

EXPOSITORY LISTENING - Hearing God's Word Like Your Life Depended on it

Part seven - Teaching #1547 - Sunday, March 18th, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

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HEARING THE WORD WITH FAITH - What Does that Mean?

Hebrews 3:12-4:2 - "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, *unbelieving heart*, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. [15] As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' [16] For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? [17] And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? [18] And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? [19] So we see that they were unable to enter *because of unbelief*....[4:1]....Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. [2] For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not *united by faith with those who listened*."

Do you ever encounter supposedly Christian people - people with an upbringing saturated with church and Bible and prayer - but people upon whom none of it has seemed to have had any lasting effect? Do you ever talk with supposedly Christian people who use all the religious lingo, know all the praise songs about loving Jesus, and yet make major life-style decisions that in no way reflect any hint of the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

That's what this message is all about. How does this happen? How can people be exposed to Christian influence with no development of a Christian world-view and mind-set? How can people *hear* the Word without being *effected* by the Word? And are these people Christians? Is this important? How will we consider this rather common situation in the visible church of Jesus Christ?

You will remember the Old Testament account we considered last week. God's people came right up to the edge of the Promised Land. Twelve spies were sent into the land to study it and report back to Moses and the rest of the people. Ten of them came back and said the mission should be scrubbed. The enemies were too numerous and too big. There was no way the Israelites could take possession. Only two spies acknowledged the promise from God that He would give this land into their hand. Joshua and Caleb saw the land the remembered God's Word. Joshua and Caleb *listened* to God.

And the whole reason the writer of Hebrews retold this account was to point out that Joshua and Caleb saw the same land as the other ten spies. And they possessed the same promise from God as the other ten. The difference was Joshua and Caleb *believed* what God said. The ten fearful spies *heard* the same promise, but reacted as though the promise had never been given. They didn't *hear the word with faith*.

We're reminded by the Holy Spirit that their unbelief *mattered*. It was a deal-breaker with God. That's the whole point of **Hebrews 3:16-19** - "For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? [17] And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? [18] And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? [19] *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief*."

Underscore "*they were unable to enter....*"(19). They received nothing. The promise was useless because it wasn't heard with faith. Hearing with faith *matters*. Close to the land doesn't count. Everyone twenty years of age and older died off wandering around aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years - one year of wandering for each day the spies were checking out the land God had promised to give them. Again, hearing the Word with faith *matters*.

Then the writer of Hebrews leaves history aside and presses application into the ears of the Christian church - **Hebrews 3:12, 4:1** - "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an *evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God....* Hebrews 4:1....Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, *let us fear* lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it."

"This kind of spiritual miscarriage still happens!" he says. "There's a kind of empty, religious, slogan-like approach to God that won't bring the kind of life God wants to generate. You won't get in. You won't enter in. You won't receive. You'll draw a blank in terms of spiritual life."

We're being reminded by the writer of Hebrews *religious looking unbelief is rampant*. Hearing without faith isn't really listening to God. That's how important it is to hear God's Word with a heart of faith.

So what is it? What is hearing the Word - *listening* to the Word - with *faith*? I want to press three ideas home today:

1) LISTENING TO THE WORD WITH FAITH MEANS HEARING GOD IN HIS WORD

Put the *hit* on the word "God."

1 Thessalonians 2:11-13 - "For you know how, like a father with his children, [12] we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you

and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. [13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

This is a fascinating text. Paul holds up two different viewpoints on what happened when he explained the Scriptures to these “believers”(13). Note that word - “believers.” We tend to use it almost like a *noun* - like a label. Paul uses it as a *verb*. It described what these hearers *did* that was so special. Paul isn’t using *believers* as a synonym for *Christian*. He’s using the term to describe what these people *did* when they heard God’s Word.

Notice how Paul describes and contrasts *two perspectives* on his meeting with these people - “....when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

The first perspective Paul holds up is the most visible. He says the people sat while he (Paul) and others *spoke* to them. They were the listeners. The apostles were the speakers. Everyone could *see* the apostles and everyone could *hear* the apostles. Take away the nicer buildings and the better lighting and the polished music and you have much the same scene you would see multiplied in thousands of churches across Canada today.

But then Paul does something quite strange. He praises these Thessalonian believers because that whole visible scene wasn’t the one on which they fixed their concentration. In fact, he says he thanked God - he literally ran to God in gratitude - that they weren’t *mised* by what they *saw* happening in front of them. He says though it may have *looked* like apostles speaking to listeners, that’s not what was happening at all.

