

How Well Do You Listen?

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Matt. 11:15

During His earthly ministry, Jesus often concluded a lesson by crying out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

- Concerning John the Baptist. Matt. 11:15, “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”
- Concerning the parable of the sower. Matt. 13:9, “*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”
- Concerning the explanation of the parable of the tares. Matt. 13:43, “*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”

In His letters to the churches of Asia, Jesus concludes each with a similar saying: “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...*” (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:29; Rev. 3:6; Rev. 3:13; & Rev. 3:22).

What is the point of these sayings?

It is like saying “What is being said is very important, so you had better pay attention and listen!”

Mark 4:23-25, “*If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*”

It illustrates that Jesus had a problem that often exists today.

Many people simply don’t listen, or don’t listen so as to understand.

I am convinced that many today don’t appreciate the importance of listening well. It concerned Jesus.

So it is appropriate to ask, “How Well Do You Listen?”

It might be profitable to begin by pointing out there are:

Three types of listeners.

The “Dull of hearing”.

Some of the Hebrew Christians were like this. Heb. 5:11, *“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”*

Note that when a person has this problem, it is hard for others to explain things to them! The fault is not with the “subject” material, nor the “presenter”, but with the “listener”!

Isaiah wrote of such people, and Jesus applied it to many in His day. Matt. 13:13-15, *“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”*

People are this way because they are dull of heart!

This prevents them from:

- Understanding God’s truth.
- Turning from sin to God.
- And being saved by God!

Who would want to be this type of listener?

Those with “itching ears”.

Paul describes these in 2 Tim. 4:3-4, *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”*

Such people listen only to that which is pleasing...

So they don’t like “sound doctrine” (which often requires the kind of preaching mentioned in: 2 Tim. 4:2, *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”*

They will find the teachers they want...but then they turn from the truth to fables. Many today are often afflicted with this “hearing” problem!

Those who hear with a “noble and good heart”.

Jesus speaks of these in Luke 8:15, *“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”*

The Bereans were listeners of this kind. Acts 17:11, *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”*

They were “fair-minded” (NKJV), thus willing to give Paul a fair hearing. It showed in how they “received” (or listened to) the word: “with all readiness”.

This is the kind of listener we all should be!

Why is it so important to be this kind of listener? There are several reasons:

The importance of good listening.

Essential to being blessed.

For those willing to listen properly, there are wonderful things to learn. Matt. 13:16-17, *“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”*

Many things which great people (David, Daniel, etc.) did not have the opportunity to learn. Things pertaining to wonderful blessings that are now available in Christ!

Eph. 1:3, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”*

We miss out on these blessings if we do not carefully listen!

Essential to saving faith.

God has ordained that we be saved through faith in Christ. Rom. 1:16-17, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to*

the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Such faith comes through proclaiming the gospel, often involving listening to a preacher.

- Rom. 10:14, "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*"
- Rom. 10:17, "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

While one can certainly gain faith through reading God's Word (John 20:30-31), the fact remains that many are often dependent upon what they first hear proclaimed.

John 20:30-31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*"

One reason faith is often lacking is because people simply are not good listeners. They miss out on the evidence in God's Word which produces faith!

Does your "listening" hinder the development of your faith?

Essential to bearing fruit.

In the parable of the sower, the only kind of soil (heart) capable of bearing fruit was the one which listened properly. Luke 8:15, "*But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*"

That is because bearing fruit comes from "understanding" the grace of God! Col. 1:6, "*Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.*"

Note that the gospel was bearing fruit in the Colossians. But that was "*since the day you heard and knew (understood, NAS) the grace of God in truth,*"

Only by listening well can we "understand" God's grace, and be thus motivated to bear fruit to His glory!

Essential to preventing apostasy (falling away).

There is a real danger of drifting, by neglecting “so great a salvation”

Heb. 2:1-3, *“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;”*

The only solution is to “give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard”.

Poor listening is often the first step to apostasy!

Essential to avoiding rejection and condemnation.

If we do not listen, as we should, we are judging ourselves unworthy of eternal life.

