

LISTENING TO THE LORD (Mk. 4:21-34)

In the previous passage Jesus had been distinguishing between two types of soil ... the type that produces nothing (the hard soil, the rocky soil, and the soil with weeds), and also the type that produces the good fruit. This describes the response to the Gospel by its hearers. ... Since salvation depends upon receiving God's truth true Christians will hear it, believe it, love it, and obey it as the Word of God. That is what sets apart a true Christian, **1 Cor. 2:14** But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. Or, as Jesus said, **Jn. 10:4** the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. ... It is a proof of ownership when you want to read and study God's Word, **Jer. 15:16** Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

That is basically what Jesus was appealing to in Mk. 4:23, **If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.** Not everyone *can* 'hear' and *wants* to listen. Not everyone has the interest to pay attention to God's Word. Not everyone wants to know what it means ... but the true believer does. It is not a burden for them to study the Scriptures for they appreciate how it helps them to grow in their spiritual walk.

One of the first signs of a believer lapsing into a backslidden state is that they stop paying attention to the reading of God's Word, and then they eventually set it aside altogether. But Jesus is addressing believers here, **If any man have ears to hear, let him hear ... listen!** In particular, He is speaking to His disciples, v.10,11. And then He says something very foundational, **24 Take heed what ye hear.** ... Listen to it ... but even more than that ... invest your energy and all your thought processes into discovering what it truly has to say. This Word of God is *infallible* for it has God as its Author; it is inerrant because He is *incapable* of any untruthfulness; and it is *inspired* perfectly, thoroughly and entirely. It is absolutely reliable! So, from Gen. 1:1 to Rev. 22:21 Christ's command to His followers is simple, **If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.**

And when it comes in through your ears, it penetrates your mind, and enters into your heart, and your soul ... and it directs your walk as a Christian. You will never find a good Christian who does not read his Bible and study it as the Word of God! ... How, then, do you listen to the Word of God? ... We listen to it *obediently*. Since this is God's Word He has given it to us so that we would do what it says. We don't have the choice to 'take it or leave it'. It is God's Word, and He knows everything about us, and He knows what we need ... and what we need He tells us in His Word, and He expects us to be obedient to it.

The Word of God is as a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Ps. 119:105), - we have been given it to shed light on the road each of us are travelling. There is no point in having a torch and keeping it switched off. The point is that since you have the light you use it!

Neither would you think of lighting a candle and putting it under your bed, or hiding it away in a cupboard. It looks so silly and ridiculous and yet many Christians keep the Word of God hidden in places out of their view. It seems to have become a burden to read it, and neither does it seem as if they want to talk about it, especially when there are unbelievers about. ...

Actually, these words were spoken in the conversation Jesus was having about evangelism, and the sowing of the seed of the Gospel. It is comparable to Mt. 5:15 *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.* 16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

There is another thought here in relation to the new energy-saving lights we use nowadays ... the kind that might start off a little bit dim, but burns brighter after a few moments. Indeed, you *will* burn brighter the more you read and study God's Word, **II Cor. 4:6** *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

And that actually opens up to us Mk. 4:22, *For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad.* ... What does that mean? Please turn to Dan. 12. Daniel had been given visions concerning the establishment of the nations into the period known as "the times of the Gentiles" and how it will develop to the return of the Messiah ... Daniel asked the angel, **6** *How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? ...* **8** *... what shall be the end of these things?* **9** *And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. ...* **12** *Blessed is he that waiteth ...* **13** *But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.* Daniel, it is hidden to you at the moment, but when you need to know what it is all about, it will be revealed to you!

That is what Jesus was saying to His disciples ... what is hidden now will be revealed, - you will get to know it when you need to know it! ... Why has God brought you to Pathhead Baptist Church? Why has God laid a burden upon your heart for this place? ... Are we seeing massive growth, as the world would understand? Are we seeing Kirkcaldy being turned upside down for the Gospel?

... No, we are not! Why are we here, then? We are here because God has placed a burden upon our hearts to be here, and the purpose for why He has us here, He will one day reveal to us more clearly. ... That is what that means, **22 For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad.** ... “My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, - all I have to do is follow ... Strength for today is mine all the way, and all I need for tomorrow”. God has a reason for every path He takes His children along ... and that reason always produces glory. That is what it means to follow Him *obediently*.

It continues on then that we listen to what He says *passionately*. We are privileged to have “ears to hear”, - the unsaved don’t hear ... It is those who through grace believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and listen and appreciate what the Word of God says to them, **23 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 24 And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear.** And when you listen and take in what the Lord is teaching you, He will give you more, **unto you that hear shall more be given.** He will respond to where you are, **with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you.** In other words, God will reward your enthusiasm and faithfulness for the study of His Word. ... He will bless you *much* when you put much into it. Whatever you put into the study of Scripture, you will get out of it! ... So, we are to be obedient and appreciate God’s holy Word.

And then Jesus mentions the contrast, **25 For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.** In other words ... the person who truly has a hunger after the Word of God will be given an even greater appetite for it, while *conversely*, the person who says he is a believer but does not have a hunger for the Word of God will lose what he erroneously thinks he possesses.