Then he paints the *real* scenario - the *second perspective* on what was really happening as he brought God’s Word to these people. And he doesn’t mean it just as some kind of *mystical religious talk* about what was happening among them. He means what was actually, factually taking place among them - 1 Thessalonians 2:13 - “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

So what they might easily think *is* happening, *isn’t* - “....not as the word of men....” And there is something they might easily miss heeding but actually *is* being heard - “....but as what it really is, the word of God....” And there’s a reason Paul lists both perspectives. It’s not that one is bad and one is good. They’re both good and necessary. But the *visible* one can easily become so routine and half-heeded that it can *desensitize* us to the larger picture of *God talking to us in church on Sunday*.

And it all matters so much. Remember our Hebrews text - Hebrews 3:19-4:1 - “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief....[4:1]....Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.” You won’t “*enter in*” to the life of God if all you hear is Don Horban. You don’t have to hear Don Horban. You have to hear *God* in His Word. *Whom do you hear talking to you right now?* That’s the do or die question of hearing the Word of God with a believing heart.

Look at these believers at Thessalonica. They left all the idols they had been trained for generations to worship. They destroyed all the idols upon hearing the Word - 1 Thessalonians 1:9 - “For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God....”

What makes pagan people do that? The words of Paul won’t make people abandon their entire pagan world-view. But they didn’t just hear *Paul* when Paul spoke. They heard the words of God. I ask again, *whom do you hear when you hear God’s Word?*

2) LISTENING TO THE WORD WITH FAITH MEANS HEARING TRUTH IN THE WORD

Galatians 1:8 - “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

The plain truth is, in all of our lives the Word of God competes for space. Even if it is *God’s* Word, it simply isn’t the case that it’s the only thing we hear. Truth fights for its proper place the way animals fight over a carcass in the desert. And the reason I cited Paul’s words to the churches of Galatia is he makes clear a tone - an intolerant stance - that must be summoned against things that entice and influence our minds with ideas and impulses that *appear* true but are not.

Error never comes naked and obvious. Every idea approaches your being posing as advantageous and beneficial. And if Paul would call Christians to curse - yes *curse* - an angel who brings something other than truth, what would he call us to do with immoral life-styles and movies and songs and internet sites and greedy advertisers and self destroying covetous desires and earthly minded friends who have no love whatsoever for Christ?

John 17:17 - "**Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**" Don't miss the simple point of these powerful words from Jesus. The sanctifying power of God's Word is directly linked to the degree to which it's acknowledged as **true**. And Jesus **prayed** about the overriding influence of the truth of God's Word over every impulse and inclination and wish and feeling and argument that would push **against** the truth of God's Word ruling in the hearts of God's people.

You never just **hear** God's Word. Your whole being must **vote** for God's Word - not in the sense of **making** it more true, but in the sense of giving its truth a ruling voice in your heart and mind.

So hearing God's Word with faith means first, **hearing God in His Word**. Second, it means **allowing its truth to rule against all other imposters**. And there's a third aspect to hearing God's Word with faith:

3) **LISTENING TO THE WORD WITH FAITH MEANS LOVING THE WORD'S GOODNESS**

We must **hear** the Word as **true** and we must **love** the Word as **good**. The two ideas here as **assent** and **consent**. Assent deals with the **mind** recognizing God's Word as true. **Consent** deals with the **will** agreeing with what the Word of God requires and demands. **Both** are required to hear the Word of God with faith.

There are people who **agree** that the Word of God is true. They give it mental **assent** as God's Word. But they never take that Word up whole-heartedly into their wills. They don't **consent - surrender - prize, treasure, yield to** - to the Word as the authority by which they live.

To hear the Word with faith means **loving** what it is and says. Hearing the Word with faith means **valuing** it because **God** has said it and what He has said is **true**. And then this final step means **treasuring** God's Word because, even though yielding to it may be costly, it will ultimately bear the richest, most satisfying fruit in my life.

Here is the Biblical picture of **loving** the Word for its **goodness**:

Psalm 19:8-11 - "**The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. [11] Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**"

Note especially that last phrase - "**.....in keeping them there is great reward.**" Listening to God's Word with faith means living by the gut-level, soul-anchoring, immovable conviction that life's greatest rewards come from **honoring God's Word**. Without that conviction, you will never keep God's Word when you think you have a better option for your own satisfaction and fulfillment. And let me tell you the church is fast filling up with Christians who no longer believe God's Word brings life's greatest rewards.

So remember these three things all your life. Hearing God's Word with faith means **hearing God in His Word, hearing truth in His Word, and hearing reward in His Word**. Learn to love it above all imposters pressing to rule your life. You'll be safe, clean, and happy above all.