

TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR

How to Listen to the Preaching of God's Word

by I. C. Herendeen (1883-1992)

"Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

—Luke 8:18

IN Luke 8:4, our Lord spoke to "much people" by "a parable." The disciples were inquisitive and wanted to know the meaning of the parable (v. 9)—as we too should covet earnestly to know the full meaning of the word that we hear, [so] that we may be neither ignorant, mistaken, nor defective in our knowledge. In reply, Christ made them aware of what a great advantage it was to them that they should have the opportunity of acquainting themselves with things which it was not given to others to hear and know. He says, "*Unto you it is given*" (v. 10). How thankful we ought to be that God has given to us the revelation of the meaning of what is but a "parable" to others—and what faithful hearers of the Word we ought to be!

In verses 5-8, our Lord had been dealing with a diversity of soils after being cultivated and sown. Of the four soils He describes, only one is represented as fertile, as fit to nourish the seed that was sown in it and to bring it to maturity. This teaches us that the great majority of those privileged to be blessed with the revelation of the truth remain unchanged, and perish in their sins. This lays the foundation for our text of solemn caution, "*Take heed therefore how ye hear*" (v. 18). When God speaks, He means us to *hear* and *heed* what He tells us. He says what He means and means what He says; and we have no option but to obey His commands. How eagerly and earnestly we should *desire* to hear and obey, for "his commandments are not grievous" (1Jo 5:3).

In all solemnity and earnestness, we ought to give heed to His words when proclaimed by His called and sent servants. Remember this and forget it not—every sermon that we hear exerts a softening or hardening influence on our souls! Religious services do not leave us as they find us. Either the Word proves a "savour of life unto life" or a "savour of death unto death" (2Co 2:16). We should therefore be deeply concerned as to how we listen to the preached gospel so as to derive the greatest spiritual profit therefrom.

The Bible is a very practical book, as well as a vitally important one. It deals not alone with eternal realities, but with things also of a most practical nature; for the great Judge of all the earth is not indifferent as to how His children live. To them He has given many and minute instructions and made known His holy will. If the fear of God be upon us, we will make it the business of our lives not only to learn what the Scriptures have to tell us, but to use "all diligence" to be "*doers* of the word, and not hearers only" (Jam 1:22).

It is not without good reason that God has given us this command to "Take heed how ye hear," for we are all too prone to listen without making any real effort to take in and assimilate what we hear. He says, "He that hath an ear," that is, if any man has an ear to hear—but in most cases that is just the trouble: we do not have an ear to "hear what the Spirit saith" (Rev 2:7). The sound of the words falls on our ears, but the message never reaches the ear of our heart. Hence we are not profited thereby, while at the same time our responsibility is multiplied a thousandfold. By nature we are so negligent, indifferent, and listless to the things of God when it should be the very opposite. Nothing in all the world ought to be permitted to make us "dull of hearing" (Heb 5:11). "Dull of hearing" describes that state of mind in which statements may be made without producing any lasting impression. So many, alas, who sit under the faithful ministry of a true servant of God are "dull of hearing," for great numbers come to the house of God with their minds full of worldly cares and interests, so that there is no room for the things of God. Great care ought to be exercised that these things be laid aside whenever we are about to sit under the Word.

Our Lord commands us, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." He is, of course, referring to our hearing His Word. In John 8:47, Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words," by which He meant that we believe them and obey them. Again, we read, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (Joh 10:27).

These are among the signs of those who have been truly born of God, and who are, in heart and purpose, what they profess to be. “Take heed how ye hear” is not merely good advice, but a divine fiat¹ we should be concerned to obey. What He demands of us we are responsible to do. We cannot emphasize this too much. If we do not conform in heart and life to God’s Word, then increased knowledge will bring increased condemnation—for “that servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luk 12:47).

This being true, as it is, it behooves us then to consider in what manner we should listen to gospel preaching that we might derive from it the utmost possible good. How then should we hear?

1. Ardent Gratitude

We should hear the Word of God with ardent gratitude that we are privileged to enjoy such an invaluable blessing, denied to multitudes of our fellowmen. Millions of unregenerate humanity have never had the privilege of hearing of our adorable Lord and Saviour, or of the redemption that is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Great multitudes have never been enlightened by the gospel of God’s redeeming² grace. Other multitudes are enveloped in mental darkness, and practice the most degrading and revolting practices. The glorious sounds of peace and pardon have never reached their ears. They are sunk in ignorance and pollutions of heathenism. They are among those living without God and dying without hope.

Now, my friends, stop and consider. You too might have been brought into existence in those regions of the earth that Scripture says are “full of the habitations of cruelty” (Psa 74:20), and horrid cruelty at that. You might, at this very moment, be bowing down to an idol’s shrine, staining your hands with the life’s blood of your babes, regarding such a murderous deed as meritorious homage to your idol.

