

## LET THOSE WHO HAVE EARS HEAR

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It is notable that Jesus often said, after he made a profound statement, “Let those who have ears hear.” He said this 14 times in the gospels, but God said this same thing about people who see but do not see, and hear but do not hear. Moses remonstrated with the Israelites, before they renewed their covenant with God after escaping Egypt (Deuteronomy 29:4), saying that they had seen all the miracles God performed in Egypt, but they did not see with their eyes or hear with their ears. Isaiah said in the sixth chapter and 10<sup>th</sup> verse that people did not see and listen to God’s message. Moses and Jeremiah repeated this same admonition over and over. Obviously, God knew this too, for he prophesied that people would not listen to his prophets, and they would chase after other gods (Deuteronomy 31:20). All that God prophesied through Moses has been true even up to today.

Week after week I go to church, and people sing songs that are theologically correct and call for some kind of commitment or action. Nothing happens. The song that really bothers me most is “I surrender All.” People sing this song and

they surrender nothing. Their lives do not change. Absolute surrender to God elicits profound changes in the life of an authentic believer. The song was probably written in response to the message in Luke 9:23 that we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow Jesus; but those who sing it do not deny anything. They also do not believe the message in the scripture that describes the action of Jesus' three would-be followers who were told they had to put him first, but they chose to put themselves first. Jesus also asked people to give up the things they treasured most to become his followers, but they would not. We do all of these things if we absolutely surrender.

Those of us in the counseling world have the same experiences that Jesus had. As a psychiatrist, I told patients that if they would take such and such an action they could handle their conflict, but they did not believe me. Their ears were closed, and although they heard the words, they did not act on them.

The same is true of revivals. I do not know how many times I have told people there is more that they can have which will give them love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self control; and they sit like bumps on a log unmoved when I tell them the price is to absolutely surrender.

One of my patients whined and complained about her life. I patiently listened to her for a year, and in spite of the fact I gave her guidance that would ordinarily result in her resolving the problems, she did nothing. Finally, when I could listen

no longer, I said to her, “Elizabeth, I am sick to the death of your whining and complaining. I am going to give you a scripture, but until you have carried it out don’t come back!”

“What is it?” she said. It is, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things will be given to you.” She left the office in a huff. I did not hear from her for two months. One day she called and said she was ready to come back. When she came into the office, she was a changed woman. I could not wait to hear what had happened, so I immediately asked her to tell me what had wrought the change.

She told me then that she was angry with me when she left, but cooled off in time. After a month, a friend asked her to go with her to a Christian conference in a city about two hours away. They made reservations, but at the last minute, her friend’s mother got sick, and she cancelled. Elizabeth, however, decided to go anyway. She checked into her motel, and at the scheduled time went to the conference hall and sat down. The row she was sitting in had no other occupants. As she sat there, she thought, “I am so terrible no one will come and sit with me!”

No one did! But just as the musicians were about to open the meeting, she heard a squeaking in the aisle behind her. She turned and saw a man being wheeled toward her; he had cerebral palsy. She was sitting in the third seat. The attendant

rolled the chair up to the end of her row and sat down in the aisle seat. Elizabeth leaned over to get a better view of the man in the wheel chair, and a voice in her mind said, "You can walk, and you can talk!"

She responded, "I know Lord, and all I do is whine and complain! Please forgive me!" She was healed in that instant, and her life was transformed. She had heard me because she was angry. Anger makes you listen, so she believed, and it changed her life.

In addition, there are sinners in the world who have healing offered to them and they refuse it. Alcoholics are told over and over that a relationship with Jesus will bring healing to their life, but they do not hear. Patients with low self esteem continue to believe lies they learned in childhood, but if they are to change their view of themselves it takes much exhortation or an epiphany to get them to change. Preachers can offer Christ to the lost in their congregations or to a television audience after they have presented a message that will change their lives, but they get only a few responses if any.

These examples are evidence for the close mindedness of mankind to all kinds of messages that would benefit them if they were believed. The question is why are people in the secular world and those in the church so closed to God's message? Sometimes it is God who blinds and deafens them. In a vision, Isaiah was listening to the Lord who was seated on his throne and then he (Isaiah),

“heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’

And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’

He said, ‘Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (Isaiah 6:8-10).

The people God was talking about were being punished for their sinfulness, and he did not want them to escape the punishment he was meting out. God has the ability to close minds, blind eyes, and harden hearts so they do not believe the message being brought to them. That is not what he really wants. He wants all men to come to him, believe, repent, and have an abundant life. They have the freedom to do so.

Another reason for our closed mindedness is that our human nature desires freedom to do what we want to do – to have sexual freedom, to eat and drink what we find tasty, to go where we want to go, to be free of the strictures of morality, and to have excitement. These desires are motivated by built-in mechanisms that drive us to satiate them. We want to exercise our biological drives when we feel them. Satan knows this, so he appeals to mankind by

promoting those things that bring satiation of our drives and inhibition of God's ethical rules. If you do not believe Satan is active, all you have to do is watch the sports channels on TV. The advertisements are mostly for beer, and to a much lesser extent whiskey. They most often have young women having a "fun time" with men. The women very frequently wear revealing clothes. Marketers know sex sells so they exploit it even in automobile advertisements. The food channel has all kinds of wonderful delights for our consumption. On cooking shows with Emeril and Rachel Ray and others, delectable dishes are prepared as entertainment, but really appeal to our appetite for tasty foods. The advertisements for fast food chains are filled with products that have enormous numbers of calories. It is no wonder that 50% of the population is obese.

