

An Open Ear

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having an open ear to hear and obey God's word amidst the distractions of modern life.

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Psalm 27:14, Isaiah 50:4, Matthew 13:16, Luke 8:18, John 8:2, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 1:1

Topics: "Listening To God", "Spiritual Obedience"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of having open ears to hear God's messages, emphasizing that God continues to speak to individuals, groups, and communities in ways that are understandable to all. The sermon highlights the significance of being attentive to God's word, as seen in the examples of prophets and Jesus speaking to humanity. It contrasts those with open ears who yield and obey, like the servant in Isaiah, with those who have closed ears and refuse to listen, as shown in the story of Zechariah. The sermon urges listeners to be like the disciples who actively listen, understand the secrets of the kingdom of God, and act upon Jesus' teachings.

Transcript

If we pay attention to what the prophets are telling us, if we open our minds to the living words of Jesus, we have to conclude that God, creator of our universe, continues to speak to our world. He speaks to every individual, group and community ... and speaks in a way that anyone can understand. "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament shows the work of his hands. Day unto day it pours forth speech, and night unto night it reveals knowledge." Psalm 19 Scripture also makes another clear statement.

"God, after he spoke long ago to our fathers by the prophets, at many times and in many ways in these last days has spoken to us by his Son..." Hebrews 1:1 Men and women who hear these words fall into one of two groups... - those whose ears are open, - those whose ears are closed. If my heart is open, God can open my ear. If my heart is closed, my ears remain deaf. "The Lord God has given me the tongue of one who is taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary....he awakens me morning by morning.

He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not disobedient, I did not turn back." Isaiah 50 This servant of God had an open ear, awakened by God. And his ear remained open because he yielded and obeyed. But, ears can also be closed. "But they refused to pay attention ... and it came about just as he called ... they would not listen." Zechariah 7 Even when our ears are closed, God continues to call to us to, "Take those fingers out of your ears and listen!...Wake up!"

"He who has ears, let him hear...." If we don't open our ears, all we will hear from Jesus are pleasant stories, parables about sowers and their seed, mustard trees, fishing nets and baking bread. (Jesus) said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. Luke 8 The people who heard only parables were the ones with closed ears...who didn't know how to listen.

Perhaps they heard the words of Jesus ... talked about them, discussed their insights, but they made no decision. Real listening involves a decision that makes those words a part of your life through obedience. Jesus didn't give his revealing word to the "religiously inclined." He gave his words to disciples... followers... - those who did more than talk about his teaching... - those who forsook distractions - those who became serious listeners. To these Jesus says, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Matthew 13:16-18 The problem of the closed ear isn't, "I can't understand ...I don't know." The problem is that I won't listen ." Do we have ears open to God?... not just individually, but as a Body gathered in this place. Are we a "listening church," or just an audience, only hearing parables? We live in a society that no longer hears, that no longer knows how to listen.

We are flooded by a tidal wave of words and images in T.V., Facebook, Twitter, etc. They clamor for our attention under the cloak of keeping us "informed." But this flood destroys our ability to listen. - Clarity and purpose have given way to vague impression. - Depth is sacrificed for speed. - Truth is replaced by propaganda. - Listening has become a reflex action--the processing of sensations without comprehension. Also in this flood, words themselves become meaningless... spiritual noise, that amuses and distracts us---an addictive chatter that demands constant attention but reveals nothing and leads to nowhere.

We are numb. The Christian world shares this numbness It demands ever-new teaching, new techniques, new videos. constant exposure ... all without genuine listening. But, "The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword"..., and when it is received, truly heard, it divides light from darkness, it exposes intent. "The word" doesn't cloud and blur, it leads to change. However, listening to that kind of "Word" requires work. I must stop and focus, separate the wheat from the chaff, tune out distraction, make a decision about what I hear...and act!