Then, too, you might have been brought to see the light of day in some home where popery holds sway, where the blessed gospel of the blessed God is utterly unknown, where the Bible is a sealed Book whose religion (if it deserves that name) is mummery³ and superstition. How profoundly thankful you ought to be that you are not among its dupes; that you are not worshipping some consecrated wafer, or trusting in some human priest to forgive you your sins.

O, my friends, stop and consider what you might have been had God so willed it! Bless His holy name that “the lines are fallen unto [you] in pleasant places,” that you have “a goodly heritage” (Psa 16:6). O, to grace how great a debtor you are. You ought to express to God daily your unfeigned thanks and gratitude for the religious liberty you enjoy in this land, a liberty not enjoyed in many parts of the world. Of all liberties, religious liberty is the most invaluable; it is the undeniable right of every human being. No man has the right to interfere between my conscience and my Judge. But this religious liberty is fast being taken from us in these last and evil days. Already our speech over the radio is greatly curtailed, and further restrictions may soon follow—and should these restrictions be violated, a heavy penalty may result. The time may soon be upon us when true preachers of the gospel, and all true Christians, will be hunted like “partridges upon the mountains” (1Sa 26:20), as in the days of the Covenanters in Scotland in the 17th century. “When they assembled to hear the Word of God, it was not to meet in some comfortable building as we do, but in some sequestered glen under cover of night. It was there and under those circumstances that they drank ‘the water of life’ and sang the sweet songs of Zion. But so often their heavenly melody was drowned by the cries and shoutings of their inhuman persecutors, and their blood was mingled with their sacrifices.”

“When one considers what the gospel is in itself, a message of good news unto lost sinners, one would naturally suppose that people everywhere would cordially welcome and receive it, for it is a most illustrious display of the divine character that has ever been given to sinful man, hence no wonder that it is designated ‘the glorious gospel of the blessed God’ (1Ti 1:11). Will not those condemned to eternal condemnation welcome deliverance therefrom? The love of God that the gospel makes known, and the sufferings of Christ for hell-bound sinners, ought to be enough to melt the hardest heart and cause the hearer to cry fervently to bestow upon him His ‘unspeakable gift’ (2Co 9:15). But the fact of the matter is that the great majority of those who have sat under this glorious gospel are little or not at all affected thereby—for the reason that there is nothing in the heart that is desperately wicked, upon which the gospel can seize, that will provoke a favorable response. The gospel is a pleas-

¹ **fiat** – authoritative decree or order.

² **redeeming** – obtaining release from captivity by paying a ransom; delivering from sin by paying the penalty.

³ **mummery** – any empty spectacular pretense, or what is regarded as such; derived from one who wears a mask or fantastic disguise on certain holidays.

ant sound in the ear of a true believer, while on the other hand it is repulsive to a corrupt heart. Before any sinner will hear ‘the word of the gospel’ (Act 15:7), the Holy Spirit must first work upon that heart to awaken it to a real sense of its need, and prepare it to receive the good seed of the gospel. None but the Holy Spirit can produce in the soul hatred of sin and a desire to be saved from it. When that has been accomplished, then such an one will indeed hear the Word with great reverence and rapt attention.”⁴

The temples of pleasure and synagogues of Satan are crowded at an early hour, long before the idolatrous worship begins, while the churches of the saints are often largely forsaken. Those who are alive to the value of their soul’s salvation will echo the psalmist when he said, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psa 122:1). You too will say, “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psa 84:2). And again, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:2). If you have even a bit of such a spirit, you will be anxious for the hour of meeting, and will need no admonition to be present and in your seat at the appointed hour (*see* Luke 22:14) to hear with the ear of your heart the things commanded you of God.

2. Reverence and Attention

We should hear the Word of God with reverence and attention. The gospel is the message of “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” addressed to us (Isa 57:15). It is a message that should have our deep and reverent attention. It is a remedy sufficient to meet our dire need, for the gospel reveals a Redeemer well able to atone⁵ for our greatest guilt, and wash away the foulest stain of our sins. It offers to us freely the unsearchable riches of His grace and glory. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa 55:1). “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17). As we have said above, might we not presume that to a creature standing on the brink of an eternal precipice, ready to perish at any moment, this Word of life would be so irresistibly attractive such would listen with the utmost attention? It would certainly seem so.

