

Matthew 13:13-15

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn to Matthew chapter 13. In their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, You will keep on hearing, but will not understand.

You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive. For the heart of the people has become dull. With their ears they scarcely hear, and they that have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes.

Hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return, and I would heal them. And two other scriptures, oftentimes in Matthew, but particularly Matthew 11, 15, He who hears, let him listen.

And I like Luke 8, 18, where Jesus said, Take heed how you hear. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for the great privilege of being in the house of God.

We thank you, Heavenly Father, for your constant love, your steadfast faithfulness to each one of us in goodness. We thank you, Father, for this opportunity to worship and gather in your name.

[1 : 43] The opportunity, again, to give back to you because of the great gifts you give to us. And we thank you, Heavenly Father, for the word of God. We ask your blessing upon all that is said and done.

And may it all be for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. If I had a title for the sermon this morning, I want to call it the art of listening.

Notice the word art, because usually it just means, well, what's the difference between listening and the art of listening? I have a granddaughter who's in high school, and for the last two years, she's been taking a class called culinary arts.

And I said, well, Kinsey, you mean you're just learning to cook? And she laughed and said, no, Grandpa, you don't understand. This is an art. Okay.

So I had to look up the word art. And art really does, of course, mean painting, but also it means a specific, speciality, creative, and imaginative presentation.

[2 : 46] Well, that's what the art of listening is about. Because there's a difference between hearing and listening. And the Bible has a great deal of wisdom to talk about listening.

And when you think about it, we kind of take it for granted. I mean, we're listening all the time. We listen to our family. We listen to our friends. We listen to our coworkers. We listen to strangers, even.

And a lot of times when we're sitting around, we actually listen to people we don't even know and get caught up in some of their conversations and sometimes actually get a little bit amused. But listening is a vital importance to us as people.

And listening is a vital importance to our spiritual lives. So it appears to me that God has a great concern about listening.

The word in Hebrew for listen is shama. It means to listen attentively. It is to focus with energy. And it is not only to listen attentively, but also to obey.

[4 : 00] It is amazing. The Bible has the word listen over 700 times. And Jesus says this word, he who has ear, let him hear, seven times.

And you know, seven, of course, is a number that indicates completeness or perfection. So, again, it is something we need to really think about and hear.

And any time God says something once, we probably ought to listen. If he says it a couple of times, we probably ought to listen a little more closely. But when he's saying something seven times, folks, we need to pay attention to what the word of God says.

And not only when a pastor is preaching the word, but also in our daily reading of that word to really focus on what is God saying to me.

There's a similar phrase in Revelation where Jesus talked about the seven churches and his message to them.

[5 : 12] He wrote in Revelation, whoever has ears, let him hear what the spirit says in the churches. So our attention is listening on the spirit, what it has to say to us.

And I love the story of the Mount of Transfiguration. We focus, of course, on Jesus' glory being shown. We have Elijah and Moses there. But it's interesting that God spoke at that moment. And he says, this is my son in whom I'm well pleased. Listen to him. So it's important to we do that. So what it's really saying to us when we hear that, we say, hey, pay attention, listen up. So the question becomes, is he who hears, let him hear. Who's he? Well, hearing is a natural function of us. So that means all of us.

It's a feature all humanity has. And so we have no excuse not to hear. So the simple answer of he is everybody.

[6 : 15] It doesn't matter your age. It doesn't matter your ethnicity. It doesn't matter your social status. It doesn't matter what language. We are to hear the word of God.

So hopefully we listen up and pay attention. I find five truths I want to share this morning with you quickly. I think the first truth I've already said, but it really is true.

God is greatly concerned about how well we listen to his word. He who has ears, let him hear. It's an admonishment.

It almost is an encouragement. You might regard it as a commandment. But also it's a warning. Because Jesus was aware, as we'll see, that people were not listening attentively and not focusing on what he had to say to them.

In the gospel, you'll read the stories of people who heard Jesus. And I think we find, you know, four different types of hearers. We have those people who heard about him and heard his words, but they didn't really try to follow him, didn't try to obey him, just kind of took it, oh, that's interesting.

