

What You Think You Have Can Be Taken Away

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Is it not true that one of the keys to life and good relationships is effective communication? And to have effective communication, there must be effective listening. Now, this is just one of the reasons that we must take our Bible study and our prayers and stuff that we do very seriously. We need to learn that we are called here today on the Sabbath day to listen to God, even though He has chosen to use human instruments to communicate with us.

Now in the Scriptures, we have a specific statement that says, "Hear the word of the Lord." It occurs 33 times in the New King James and 33 times in A Faithful Version—probably the same places. And the word "listen" is actually found several hundred times, and the majority of these passages in some way deal with listening to the Lord. "Hear" is also found several hundred times, and again, many of these also have to do with hearing God's Word.

We also find a number of comments like, "Incline your ear," or "give ear," or "pay or give attention," and similar expressions are used in various ways to call God's people to listen intently to God. In the New Testament, the Lord warns us to consider carefully what we hear (Mark 4:24). And in Luke's version, He says, "how you hear." (Luke 8:18). We will be seeing that one in a little bit.

Now the words "today, if you hear His voice" are found three times in Hebrews and once in the Old Testament. (Those are Hebrews 3:7, 15; Hebrews 4:7; and Psalm 95:7, if you are interested in looking them up.)

But seven times, once in each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, we read, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

In Mark 4:9 and 23, the Lord gives us a warning: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And again, in Luke 8:8, He says "The one who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The New English Translation (which I am going to be using, I think, from here on out, and if I do not, I will let you know), translates that "Whoever has ears to hear had better listen." That is a pretty stern warning.

Remember the story of the Transfiguration? We have heard that many times, where Jesus took Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, and led them privately up a high mountain. Let us look at that again in Matthew 17, beginning in verse 2.

Matthew 17:2-6 (NET) He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light. Then Moses and Elijah also appeared before them, talking with him. So Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You want, I will make three shelters [or tabernacles, as the King James and New King James translate it]—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my one dear Son, in whom I take great delight. Listen to Him!" [I guess poor old Peter was shaking in his boots after that.] When the disciples heard this, they were overwhelmed with fear and threw themselves down with their faces to the ground.

I can imagine James and John were probably saying, "Peter, we told you not to say anything." Anyway, poor old Peter.

So is it not significant that one of the titles of the Son of God is the Greek term "Logos"? You have probably heard this before, right? It refers to some form of communication—I mean speech, words, saying, discourse—and as the Logos, Jesus Christ is the living Word of God to man. Remember what was said in the gospel of John, first chapter:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word [that is the word "Logos"], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Then later on down in chapter 1, verse 14 of John, it says:

John 1:14 (AFV) The Word became flesh, and tabernacled with us.

So He is the One that was the Word, and He was God in the beginning, who became Jesus Christ our Lord.

When you look at these things, the point of all this is pretty simple. God has a lot to say to us because He is the all-wise and all-sovereign God, and I think it is imperative for us to listen carefully to what He says. But we are still human, and we are so prone to being distracted and drawn away with other things—even good things. We can easily become like Martha.

Remember the story of Mary and Martha, good friends of Jesus? Well, we will look at that here in a minute. She was distracted by so many things rather than Mary, who sat at the feet of the Savior. What was she sitting there to do? To hear Him, to hear His word. So if you want to, you can turn over to Luke 10 and we will begin in verse 38.

Luke 10:38-42 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations, and she came up to Jesus and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." The Lord answered and said to her [I can almost imagine Him going], "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things. But only a few things are necessary, really only one, while Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Now I want you to kind of hang on to that last portion there, "which shall not be taken from her," because we are going to be talking a little bit about this later on as we go through this message.

Let us also turn over to Luke the 8th chapter and we are going to take a look again at the Parable of the Sower. We will begin in verse 4.

