

Hearing His Voice Today

Matthew 5:1-2; James 1:19-25

“And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying,” (Matthew 5:1-2)

It could have been a day much like today when the greatest teacher who ever lived preached the greatest sermon to ever be preached.

That teacher, of course, was and is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sermon is called **the Sermon on the Mount**.

On that day **He saw the multitudes** of people who needed to hear a fresh word from God.

And they, like many today, were hungry for something which would speak life to their hearts.

They were tired of the opinions of people and the abstract theological ramblings of the religious leaders of the day.

They wanted a relevant message that they could apply to their lives now. And Jesus would give that to them.

For quite some time I have felt God speaking and guiding me to preach to you a Series of Sermons of the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes talk to us about Being a certain way in our attitudes – the way we react in life.

They are actually living practical Holiness.

Talking about hearing: An elderly man had serious hearing problems for a number of years.

His family tried again and again to convince him to get a hearing aid.

Finally, he gave in to them and he went to the doctor and was fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed him to hear 100 percent.

A month later he went back to the doctor. The doctor said with a smile, “Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again.”

The old man replied, “Oh, I haven’t told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to their conversations.

I’ve changed my will three times!”

If you have hearing aids, this would be a great time for you to turn them up

Now as we prepare to hear the words of Jesus' great sermon:

- words that are full of power,
- words that are full of wisdom,
- full of insight,
- full of love, grace, and life,

It's important that we recognize that it is possible to hear the greatest sermon ever spoken and go away unchanged by it.

Now let me explain that to you:

Unless the ground is prepared to receive the seed, the seed will never penetrate that ground and consequently will never take root and eventually bear fruit.

- Last year, we went through a spell when we didn't get much rain for the lawns.
- My grass died because of the lack of rain and the insects that thrived and ate the roots of my grass.
- In order to regrow my grass, I had to prepare the soil.
- I couldn't just throw the seed and hope it would grow.
- I had to dig up the old grass and dig into the soil.
- I planted the new seed and put fertilizer on it and then put straw over it and watered it with the sprinkler system.

So what do we have to do to really hear and apply this hearing to our lives?

Unless we have spiritual ears to hear the truth, we can hear it and it will never change us, consequently we will never be the person God wants us to be.

- Would you bow your heads with me?
- Let's pray a prayer this morning.
- "Dear God, the pastor has a sermon coming directly from Jesus, Your Son.
- Would you prepare my heart and mind to receive this?
- God, if you need to get rid of some things in my life that are hindering my spiritual growth and being a disciple, I pray that you will help me accomplish this.
- Lord, rough me up and replant your Word in my heart so that I can grow into the Believer/Disciple that You want me to be.
- Amen!"

So the **Big Question** is:

What can we do to make sure that we hear His voice today?

What can we do to receive the full benefit of the most powerful Word spoken to mankind?

There are several areas we can examine concerning our ability to receive the Word and

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perhaps a passage from James (1:19-25) would assist us in that endeavor.

An Attentive Heart

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness . . .” (James 1:19-21a)

I. Cultivate an Attentive Heart.

The first insight we receive from this passage is to **cultivate an attentive heart.**

We must be quick to hear the Word of truth.

“Quick to hear” refers to an ***alert ear.***

It’s that “Spiritual Ear” that Jesus refers to in the book of Revelation to the 7 Churches.

It is possible to hear, and yet not hear.

You see - We do that all the time.

We do that when we talk to one another.

Do you know what I mean when I say that?

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How many times have we talked to someone and that person would keep looking around at other things?

Have you ever felt like saying to that person, “Hey, I’m talking to you, would you pay attention to me?”

I’ve done that! At times I have to check myself to make sure I’m paying attention.

You see, James is not talking about physically hearing the words as they impact our ears, but listening for what God has to say.

1. ***“Quick to hear”*** describes an attentive heart, listening for what God has to say.

Often we talk to one another and never really hear what the other person has to say.

When we ask someone, “How are you doing?” and they give us any other answer besides, “I’m doing fine,” (the only one we’re programmed to hear), we may miss it altogether.