Acts 13:44-49, *“And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.”*

If we reject the gospel (perhaps by poor listening?), the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South will condemn us at the judgment!

Matt. 12:41-42, *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”*

The men of Nineveh repented after hearing just one lesson from Jonah; will we reject the gospel of Christ after being given many opportunities?

The queen of the South went great lengths to hear the wisdom of Solomon; are we willing to go just a short distance to hear God's Word proclaimed?

The rejection and condemnation is not limited to coming from just these individuals...it will come from God, too!

Hopefully, we appreciate the wonderful opportunities we have to be able to listen to God's Word, and the importance of good listening! How then can we improve our ability to listen? For just as speakers need to learn to speak so as to be understood, people need to learn to listen so as to understand! Here are some ...

Steps to better listening.

Make listening an act of worship.

How you listen to God's word being read or preached is as much an indication of your devotion to God as to how you pray or sing.

So when you have opportunities to listen, do it with "a worshipful attitude". Think of how you would listen if some great person were speaking. Imagine your rapt attention if you were listening to some famous person.

Does not the proclamation of God's Word deserve as much attention?

Listen from beginning to ending.

Pay attention all the way through. Do you expect to understand a novel by simply reading a sentence here and there? So it is with listening...sentences, phrases, words, to be understood must be heard in light of the context in which they are presented.

Speakers must follow certain rules of speech so as to be understood:

- Introduce the subject.
- Present main points with supporting arguments.
- Conclude with a summary.

So listeners must listen to ALL the parts to truly understand.

Look at the speaker or take notes.

This greatly aids your concentration. Looking elsewhere makes it easy for your mind to wander. Closing your eyes makes it easy for you to nod off!

This requires self-discipline, but it is conducive to developing a longer attention span.

Try it, and see if it doesn't make a difference!

Read along in your Bible.

You remember more of what you both see and hear over what you simply hear; which is why visual aids are often used in sermons. But the greatest visual aid is your own Bible!

Your knowledge of the Scriptures can be greatly improved by doing this.

It is hard at first to keep up, but persevere and it will soon become easier. We encourage our children to do this, shouldn't adults provide an example and do the same?

Listen with faith.

Listen with a willingness to accept and believe what is shown in God's Word.

Notice Heb. 4:1-2; those who died in the wilderness did not listen with faith! *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."*

If we don't listen "with faith", the same sort of thing will happen to us; i.e., fall short of our heavenly rest!

Listen with a mind to act.

Are we like the people in Ezekiel's day? Ezek. 33:30-32, *"Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not."*

They loved to hear him, but for the wrong reason. Do we love to hear sermons because of how well the speaker presents them?

Hearing must be accompanied by doing to be of any profit. James 1:22-25, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth*

therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

As important as good listening may be, the blessedness comes only if we are doers as well as hearers!

Conclusion.

To be blessed in what we do that is my goal in presenting these thoughts on listening, for it all begins with listening in the proper way.

How important, then, is listening?

When it comes to listening to God, very important!

Isa. 55:2-3, *"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."*

It is essential for the good of our soul!

Is there ever a time when GOD does not listen?

Yes, when our sins are between us and God. Isa 59:1-2, *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

But we can take care of that problem by receiving God's Mercy. Isa 55:6-7, *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

Today, that mercy is offered through Jesus Christ, God's Son. And as God said in Luke 9:35, *"...This is my beloved Son: hear him."*

Have you heeded Him by obeying His word? Or does the following cry of Jesus apply to you? Luke 6:46, *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"*

He will not hear you unless you are a Christian? The following are the steps necessary to become a Christian:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he

could see that living the life of a Christian was good, but he wasn't sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, "It doesn't work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him."

- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" Acts 11:18, "... *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*" If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, "There's a burglar in my house!" So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry!" What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.
- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are "**UNTO**" righteousness, life, or salvation. "Unto" means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, "*But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up*

straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said “it becometh **us** to fulfil all righteousness.” We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? “for the remission of sins”. Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was rename Paul) the very same thing, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*” (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn’t mean “sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don’t take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not yet become a Christian, won't you consider it today?