Here is a story about someone who listens to Jesus.... Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery: Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more." John 8:2-11 Why is this scene so powerful? We are witnessing someone who receives a word from God. This shamed woman is listening! There are only three short sentences uttered by Jesus, but they are enough to change

this woman's life. Because this woman is paying attention. In this episode Jesus is making three statements. Three with words ... one by silence. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.... Here, Jesus speaks by his silence. He stoops down and writes in the dirt. What is he saying? ... His silence is telling these mean-spirited religious officials that you can't use the Torah as a tool of hate. You're belittling the Torah, when you use it to prove a point at the expense of a living soul.

"You're messing with the Holy. Watch out!" The Master's silence is shouting, "You men are in far greater danger than this woman." Many times we say, "Why is this happening Lord? Why aren't you helping me? God, I've been asking you to change my wife for ten years...." And the only answer we get is silence. Jesus is not just doodling in the ground, his silence is commanding us to be quiet and listen. Maybe we will find that something is wrong with our questions, If we have ears to hear.

His silence may be convicting us of our own sin, which, in God's sight, is far greater than the person we are judging. And then.... And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Once we're quiet, Jesus brings a word of Judgment and expects it to be received by repentance. Judgment separates good from evil, separates light from darkness. Jesus revealed that these "champions of right and wrong" were hypocrites. They knew very well the wrongs they committed made them as guilty as this woman, , but, instead of repenting, they pretended to be pure. These words of judgment also revealed something to the woman. She may have been hardened by her treatment at the hands of "respectable folks."

She may have arrived at an outlook held by many today: "There's no right or wrong.. these religious officials are all hypocrites. I just happened to be a convenient victim in their phony game. My life may be a mess, but at least I'm honest. By the way, where's the temple priest they caught me with?" But, when she heard the words, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," she realized this man wasn't playing a religious game, He is serving the truth.... willing to put himself under its demand.

Her heart melted as Jesus stooped to the ground and wrote in the dirt. Surely Jesus wanted this entire audience to repent ... to be changed ... not just the woman. He wanted them to see that they were all in the same boat called sin. Here was their chance to repent. A Body of believers needs to practice "corporate repentance: When I repent...and make things right with my neighbor, - their eyes are opened, - they're softened...and they see God in a new way. And when my neighbor confesses and makes things right with me, they have wronged me, I'm never the same.

This is "corporate repentance ... corporate healing." But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end...

Ephesians 2:13-16 If we have ears to hear, we will hear a word of judgment, and if we receive it, we will repent. The next statement of Jesus is a word of hope. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you...." If there is nothing hanging over your head ... you don't have to be swept along in a current of circumstances. When Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn you," he is turning her ear from the despair of a wasted life and showing her that he is the door of hope.

If we are quiet and let God open our heart, and turn, we will hear him say just as clearly, "Neither do I condemn you." What's holding you back?... Be of good courage and he will strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord. Psalm 27 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope... "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."...It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3

Jesus' final statement is: "Go, sin no more!" He is giving her a blessing of power. He is not saying to her, "Try to live a better life ... get it together." He is blessing her ... in the same way we end our service here with this blessing...

"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with joy and give you peace."

The words of this blessing flooded her with God's grace, love, power and forgiveness. Our souls are waiting to hear a blessing and a command like this from God ... a word that helps us ... a word that sifts through the clutter, tunes out the distractions, and sends us out with power.

"Go and sin no more." If we have ears to hear, we will hear this blessing.

Let's become a "listening church" ...people who really use their ears...people who tune into God's word by;

- turning away from the flood of meaningless words outside us,

- turning from the clamor inside us,

and by making a decision with the words God speaks to us. We will have an OPEN EAR .

At this moment, the Master calls us to:

1. Be quiet and listen.
2. Let the sharp word of God open our hearts and change us.
3. Lay hold of his word of hope.
4. Receive the command to, "Go and sin no more," as a word of power from heaven.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. Isaiah 50:4

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