The other day I was talking to someone and I know they said something and I either wasn’t paying close attention, or I said something like, “Oh, well that’s great!” and I really didn’t know what they said.

I want that person to know if I didn’t answer them correctly, I was embarrassed and didn’t want to ask

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them to repeat it, so at my last doctor's visit I told him I wanted to have a hearing examine.

You see – now understand this – we are not programmed to deal with answers other than “I’m doing fine.”

We are not quick to hear when it comes to receiving what others are trying to tell us.

That is often true when it comes to the “what” God is trying to communicate to us.

2. You can hear His Word and not really hear it.

You can even read the Word and just be reading and not processing it.

That's why Jesus was always talking about ***"having ears to hear."***

In one Gospel, it says, **"Take heed what you hear;"**

In another Gospel it says, **"Take heed how you hear."**

3. We not only have to concentrate on the facts, we have to concentrate on the attitude of our heart in hearing the facts.

What are the things that keep us from hearing?

1. “Slow to Speak”

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One of the things that keeps us from hearing is that we need to be (but are not) **slow to speak.**

One of the reasons you don't listen is because you are doing all the talking.

God gave us two ears and one mouth - that ought to say something to us.

Many times we need to be quiet and let God speak to us.

The story is told of a young man who came to the philosopher, Socrates, to be instructed in oratory.

When the young man was introduced, he began to talk incessantly.

This went on for some time, and finally Socrates put his hand over his mouth and said, "Young man, I'll have to charge you a double fee."

The young man asked, "Why?" Socrates replied,

"Because I have to teach you two lessons.

One - the science of holding your tongue; and two - the science of using it correctly."

Sometimes we just need to shut up if we are going to hear God. I don't mean that statement to be crude and rude.

Have you ever been around someone who just talks and talks and you just wish you could take your hand and put it over their mouth and say – “Shhh!”?

You see - **We need to develop an attentive ear.**

The Psalmist said in Ps. 46:10, “Be Still and know that I am God.”

The second thing we need to do is

2. **“Cultivate a calm spirit.”**

We need to

“be slow to anger.”

Did you know that being upset with what you hear can block all the capacity you possess to hear it, especially when it comes to a Relevant Now Word from God?

If you don't calm your spirit down and let God speak a word to you, even when that word is uncomfortable, **you will never hear.**

As a Senior Pastor, I've had people who would get angry at me over a decision that I struggled with and had to make in order not to compromise the Scriptures and these people could not hear a word I preached on Sunday morning because they were mad at me.

Illustration:

I remember in one of my pastorates that I dealt with a couple who came to our church who were not married.

They were good people and quickly made friends with others in the church.

He joined the choir and sang specials. She volunteered in the nursery.

Months went by and finally several people began to inform me that they were living together.

But he kept telling me, “Pastor, I've got my own apartment.” He went out of his way to let me know. I should have been suspicious but I was naïve.

Finally with pressure on me from others, I went to lunch with him and I asked him straight out, “Are you living with her?”

And he said, “Yes!” We're living together!

And I told him, “I am so sorry, but you know our stand as a church. I must insist that you move out and stop this relationship until you are married. And in the mean time you must step aside from singing in the choir and she must stop volunteering until you both get married.”

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Of course, he was visibly upset and it wasn't long until this couple and spread their dissent throughout the church to their friends.

And the friends, who were members of the church, got upset and angry with me and turned against me for the decision I made.

But I could compromise the Word of God and the Church for anyone, even knowing these people were mad at me.

In my heart I had to cultivate a calm spirit although I was distressed that people took a unbiblical stand against me.

This unmarried couple left the church and those who stayed behind blamed me for taking the stand I took.

And for the longest time those people who were upset with me did not have the capacity to hear the Word of God because they were angry.

Cultivate a calm spirit.

Then we also need to

3. Cultivate a clean heart.

James exhorts us to continue **putting aside all filthiness.**

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This word, **filthiness**, comes from a root in the Greek language that has to do with earwax.

- But it refers to sin.
- In other words, sin in your life is like earwax - it will prevent you from hearing God.
- It stops up the capacity to hear.