Luke 8:4-10 (NET) While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from one town after another, He spoke to them in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled on, and the wild birds devoured it. Other seed fell on rock, and when it came up, it withered because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, and they grew up with it and choked it. But other seed fell on good soil and grew, and it produced a hundred times as much grain." As He said this, he called out, "The one who has ears to hear had better listen!" Then the disciples asked Him what this parable meant. He said, "You have been given the opportunity to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that although they may not see, and although they hear they may not understand."

So when He talks about those who have ears had better listen, He is talking about those He is talking to that hear with understanding.

In Luke 8, verse 11, He begins to explain the parable.

Luke 8:11 (NET) "Now the parable means this: The seed is the word of God."

What we are going to look at here is that there are four categories of people. With my having been affiliated with the church for over 50 years, I have seen each one of these, and I would imagine that many of you have also seen these categories of people as well. And we will talk about it as we go through it. But it is the third category that concerns me the most, and that will be the one that we are going to be focusing on the most, because when we get to it and we begin to talk about it, I want to compare it to the Laodiceans. I think you will see that there is a little bit of a connection there.

In verse 12, He said:

Luke 8:12 (NET) "Those along the path are the ones who have heard [they heard the Word]; then the devil comes and takes away

the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."

Now, I have known a lot of people that listened to Herbert Armstrong's program. I had people I worked with, they loved Herbert Armstrong! Oh, he just loved listening to him. I remember one guy, when Herbert Armstrong actually died back in '86, he called me. I do not know how he got my phone number, but he called me, and he was almost in tears. He says, "You know, Herbert Armstrong died." I said, "Yeah, he did." And, you know, we talked a while. I do not actually remember the conversation anymore from that. But he was so down about that. But you know, I never knew if he ever attended church anywhere. He just probably just let it go after that. Because we have an enemy that is ready to devour us as soon and as quickly as he can.

Remember in I Peter 5:8—you have heard this many times:

I Peter 5:8 (NET) Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

He is always ready to devour you. He has tried to destroy, and he has brought about counterfeits and tried to deceive people since the very beginning. Just like Craig [Sablich] was talking about how he deceived Eve right from the beginning, and he has never let up ever since.

So these are the ones in that category—they might come into the church for a very short period, some of them do, and then all of a sudden you never see them again. I remember a man back when we were in the Worldwide—I believe it was probably in the late 70s, but it was before John had left, because John was the minister there. And he was a guy we knew back when we were teenagers. He showed up one Sabbath.

I did not know his name, but we used to gather together in what we call a youth center, where they had bands sometimes, played music, we danced, and there was a guy there who—he was a teenager, but he looked like a professional dancer, and that is how I remembered him. He probably did not remember us at all. I did not do anything special, I did not attract anybody back then—but everybody would look at him when he would dance. And if my memory serves me correctly, I believe his mother actually owned a

dancing studio. It seems like I heard that years ago, when somebody was talking about him.

But we actually spoke to him. We were very excited to see somebody that we knew back from the past, from the youth center, and we thought, maybe he is being called, you know, he is coming to church, he wanted to talk to Mr. Ritenbaugh, the minister. So, later on, I remember him talking to John, but he left, and he never came back.

Now I do not know if he went somewhere else, another church—well, back then we were in Worldwide, and the only other ones he could have gone with was maybe to Fred Coulter, or Ted Armstrong, or one of them—but he left. We never saw him again. Now I am sure there are many who have never made it even that far, like I just told you a while ago about the guy I knew out on the construction site. I do not think he ever even came to church.

Let us look at the next category here, in verse 13.

Luke 8:13 (NET) "Those on the rock are the ones who received the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in a time of testing [or, I think, one translation says any time of persecution, or whatever, things get kind of tough], they fall away."

I have known people who have attended church for quite a while. I do not think they ever were baptized, but they were there for quite a while, and before you know it, they are gone, and you do not see them; they left, and they do not return. I do not really know what happened to them. Again, this is just my thinking about back in Worldwide.

But because they have no root—he says they have no real commitment. I think most of you would agree that the Sabbath was our first test commandment. Mr. Armstrong always said the test commandment was the Sabbath.