[7 : 29] And I think of the word that says that Herod, even the king of Herod, he listened and heard about Jesus, but he didn't take the time to go ahead and investigate, what is he really saying and what does it mean to me?

And, of course, you have those who hear because, well, they just wanted to learn. We want to know everything he has to say. And a lot of times they just wanted to hear because they'd have something to talk about, a good conversation to talk about.

I guess if they had had water coolers and coffee pots at the business office, that would have been the conversation of the day. Well, I heard Jesus say this, but they weren't willing to really listen, to follow and believe and obey.

And then you had those who came to hear Jesus and his words, and they were just listening so that they could trap him or trick him as they compared to what the law of Moses said.

And I'm talking, obviously, about the scribes and the Pharisees. They weren't willing to hear what he had to say so that they could learn and obey and follow him, but to make him stumble.

[8 : 39] But then, of course, the other hearers were those people who truly listened to God, who followed him and obeyed him completely. So the best illustration, and it's in this same passage, is when Jesus told the parable about the sower and the seed.

It's a great parable. He talks about, of course, that God is the sower. What is the seed? It is the word of God. And that seed is great.

There's nothing wrong with the seed. The question is, what is the soil? What is the person's heart that hears that? And, of course, the first one is he threw the seed along the roadway, and the birds came and snatched it away.

Well, that's an illustration of the one who hears God's word, but he doesn't let it go into the heart. It doesn't even really stay in the mind. And, of course, Satan comes along and snatches that seed completely away from the hearer.

The second one was he threw the seed into the ground, and it took root. But after a while, the sun was so hot, it scorched it, and it died.

[9 : 54] Well, those are like the people, of course, who hear the word of God, but unfortunately, they reject it. They get caught up in the worldly pleasures, all the great things that the world seems to offer, and don't follow the word of God.

The third one, of course, was the hearers who heard the word of God, and the seed was thrown on the ground, and it actually grew, took root, did well, but then the thorns grew up, choked it out.

Well, this is an illustration of the hearers who hear the word of God. They listen. They start to grow. But when they face trials and tribulations and also those things of temptation, they let that seed fall away.

They don't follow Christ. But, of course, the fourth one, it talks about the hearer who hears the word of God, takes it into the heart, lets it grow there, and they produce fruit.

What was it? A hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. That's God's intention for us to be good hearers of what God is saying to say. And it's up to the hearer to decide, will I listen, will I obey, will I follow what God has said?

[11:09] And I'm asking and believing that the Christian must learn the art of listening so that we can obey him in all that we say and do. Otherwise, that seed, that word of God, will be completely lost.

So, first of all, again, I think God is obviously very, very interested in our ability to hear. But we have to show some problems with our hearing. First of all, the truth is, you and I are poor listeners.

Are you willing to admit that? I mean, you really, think about it. Hearing is awfully, awfully easy. But I think listening is hard. I mean, it's a biological function.

It's who we are. I mean, we all have God created with two ears, right? We all have the parts. We have the physical stuff. I can still remember learning about the ears when I was a young man. Something about the, what is it? The three little parts. I can't say their official names, but they used to, I always remembered, one was an anvil, one was a hammer, and one was a stirrup.

[12:15] I don't know why that stayed in my mind. But it's all there, right? Unless something happened to you when you were born. Social scientists do a lot of studies on listening, and guess what they've told us?

We only hear about a third of our ability. That's pretty poor, is it not? And our problem is, of course, is our ability to pay attention and focus and keep our mind on that.

And it is interesting, isn't it? God gave you two ears and one mouth. I think he was trying to tell us something. And what is really interesting is, one you can shut, but the others stay open.

When I was teaching at Marlow College, I had the privilege of teaching a class called Study Skills. It's always tickled me that I had to teach college students how to study.

I thought maybe they learned that when they were in K through 12. But one of the concepts we had to teach them, because obviously when you went to college, you had a lot of teachers who lectured. And so we taught them the concept of, folks, you've got to be here now.