The Bible teaches that sin separates our hearts from God's. Isaiah said, "**The Lord GOD has opened My ear.**" (Isaiah 50:5)

Illustration:

I remember when I was a young boy, I came to the place where I was having a hard to time hearing.

It was like everyone was talking and I could hear them, but something was wrong.

Mom took me to the doctor and he looked in my ear and said, "I know what the problem is. Your son has wax impacted in his ears."

The doctor took a syringe of some kind filled it with warm water and washed it all out.

It was like something wonderful had happened. I could hear!

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God sometimes has to dig our ears out so that we can hear what He has to say.

Friends, listen to me - **If you listen for God to speak, you will hear His voice.**

4. The next thing we have to have is A Teachable Spirit.

“In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21b)

II. How do we receive the Word?

There are several keys here.

1. One is that we Receive it in humility.

Anger speaks of arrogance.

We don't want to hear what God has to say because we don't like it.

2. We need to Develop a teachable spirit if we are going to hear what God has to say.

Humility is talked about in Galatians 5 in terms of the Fruit of the Spirit.

It is talked about in the Beatitudes, one of the eight characteristics which characterize a Christian's walk and life.

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Humility is essential to hearing the Word and receiving it.

It's not just enough to hear the Word.

We have to welcome it.

The welcoming of the Word takes place when we are humble enough and teachable enough for God to speak to us.

Illustration:

Do you remember what Dr. Hermiz preached on one night during revival, when he talked about those people who through their youth always got their way.

And when they become adults they really don't change. There are some people still like that in the church.

- Some people think they know everything.
- It can be rampant in some church situations.
- I don't know what there is about coming to know Christ that does this to some people, but it's incredible.
- Some Christians are saved only for a matter of days or a few months, and they've already "arrived."

I have followed the Lord for over 40 years or so and I find that the more I know about Jesus, the more there is to know.

I have only scratched the surface in my understanding about the things of God.

If I am to press on and understand the things of God better, I must maintain a teachable spirit, or I will stay stuck in the mud in my spiritual walk.

Listen, saints, none of us have arrived.

Paul said that he hadn't arrived, and if he hadn't I can't think of anyone else who has. Paul said, "***I have not attained . . . I press on.***"

We need to develop a teachable heart and an open receptive spirit.

The saints of God sometimes need to throw off all they *think* they know.

Often they have to unlearn some things to be taught again. And folks, while I'm here, sometimes God has to teach a "New" thing in order to be effective in the society in which we live.

That's where some people in the church need to trust, have faith in and follow the leadership that God has placed in your church.

The idea of "**receiving**" the Word has a connotation in the original language of showing hospitality.

This word is used for how we receive others into our homes.

Here it is used for how we receive the Word.

In other words, we are to "**give the Word a warm welcome into our hearts.**"

Receive the Word of God into your life and let it do its work.

III. The Third thing we must have is An Obedient Walk

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

(James 1:22)

Many Christians stop at merely hearing and receiving the Word.

They hear the Word, receive it, but don't take the essential step to do what the Word commands.

Chuck Swindoll says, in his book, ***Improving Your Serve:***

"To make the value of obedience just a practical as possible, let's play 'Let's Pretend.' Let's pretend that

you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I'm the owner and I'm interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until a new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family and move to Europe for six to eight months. And I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you directions and instructions. I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival, I drive down to the office and I am stunned. Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the Receptionist's room. She is doing her nails, chewing gum and listening to her favorite disco station. I look around and notice the wastebaskets are overflowing. The carpet hasn't been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I asked about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, "I think he's down there." Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office, which has been temporarily turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas. "What in the world is going on, man?" "What do you mean, Chuck?" "Well, look at this place! Didn't you get any of my letters?" "Letters?

Oh yes! Sure! I got every one of them. As a matter of fact, Chuck, we have had a letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided the personnel into small groups to discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of the things were really interesting. You will be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two - Great stuff in those letters." "OK. You got my letters. You studied them and meditated on them; discussed and even memorized them. But what did you do about them?" "Do? We didn't *do* anything about them."

This is not funny at all, when you think of the unhappy fact that this is where many of our churches and Christians are.