Probably most who attend the preaching of the gospel do so without first imploring the blessing of God upon it. And when they attend, they have no specific object in mind. They sit with indifference [and] sing the grand old hymns of the church, but to them the service is irksome and tedious; it is more a matter of religious ritual than a life and death matter. Is it not so? The trouble is, the truth is not *felt*, it does not *disturb* them. If it did, their indifference and inattention would be dissipated. We can talk to men on any subject that concerns the accumulation of wealth and they are all attention and most deeply interested, but discourse with them on the grand matter of their soul’s eternal salvation and they show not the slightest interest, but rather a distaste of such a conversation. As I have stated in my little booklet *The Eternal Destiny of the Unsaved*,⁶ “Since eternal woe is something future, unseen and unfelt, the human heart is prone to neglect or slight God’s warnings and threatenings of ‘judgment to come’ (Act 24:25). Its apprehension disquiets men and disturbs their enjoyments, and so they are strongly inclined to put it from them and go merrily on their way—while all the time they are drawing nearer and nearer to the pit of woe. The threat of ‘indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish’ (Rom 2:8-9) is fearful, and they cannot think of these things and remain at ease, and so try to persuade themselves that these threatenings will never be executed upon them.” What our Lord said to the Jews in Matthew 13:15 is so largely true today: “This people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing.”

3. Sincerity and Open-mindedness

We should hear the Word of God with all sincerity and open-mindedness. The design of God in sending preachers to preach the gospel of His grace is “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Act 26:18). If those who attend were prompted by such motives, then we could hope and expect that our preaching would not be in vain, nor your hearing in vain. The pulpit is not the place where God’s servants are called upon to entertain the audience for a passing hour.

⁴ A. W. Pink (1886-1952).

⁵ **atone** – satisfy the wrath of God against the violation of His Law in the sacrifice of Christ for His people.

⁶ Available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

4. Earnest Prayer for Divine Illumination

Our attendance upon public ordinances ought to be preceded by earnest prayer for divine illumination. It is the Word by the Spirit that giveth life. He alone can make the Word effectual unto the salvation of dead sinners, and edifying unto the saints. Ministers can and should correctly set forth divine truth, and may do so ever so earnestly; they may make impressive appeals to their listeners. But unless the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching with unction and power, neither spiritual breath nor life will follow. More than human power or eloquence is needed, else the best sermon by the best man will be as “clouds without water” or as “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (Jude 1:12; 1Co 13:1). A minister’s success depends entirely upon supernatural agency, and this shows the necessity of his waiting upon God to make it effective unto the salvation of the lost and to the edifying of believers.


5. Earnest Exercise of Our Understanding

We should hear the Word of God by the earnest exercise of our understanding. We should use all diligence to the end that our minds might be illuminated with divine truth. There are many preachers who mutilate and adulterate the precious Word, or even blatantly deny it, hence the divine fiat to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1Th 5:21). We must bring all that we hear to the touchstone of the Scriptures to make sure that their doctrines agree therewith. We are to take nothing for granted, for many deceivers have gone out into the world who are Satan’s emissaries posing as true servants of Christ. They would deceive the very elect of God if possible (Mat 24:24).

6. Determined Resolution to Obey

We should hear the Word of God with a determined resolution to obey it. God has given us His Word not only to instruct us but to *direct* us, to make known what He requires of us. The first thing is, of course, to have a clear knowledge of our duty, and then to conscientiously practice it. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc 12:13). The Lord Jesus affirms this when He said, “Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). Let me ask you, Are you His friend? *Are you?*

We are to unreservedly submit and regulate our conduct according to the teaching of the Word, which will be the standard of our judgment in that Day.⁷ Unless we do this, our attendance is but a solemn mockery, and God will not be mocked with impunity. There are too many like the Jews in Ezekiel 33:31: “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Let us beware that these words are not true of us.

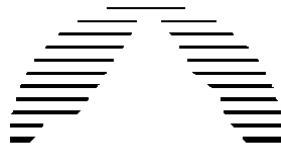
A word of caution. Let everyone listen to every sermon as though it were to be the last one he would ever hear on earth—and it may be, in spite of the fact you may be in the best of health, with every prospect of enjoying many years yet in your earthly journey. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). As I have warned you before, so warn I you again: this may be the last time you will ever hear the message of salvation. Ere the next Lord’s Day, your body may have returned to the earth as it was, and your spirit returned to God Who gave it. You have no lease on life: you are not immortal. Your days on earth are strictly numbered, and your number may be called at any moment. Are you ready? Have you made “your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10)? 

© Copyright 2001 Chapel Library: annotations. Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided 1) you do not charge beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication and 2) this copyright notice and all the text on this page are included.

Chapel Library is a faith ministry that relies entirely upon God’s faithfulness. We therefore do not solicit donations, but we gratefully receive support from those who freely desire to give. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes.

⁷ **Day** – day when the works of men will be judged by Christ at the end of time (Mat 25:32-46).

Worldwide, please download material without charge from our website, or contact the international distributor as listed there for your country. In North America, for additional copies of this booklet or other Christ-centered materials from prior centuries, please contact



CHAPEL LIBRARY

2603 W. WRIGHT ST. • PENSACOLA, FLORIDA 32505 • USA

chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org

850 438-6666 • M-F 9-5 CT • fax 850 438-0227

A worldwide ministry of Mt. Zion Bible Church