[13:24] I'm going to suggest to you there are several here who are not here now. I mean, yes, I know you're here physically, but you're not here now.

Your attention span is someplace else. You're thinking about, oh my, I wonder what's for lunch. Many of you are probably thinking, wow, I hope my bid for that chocolate pie is going to be the highest one and I'm going to get it and take it home.

I hope you're understanding there's a difference between hearing and listening. Oh, let's be honest. You know why we're poor listeners? Because we're lazy.

We're self-focused. We're self-absorbed. We're more intent upon ourselves than hearing God's word and listening to his voice.

And when we listen, my wife tells me this often, when we listen, we are giving that person our full attention, all of our focus, and all of our energy.

[14:31] And when you listen to one another, how important that is, because if I listen to you, I'm giving you the highest compliment that I possibly can, because I'm seeing you as a person with value.

I'm showing you esteem. I'm showing you, obviously, interest. How important is it then for us to listen very carefully to what God has to say to us?

It takes a lot of thought. It takes a lot of energy. It goes beyond the hearing. It goes to the mental process. I listen to every word. I define that word.

And I say, okay, what does that mean to me? How does that affect me? It takes a lot of energy on our part to listen well. Part of the problem is, when I'm talking, I'm only going about 120 words a minute.

Probably most of you are saying, speed it up, Ivan. But the problem is, our thoughts are going about 500 words per minute. So it's so easy to lose track of it.

[15 : 40] Also social scientists, I love it, is they actually can identify five ways that we hear. First of all, ignoring. Sometimes we just ignore.

There's pretend listening. Well, we look at the person and act like we're listening, but we really aren't. There is selective listening. Well, we like to hear what we like to hear, but we're going to tune out anything we don't like to hear.

But the two good ones are attentive listening, where we really are focused, we are listening to what the word says, what the person's talking about. But the fifth one is the one, I think, that we really need to learn.

And that's what we call empathic listening. Empathic is just a simple listening with empathy. In other words, I'm not only listening to the words, but I'm listening to the emotions, I'm listening to the feelings, I'm listening to what is truly being said, and how that affects me and my emotions.

And I think, again, God desires that greatly. The preacher, 18th century F.W. Robinson said it well, he said, truth is for the heart, not for the intellect.

[16 : 59] I don't know if you've ever thought about it, folks, but the Jewish people, at the time of Christ, heard Jesus Christ talk for three years.

And it's amazing, in the book of John, at the end of the chapter, it says, what Jesus said, and what Jesus did, you can't even fill all the books about it. So they had the privilege of hearing it first and well for three years.

And yet, they are the same people who rejected Christ and crucified him. They weren't listening. So I think, again, we're poor listeners.

Truth number three, well, we have an enemy, and that's Satan. And Satan's gonna do everything he possibly can to keep you from hearing the word of God. Because Satan hates scripture.

He hates the word of God because it's truth. And if Satan has that great ability, even when you hear the word of God, he will take that and twist that in your mind, as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

[18 : 05] Because he knows if what you hear and accept and believe, he has lost you. And he hates the good fruit of what God produces. Well, how does Satan keep us from hearing?

Well, first of all, he keeps you from church. He keeps you from church. He'll find ways of keeping you busy. He'll find maybe work or he'll find any other possible reason that will say, well, I don't need to go to hear the word of God this morning.

It is so important because God has the words of life. It is where we find truth. It is where we find the blessing as we hear God's word preached.

And he entertains our minds with wandering thoughts. He helps us daydream. He helps us to worry about all other things that are going on. He distracts us if we ever can.

Oh, let's be honest. Sometimes when we're hearing the preacher, we're more focused on the preacher than what he's actually saying. Well, what is he wearing? Well, his hair's not straight. You know, sometimes I hear the pastor but I think, hmm, I'm not sure I agree with him.

[19 : 14] Sometimes we hear the pastor and say, wait a minute, I know some of his weaknesses. He's not quite living it. Folks, we're all, again, have weaknesses. But we're not to focus on the speaker.

We are to hear the word of God and let that affect us. Truth four.