Sometimes we even reinforce it.

We encourage our kids to memorize Scriptures and reward them for the mere fact of Scripture memorization without the consequent obedience to that Scripture.

You see, God gives us His Word, not to make us smart, but so that we will obey it.

He says, **"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."**

Sometimes, we hear and receive the Word; we memorize and can tell people the facts and the truth of the Word of God; and yet, we do not live that Word out.

If we are merely hearers, we delude ourselves.

“For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror. For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.” (James 1:23-24)

He is comparing the Word of God to a mirror.

The mirror shows us what we really look like.

Most of the time when we look into the mirror, we do it for other reasons besides seeing ourselves.

Sometimes we look into the mirror to shave, or put on makeup.

Many times you can go through that routine without ever seeing what you look like.

But if you do study that image, you will see an accurate reflection of who you are.

Now I'm serious – You know the older we get there can be a problem here.

We lose our vision – We don't see like we use to.

I look in the mirror and wish it was somebody else I was looking at. Do you know what I mean?

I have to put on a special pair of glasses to see me.

The Word of God is like that.

- When you look into the Word of God and hear His truth, you see who you really are as you compare to that Word.
- The Word of God, like a mirror, reveals to us who we really are.

If we just hear the Word, we are like somebody who glances in the mirror and shaves himself, or powders her nose, and walks away and doesn't really remember what they look like.

I have this idealized image of myself.

Sometimes we think we're still the good-looking person we were twenty years ago.

But the mirror pops our bubble.

Most of you probably think you look differently than you really look.

Some of you might remember when cassette recorders were first introduced. When we heard ourselves on tape we said, "I don't sound like that!"

But you do.

The tape is precisely how you sound.

Somebody takes a home movie and says, "I don't look like that!"

Yes you do!

That's precisely how you look.

We have an idea of what we really want to be and what we want to look like.

Sometimes that is true for our Christian lives.

Sometimes we deceive ourselves into believing we are something we are not simply because we know the facts of the Word of God.

A. W. Tozer wrote:

"There is an evil which, in its effect on the Christian religion, may be more destructive than communism, romanism and liberalism combined. It is the glaring disparity between theology and practice among professing Christians. So wide is this gulf between theory and practice in the church that an inquiring

stranger who chances upon both, would scarcely dream that there was any relation between the two of them. An intelligent observer of our human scene who heard the Sunday morning message and later watched the Sunday afternoon conduct of those who heard it would conclude that he had been examining two distinct and contrary religions. It appears to me that too many Christians want to enjoy the thrill of feeling right but are not willing to endure the inconvenience of being right. And so, the divorce between theory and practice becomes permanent in fact. Truth sits forsaken and grieves till her professed followers come home for a brief visit. But she sees them depart again when the bills come due."

Because we fail to obey the Word, there is a disparity between what we profess and what we possess; what we say we believe and what we actually believe; what we say we are and what we really are.

Jesus has not called us to become people who "know" the Word only.

He has called us to be people who live the Word, who obey the Word.

How do you do that? You do it by "doing." Simply, do it! Obey it! Live it!

“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.”(James 1:25)

Summary:

How do we receive the Word?

We need to develop an **attentive heart** to hear the Word of God.

We need to develop a **teachable spirit** to receive the Word of God.

Finally, we need to develop an **obedient walk** to obey the Word of God. If you do this, you will be blessed.

If you are going to be changed by the Sermon on the Mount, these qualities will need to be in you.

Are they?

Are you listening with your spiritual ears to what God wants to tell you?

Do you have a teachable spirit open to what God has to say, or is your theology too closed and narrow to hear a fresh word?

When God speaks, are you willing to do what He says?

If you are willing to hear and obey, God will gladly tell you the next step to take.

May God give us grace to take it.

Invitation:

This morning I want to invite you to respond to this sermon.

In the next few weeks, you are going to hear what Jesus says about our character and relationship towards God and our character and relationship with other people.

God is going to show you some areas where you need to take a serious look and do something about it.

Will you do this?

All of this teaching coming from Jesus speaks to what we refer to as Practical Holiness of Heart.