So if you have no real commitment, that is, no root, then you are not going to give up your job to keep the Sabbath. It just is not going to happen. You are just not going to do it. You are going to make up all the excuses in the world.

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"Well, you know, I'd like to go to church, but I have to feed my family." "I have to work, I can't lose my job," and so on. So they end up falling away and never coming back again.

Now verse 14, this is the third category. This is the category of people that concerns me the most, and as we go through this, I think you will see and understand why.

Luke 8:14 (NET) "As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries [some translations say cares or anxieties, and this is all through the idea of distractions] and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature."

The reason this one concerns me the most is because it mentions fruit. We all know, in John chapter 15, it talks there about the vineyard, and about Jesus being the vine, we are the branches, and "unless you abide in Me, you can do nothing." And we know that if the branch is broken off of the vine and it withers, then it is good for nothing but to be thrown in the fire. I think that is kind of how it puts it.

And that is a scary thing; this is why this category is so concerning to me, because it shows that they may have been producing some fruit. Now it takes a while to develop fruit, and it takes a while for fruit to come to maturity, but the fruit never did reach maturity, so they stopped growing, right? They stopped producing fruit, they stopped growing in Christ, and they fall away. Or, as we are going to see here as we compare them to the Laodiceans, God spews them out of His mouth. We will look at that again in a little bit.

Let us continue with the last group, then we will come back to this group and compare them to the Laodicean church.

Luke 8:15 (NET) "But as for the seed that landed on good soil, these are the ones who, after hearing the word, cling to it with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with steadfast endurance."

And we all understand that this Greek word for endurance here is *hupomone*, and we all know it means "endurance under extreme pressure or

provocation." So you cannot just give up when the going gets tough, so to speak, because there are going to be a lot of trials, a lot of testing, and there is going to be a lot of pressure, sometimes, for people to give up, especially in the beginning.

Christ goes on to say in verse 18:

Luke 8:18 (NET) "So listen carefully." [A Faithful Version, the New King James, translates it: "Therefore take heed how you hear."]

Remember I said, in the beginning, when we were talking about Mary and Martha and what He said to Martha,

Luke 10:41-42 "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things, but only a few things are necessary, really only one. For Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

In other words, she chose to sit at Christ's feet and to listen to Him to gain understanding, and Christ said it is not going to be taken away from her, that is, the understanding she receives from Christ. Now, Martha, of course, was busy and distracted. How much she heard, I do not know. Maybe she changed later on. I do not really know.

But back in Luke 8 again, in verse 18, it says:

Luke 8:18 "Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has will be given more, but whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

I have read that many, many times over the years. I have thought about it over and over many times, and I am thinking, "What did Christ mean by this, really?" You know, sometimes you just read over things and you just say, "okay," and just carry on. So what did He mean by this? He started off by saying, "Whoever has will be given more."

Well, I want to show you from the letters to the seven churches some of the things that will be given, and I am just going to read through them. You have heard them before, in Revelation 2 and 3. I do not need to necessarily bring out which verses they are; you can go read through the letters yourself and you will see what I mean.

Revelation 2-3 I will give to eat the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. . . . I will give you the crown of life, . . . and you will not be hurt by the second death. . . . I will give you some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no man knows except he who receives it. . . . I will give power over the nations—He will rule them with a rod of iron; . . . and I will give him the morning star. . . . I will not blot his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. . . . I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, . . . and My new name. . . . I will grant him to sit with Me in My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne.

Revelation 20:6 . . . but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

That is what is going to be given to the ones that have—hopefully we will see what that means here in a minute. These are those in category four: It landed on good ground and they produced fruit; they listened and they understood, and they grew and produced fruit.

Back to Luke 8 and we will look at verse 15 again.

Luke 8:18 Whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him.

Now here Jesus is warning us that what you think you have *can be taken away*. So now let us take this and compare this category three group to the

Laodiceans in Revelation. Revelation 3, and we will look at this letter to the Laodiceans, beginning in verse 14.