The problem is that overindulgence of our biological drives gives rise to consequences. Sexual indiscretion results in illegitimate pregnancies, sexually transmitted disease and perversion. Gluttony results in all kinds of problems including hypertension, coronary artery disease, type two diabetes, and other diseases.

Then excessive use of alcoholic beverages gives rise to misbehavior of all kinds, liver disease, delirium tremens, alcoholic paranoia, crime, and automobile accidents resulting in injury and death. Then there are the social consequences of alcohol use, like child and wife abuse, incest, stealing, and murder. In addition, it produces despair of morality that can lead to suicide. Drugs do the same. Both

are associated with criminal activity.

Satan then achieves his purpose, and that is to claim as many followers as he can to thwart God's desire for mankind. God wants all men to believe in him, have an abundant life here on earth, and spend eternity with him.

How are eyes and ears opened? One answer is that God takes the initiative to open them. There are in the world what are called seeking souls. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day." I realize that this is in keeping with the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election, but I know there are scriptures that contradict their interpretation. Jesus said, "Come to me, **all** you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Since almost all are weary and heavy burdened it implies that man can take the initiative.

In the same way Peter quoted from Joel at Pentecost saying, "**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). This again implies man's initiative.

Finally, Paul told Timothy, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for **everyone** — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants **all** people to be saved,

and to come to a knowledge of the truth" ( 1 Timothy 2:4). These scriptures, to my mind, refute the idea of unconditional election, and strongly emphasize the statement that harvesters need to be sent out to bring all who have "ears to hear" into the kingdom. My own belief is that some few people are subject to unconditional election, but most are not. Their salvation is in part up to them.

Ears are opened by the persecution of believers, by stress in a person's life, by economic hard times, and by existential despair. I was watching TV this morning, and a man was promoting his book on the management of debt. It was interesting that he was proclaiming the same principles that Christian money managers promote. These are all revealed in the Bible. I realized as I listened to him, that very few people will listen and follow instruction. Those who will are those in the greatest economic troubles. Others will declare bankruptcy and suffer the consequences of their folly.

A young man who was on marijuana, alcohol, and ecstasy came to me with his wife and child in tow and told me his story. His mother had been married five times and was essentially a prostitute. He had never known love in his life. He served in the Marine Corps and was honorably discharged. He was deeply in debt. After he told me his story and about the despair he was suffering, he plaintively pled with me to, "Please help me Doctor! Please help me!" His desperate plea brought tears to my eyes, because his suffering was so extreme. His ears were opened, he understood God could change his life, so he accepted

Christ when offered and was soundly saved. This scenario has been acted out over and over in my life; I finally learned that alcoholism and drug addiction are spiritual diseases, and only have a spiritual cure.

As I meditated on the problem of closed ears, I came to realize there is an algorithm for mankind's closed ears and blind eyes. It goes as follows: Man is born separated from God and possessing free will. As he grows up, he has an increasing desire to control his own life. He is self-oriented and desires to have freedom and to seek pleasure.

Nevertheless, he has an inherent radical need for a god. Satan, who is the god of the world, teaches him that he can be his own god, and can subscribe to his own belief system. If real truth is proclaimed he rejects it. The only problem is the beliefs he chooses are often contrary to the laws of God because there are only two choices. Even if he chooses God's commandments, he does not have the power to obey them (Romans 8:6). His human nature will lead him astray. In time, he may realize this lack of power, and realizing that it can be found he seeks it. In seeking it, he finds God can give it to him, and he asks him to take over his life and guide and direct it.

God then reveals the truths to him that he needs. He is now a Christian infant, and needs to be fed spiritually. Unfortunately, the church rarely feeds him. He does not continue to encounter God, and his relationship soon wanes. Without

an ongoing relationship, the Holy Spirit is quenched and/or grieved. Again, he begins to become worldly, seeking the approval of men rather than God and listening to Satan's lies. He then ends up sinning and getting into trouble.

If, however, a believer is disciplined he will mature and will be closer to God, receiving the power to resist the temptations the world puts before him. He will have spiritual immunity. The Holy Spirit will guide and direct his life and provide him with all he needs. God is not a Santa Claus, so he will not have his wants met, but only his needs. He will also continue to have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self-control. He will obey Jesus' commandments to love God with all his being, to love his neighbor as himself, and to love other Christians as Jesus has loved him. He will *do* love by giving food to the hungry, clothing the naked, giving water to the thirsty, visiting the sick and prisoners, and taking strangers in his home.

I wish there was a formula for opening ears and hearts so the lost could hear and understand the Good News, but I don't know one. We do, though, have to continue to proclaim the Good News and pray it falls on "ears that hear," and that people can see Christ in us.