

To Hear or Not to Hear 5-19-01

My personal devotions have been in Isaiah but at school I've been teaching from the book of Hebrews. I believe the Holy Spirit brought out something the two had in common that is very important for the people of God. Last week we looked at the importance of mixing the Word with faith, which results in action directed by the Holy Spirit. That common thread I am led to share with you today is of hearing the Word – for we must hear the Word before we can mix it with faith.

There is a world of noise today – more so than any time in history – to distract us from the voice of God. Think about life just a hundred years ago and how quiet the days were. The sounds you did hear were of nature. Today we have devices that cover our ears to fill them with music so we don't have to listen to all the machines that surround us. Competition for our ears is at an all time high. But the greatest noise is still the same as it has always been since the fall of Adam. It is the noise of the human heart. To be still is not so much an outward ceasing of activity as it is to quiet the heart and a decision to listen to One other than the self.

I have been running at too fast a pace the last month. Somewhere along the way I over committed myself. And so I run from one thing to the next at a hurried pace. Sometimes I let my heart get caught up in the attitude that I have to do it by my own cleverness and organization. When that happens look out, because there goes my peace. When my peace is gone I act like crazy man. Then I get convicted, and I know I have to stop and yield my heart back to the peaceful Lordship of Jesus.

The teachers at Cornerstone meet and pray in the morning and take turns doing devotions. It was my turn and I was in that hurried self-reliant mode. When I am trusting in the Lord and walking in His strength and peace if I haven't had time to prepare He gives me something to share as I drive there. It's wonderful. But when I am in that ugly hurried state I found out my ears don't work. When I am out of harmony with Jesus and trying to be my own Lord – we have a communication breakdown. It is not His fault at all. It is that I have plugged my ears so securely that it takes some time to get them unplugged.

Israel got in this state of self-reliance just before they went into captivity and in the 44th to 49th chapters of Isaiah God says, "listen" nine times. Let's just take a look at a few verses in 48. ¹ "Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the LORD and invoke the God of Israel-- but not in truth or righteousness—

⁸ You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.

¹² "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.

¹⁶ "Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." ¹⁷ This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.

¹⁸ If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

They said the right things, were born into a chosen nation, invoked God's blessing but they did not do it in truth or righteousness. Verse 8 tells us their condition has always been an ear that was not open and goes on to call that treacherous – a rebel from birth. But God is pleading that they come near and listen. Why? He wants what is best for them. He desires to direct them in the right way.

In Hebrews 2:2 the author calls Israel a disobedient people. The word 'disobedient' in Greek is *parakoe*, which means an unwillingness to hear. Jer 6:10 (NIV)¹⁰ To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.

That is the root of so much of our trouble. God is always speaking. His Spirit is always communing with us if we have our ears open. When I start running around like the proverbial chicken with its head cut off I always hear Him warn me. But when I keep going I seal my own ears – close them up to my own detriment. The Bible calls that walking in the flesh. It is an unwillingness to hear. That is disobedience, rebellion!

But I have an example before me that I need desperately to follow. Psalm 40:6-8 the author of Hebrews tells us is about Jesus. In that passage Jesus says his ear has been opened. Your translation may say pierced. The wonderful example of Jesus was He never closed his ears to his Father. Isaiah 50:5 (NIV)⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. He was always attentive and listening. That hearing mixed with obedient faith is what made Jesus' life our perfect example. And when I yield to that life in me, I hear the Father and obey His voice.

I know God was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom (1Kings 3:9) because it was for others and not something for himself. But did you realize that word "wisdom" – also translated discerning heart – is primarily translated as

hearing? That is why God was so pleased. Solomon asked for something that Christ, the ultimate Son of David, was going to demonstrate to us, a hearing heart, open ears.

I would encourage you to go back to the sermon "Hearing" from 2 years ago and refresh your memory on the many ways God speaks to us.

The still small voice is always there to encourage and direct us. There is a story told of the old icehouses before electricity. They had thick walls and would store ice cut from a lake covered in sawdust for summer cooling of food. A man lost his pocket watch in the icehouse and could not find it in the sawdust. Another man looked and looked for it too, but to no avail. A little boy asked if he could help. Not long after he shut the door behind him he came out with the watch in hand. "How did you do that?" the men asked. The boy answered, "I just lay real still on the floor until I could hear it ticking." Make time to be still inwardly and hear the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The direction of the Holy Spirit will always be in line with his Word. -- Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "I ask with all my strength what God is trying to say to us through [the Bible]; since I have learnt to read the Bible in this way it becomes more marvelous to me every day." If you come to the word with an ear to hear and a request for the Teacher to do as He has promised you will find this to be true also.

Jesus said in John 14:26 (NIV)²⁶ 'But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.' The Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus' words; and then what happens when we surrender our hearts to that instruction? The next verse is reality to us. ²⁷ 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.' Isaiah 48:¹⁸ 'If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.' But the last verse in that chapter says the wicked will not experience this peace. So we see a clear, direct connection in God's word of listening to God and experiencing the peace of God.

I try to use Holy Spirit tactics in my Bible class. When the students are too noisy and just not listening I don't say a word. Pretty soon they get real quiet. I've got a good group of students – they are there to hear. When they forget that and get noisy I take away what they are there for – the instruction. We are just like that with the Holy Spirit – when we start to get too noisy to hear Him we lose the peace his voice brings. Finally we get ourselves quieted and there He is instructing us again. Isaiah 48:18 says "If only you had paid attention..." He wants our attention because we miss out when we don't focus it on Him. My wife can be real blunt with me when she knows I am in that hurried, worried

state. I don't like that but I need that. We need to just say to ourselves, "Hey, this is not productive, it robs me of the peace of God, and it won't help get anything done." Quiet your spirit and return to a submissive listening to the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 55:3 (NIV)³ 'Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.' Take time to be still before God and present to Him an opened ear.