

Do We Hear But Not Really Listen?

Most people assume that when we have listened to the message that a preacher pronounces that we have been instructed by that message.

This is not always true.

If we want to be truly instructed by God's Word we must be worthy to hear or we must hear what is said in a worthy manner.

What do I mean by this statement?

When we listen to a preacher or read The Bible, much may be lost to us because we are **not** worthy to hear the truth.

That is, we have not **met** the moral terms required for us to hear or read the truth rightly.

Isaiah 55:10-11 [NIV] *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

The scripture does **not** give support to the notion that God's Truth is effective wherever or whenever it is preached.

Isaiah 59:1-2 [NIV] *“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. **But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.**”*

Isaiah 55:6-9 [NIV] *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. **Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**”*

Humbly accept that our thoughts and our wisdom is far inferior to God's and our sin has cut us off from hearing Him.

God is **not** planning to move away from us, but we often move away from Him or erect a barrier of prejudice or self-righteousness between us and God.

Proverbs 1:20-25 [NIV] *“Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: **“How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. But since you rejected me when I called and no-one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke,**”*

The lament of the Old Testament prophets was that they cried aloud to Israel but their words were not regarded.

Matthew 13:3-9, 13 [NIV] *“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil*

was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.” ... “This is why I speak to them in parables: **“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”**”

Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed is another proof that it is possible to hear the truth without profit.

Why?

Matthew 13:18-23 [NIV] “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

We can hear yet not hear to the place of understanding.

Paul had same problem.

Acts 28:23-27 [NIV] “They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” **For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.** Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”

Because of this Paul turned from teaching the Jews Moses’ law keepers and from then on began his ministry to the Gentiles, who were without the Jewish laws.

Before there can be true inward understanding of divine truth there must be moral preparation.

Matthew 11:25-26 [NIV] “At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and **revealed them to little children.** Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

Jesus mentioned two kinds of people in His prayer.

The “wise”, those arrogant in their own knowledge.

The “little children”, who humbly are open to receiving the truth of God as revealed by Jesus and the Holy Spirit after His ascension.

We have to ask the question: ‘Are we wise in our own eyes, or do we seek the truth in childlike faith, realising that only God holds all the answers?’

The attitude of mind we have is crucial to our understanding and accepting the truth.

A child-like mind that is eager to learn is indicated by this and other statements Jesus made.

Revelation 3:14, 17 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” ... “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”*

Laodicea was a wealthy city, and the church was wealthy. But what the Laodiceans could accomplish by their own wisdom had become more valuable in their eyes to what was unseen and had to be revealed by Jesus Christ.

Revelation 3:20-21 [NIV] *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

The words of Jesus Christ were **not** being heard, they were **blind** to whom was speaking to them.

They had shut Jesus Christ out of their lives.

John 7:17 [NIV] *“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

The gospel according to John is filled with the teaching that there must be spiritual readiness before we have real understanding of God’s Truth.

The above verse is a summary of Jesus’ sayings as recorded by John.

1 Corinthians 2:14 [NIV] *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

Our relationship with the Holy Spirit determines our understanding of God’s Truth.

For it is the Holy Spirit that reveals God’s thoughts to us.

Too often we consider, intentionally or unintentionally, when we hear a pastor preach we think *“Is this man worthy to speak to me?”*

Such a question may be valid but there is another question we should be asking which is more in keeping with the circumstances: *“Am I worthy to hear this preacher?”*

An attitude of humility on our part as the hearer will secure for us far more light on God’s Word and will from whatever size of candle God may choose to send us through His preacher to illuminate His Word.

When we humble ourselves before God’s Word, Jesus Christ, He will sometimes communicate to us through very unworthy media.

Peter was brought to repentance by the crowing of a rooster.

Of course the rooster was innocent of the part he was playing.

Augustine was brought to repentance by seeing a friend killed by lightning.

Spurgeon became a Christian after hearing a humble Methodist class leader exhort a congregation.

Moody was led to a clear anointing of the Spirit through the testimony of a simple-hearted elderly lady of his acquaintance.

All these examples teach the same thing; God will speak to the hearts of those who prepare themselves to listen.

Good hearers are as important as good preachers.

The Church needs more of both, if it is to mature.