This actually introduces us to our third consideration ... We listen obediently, we listen passionately, and we listen *trustfully* for we *depend* upon the truth the Word of God teaches us. That is what Jesus is explaining, **26 So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.** The farmer prepares the ground and plants the seed and retires to take a well-earned sleep, and waits in anticipation of the harvest. ... He plays no part in the growth of the crop, - he has done all he can, and all that is expected of him, to bring about a good harvest ... and off he goes to bed. He had done what he was responsible for doing, and he could do no more.

He sowed all the seeds into the good and well-prepared ground, and they died. Yet, out of them came life. How does that happen? The farmer doesn't know, but he believes it will happen! ... And that is the wonder of the Gospel for hidden in the Word of God are those seeds that seemingly fall to the ground *dead*, and yet in the will and plan of God, new life springs from them.

I believe every word of this Book. It doesn't matter how implausible or incredible it is to many ... but I believe every truly born-again child of God must accept this Book as **II Tim. 3:16** given by inspiration of God, and *is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. To do anything else is to throw it back in the face of God and reject what He calls His truth. ... So often, there is been a verse or a passage of Scripture I have found difficult ... but I have always believed it nonetheless. Then, sometime later, God honours your faith and the truth of that verse or passage becomes clear to you. J.C. Ryle wrote, "Give me the plenary, verbal theory of Biblical inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than the doubt. I accept the difficulties and humbly wait for their solution. But while I wait, I am standing on the rock."

When we present God's Word, it is not ours to manipulate or contrive to suit our purposes, no matter how well-intentioned. God's Word is not ours to change or adjust. No Christian, - with all the best intentions in the world, - can manipulate this Book to make it reach into the heart and mind of any sinner for it is not down to intellectual ability to understand the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit alone Who opens up the heart and applies the Word convincingly ... and, therefore, it is the light we must hold confidently in our hands to shine into the many dark places around us.

The Gospel of grace shines far brighter than any denominational 'candle' or doctrines of men for salvation is not by human means, but by God's work. Look again at what Jesus said, **28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. 29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.** It is the earth itself that brings forth the seed, in the same way it is the Holy Spirit Who brings forth the seed of the Gospel. When the farmer sows the seed, there is nothing more he can do. ... When you plant the seed of God's Word, - in the Sunday School, in the CE, in the YF, in the ATC, in the Old Peoples' Homes, in the church services, - there is nothing more you can do because the rest is in the hands of God. True grace is a work all of Him, - I mustn't steer any of it in my direction! ... And once God's grace starts, He doesn't stop until He finishes. And all you can do, - like the farmer, - is to be there when the harvest comes! And when the harvest comes there is plenty for all!

23 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 24 And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear ... We listen *obediently*, we listen *passionately*, and we listen *trustfully* for we *depend* upon the truth the Word of God teaches us. Finally, we also listen *confidently*. There is the inevitable outcome in the victory of the sovereign work of God. I love what Paul says, **Col. 1:12** Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: 13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins: 15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. ... That's it ... that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. I don't know all the 'ins and outs' as to how God will achieve it, but He has proved He can do everything else, and I sincerely believe He will do that also, for His glory's sake. ... And Jesus used the simple illustration, 31 *It is* like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: 32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and cometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

The grain of mustard seed could grow to up to fifteen feet in diameter ... Don't simply look at the little seed that starts it all off, but look at what God can do with it. ... Look what He did with the five loaves ... Look what He did with the two fish ... Look what He did with those ordinary men He called to be His disciples ... Look what He has done and is doing with the seed of the Word of God as it is being sown and propagated across the world ... He is winning, and we are more than conquerors through Him (Rom. 8:37).

It is not the preacher, or the style that reaches into the heart ... it is the Word of God that is sown and brought to fruition through the work of the Holy Spirit. And that is why we are confident in its proclamation for we believe in His promise, **Is. 55:11** So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. ... And He goes on to elaborate ... 12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off.

We are winning ... and, actually, in the mind and will and plan of God, *we have already won!* That is not how it may seem, especially if you don't read the Bible and study it. But that is why we must emphasise what Jesus said to His disciples, ²³ *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.* ²⁴ *And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear.* Pay particular attention for here is what God promises is going to happen, - for it is what His Word says, *Is. 2:2* *it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.* ³ *And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* ... Do you see the implications? That has yet to happen, and it will, *52:7* *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!*

So, I trust we are listeners, and we understand what God in His Word is telling us. We are privileged. ... Do you see two apparently insignificant words in Mk. 4:24? They are the words *he said unto them*. Jesus was speaking specifically to His disciples for those two words are missing in v.26 and in v.30. As a disciple of Christ, are you hearing what He is saying to you? Notice v.33, *And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.* ³⁴ *But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.* ... Are you taking it in what He says to you in His Word?

Do you know the truth? As a believer, yes, you do for the truth of God has set you free (Jn. 8:32). You are saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ because the truth of His salvation has been made effective in your soul. And that is the greatest privilege ... to know the truth of your salvation. What is the distinguishing mark of a Christian, then? It is to know the truth, and to obey the truth, and to love the truth, and to be listeners of the truth. And how do we listen? We listen obediently. We listen passionately. We listen trustfully. And we listen confidently. ... As a Christian, as a believer ... you speak God's language as you hear and receive what He says to you. Amen.