Revelation 3:14-19 (NET) "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: "This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! Because you say, "I am rich and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing' [you see, they thought they had, but what they thought they had, we are going to see, was going to be taken away from them], but do not realize [now, the Faithful Version translates it as "you do not understand"] that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing [that white clothing represents repentance] so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed [that means your sins, you know, the shame of your sins and what you were doing will not be exposed], and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see! All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!"

He says, listen—now listen to this, this is interesting—in verse 20:

Revelation 3:20 (NET) "Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking!"

Notice that Christ is on the outside. He has vomited them out of His mouth, and they are no longer in Him. They are not abiding in Christ, and Christ said, "Without Me you can do nothing." That is where the fruit does not mature. It is because Christ, at this point, He has removed Himself, or removed His Spirit, from them. That is the way I see it, if my understanding is correct.

This is what I see: They stop producing fruit; it never comes to full maturity. We have to stay with Christ all the way to the end, until we are changed to become what He is. So they give up. These did not really give up. They just

thought they had something—they thought they had God's Spirit, they thought they had understanding—but Christ said, "No, you don't. You're miserable, pitiful, wretched. And now I'm out here knocking on your door. I'm ready to come back into you and abide inside of you."

Remember the demons that were in that guy, and Christ ran them off, and he (the demon) came back after he had wandered around, and he wanted to go back to where he had come from, and he said he found it clean and well swept in his house. So Jesus is saying, "If you repent and return to Me, I'll come in." He says,

Revelation 3:20 (NET) "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door [that is, if he repents and invites Me back in], I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me."

In other words, He will sit down and start working with you again. God does not give up on us easily. Remember, He said, "Those I love I discipline and correct." He loves us, but He does not compromise either. He does not compromise with sin at all.

And again, if we do not bear fruit—the fruit that is spoken of back there in John 15, which says the Father is glorified by the fruit we bear, if we bear much fruit. That is what He is looking for: for us to continue to bear fruit. But if it stops, and we stop, and we give up, and we neglect, that which we think we have can be taken away from us.

Now, there is an indication that half of those in the churches of Christ, when Christ returns, will not be in the first resurrection. There are indications—you have two who were grinding at the wheel, one was taken, one was left; the other one was two in the bed, one was taken, one was left.

And then we have the Parable of the Ten Virgins—five were wise. What did they have? They were still producing fruit, they still had God's Spirit. The other five *thought* they had God's Spirit, but they apparently did not. You see, what they thought they had was taken away from them, because they did not have any oil. But they were pretty much like what we are talking about here from the Laodiceans—and I do not know that all Laodiceans were like that, but I know that there were probably many of them who did repent and

change and come back to Christ. And the reason for this is because whoever does not have, even that which he thinks he has, will be taken from him.

I hope this is really hitting home. It takes you a while, you think about—"I hear, I hear, I hear the word; I hear, I listen, I listen." How many times have you listened to something, a sermon or message, and the next day say, "What was it about? I don't know, I don't remember." Well, how intensely were you listening? I have done this myself—how intensely was I listening? Was I listening carefully to what was being said, or was I just being distracted?

Well, I think you get the message, right?

I want to begin to wrap this up. I want to quote from the *Summarized Bible Commentary* at the conclusion of the letters to the seven churches. It reads and I quote:

Let the believer keep his spiritual ears open continually for the voice of the Holy Spirit, lest he be found merely professing the name of Christian and not having the power thereof. Or lest he grow lukewarm toward Christ and so be taken unawares, or even found to be a counterfeit at the sudden appearing of Christ in His glory.

Now we do not want that to be us. But when you think about this, how serious this is—how serious it is that we listen to the words of our Lord carefully, because His words are whose words? Did He not say, "The words I speak are not Mine, but are the Father's"? They come from the Father. "I speak what the Father told Me to speak."

The bottom line is that listening to God is no small issue. Let us take Christ's warning very, very seriously, and take heed how you hear. And do not forget this! Do not forget this statement:

Luke 8:18 (NET) "For whoever has will be given more, but whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."