Our other problem, folks, is we tend to forget. In other words, we only remember about a tenth of what we hear, which is a sad state of affairs.

And some of us, I think, unfortunately, don't even do that well. So what do we do to fight that? You have a bulletin. You see the back?

There are places for notes. And I applaud those because I see many as I listen to the pastor.

[20 : 12] They are busy taking notes or writing down. What should we write down? Two things that you need to get out of every sermon. Number one, what have I heard that I have not heard before?

What did I really learn? Jot that down because that's important. But also, we need to hear the words that talks about the sin that's in our lives.

We need to write that down because that's what God is trying to help us to transform our lives because of his grace in working in our lives. And I applaud those who continue to do that and write those down.

Think about it. The disciples were just that way. I mean, they heard Jesus talk. They heard him speak. And yet, after he spoke, they immediately went to him and said, okay, now wait a minute.

What did you just say? What does that mean? Explain it to us. And I love the two examples in the Bible. Do you remember Mary hearing the angel Gabriel about her giving the birth?

[21 : 17] Do you remember what it said Mary did with all that the angel said to him and all the events that took place at Jesus' birth? She put them in her heart and pondered on them.

And I love the fact that in Acts chapter 17, when Paul would preach to the Berean Jews, that afterward, they would go home and examine the scripture to see, was Paul telling the truth? We need to record and remember what God's word has said. Have it there. And as we're reading the word the next day, look at our notes and say, okay, what God, what were you saying to me at that time and how do I need to change who we are?

Last truth, truth five. I think you can see four evidences in people's lives if they're hearing the word of God well.

First of all, the evidence is you're being obedient to God's commands. are you following him and being obedient? And I guess a true test of that is just following the first, the most two important commandments.

[22 : 34] Do you love God with all your heart, mind, and soul? And the second one, do you love your neighbor? Secondly, I think the evidence is your faith has grown.

I'm hearing the word of God and my faith is growing. Romans 10, 17, faith comes from hearing, comes from hearing the word of God.

Are you stronger in the faith because of you're listening carefully to what God's word has to say to us? And obviously, the fourth is there's fruit in your, or third, rather, there's fruit in your life.

There's fruit in your life. Again, the seed grew and it produced a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold.

You should be growing in the Lord and you should be producing fruit, good works, good deeds.

And that fruit of the Spirit that's listed in Galatians should be becoming more and more a part of our life. Love and joy and peace and patience, goodness, self-control.

[23 : 40] That's evidence that you and I are truly hearing and listening to God's voice. and of course, the last one is you're changed. You're different.

You are being transformed by the grace of God through His word. That's the only way we do change because the word is powerful. It's a two-edged sword.

It is a sword that goes into us and takes out the sin in our life. We're living better. We're living stronger. If you're not better than you were a year ago, you're not listening well to the word of God.

I'll let you check that out for yourself. So the question before the house is, are you listening? And the question then becomes, who are you listening to?

Seeking God's truth again takes energy and focus. It takes us to a part where we need to be challenged and we need to be changed. And when we listen to God carefully, we typically grow and we have more peace, we have more comfort, we have more joy, we have a more fulfilled life because God is truth.

[24 : 59] God's word is truth and God's word is life. You know the scriptures, but it says it well. Psalm 46.10, be still and know I am God.

That quietness allows us again to hear God's voice to us. You're familiar again with the passage of the parable of the ten virgins, five who had oil in their lamps and five who did not.

Five were foolish and five were wise. Well, I think that's how we should describe hearers of the word of God. We have those who are wise hearers and those who are foolish hearers.

They are not listening to God's voice. In Revelation 3.20, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and will dine with him and him with me. Are you hearing God's voice?

[26 : 13] Are you listening to his knock and answering and inviting him in? And you notice at the end of the scripture that I read this morning, the last verse in 15 of Matthew 13.15, he added that and I will heal them.

That is a beautiful promise from the word of God. That is why we come, we hear the word of God preached, but each day we come to the word of God and hear him speak to us.

Through his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you and praise you that you have given us the ability to hear. But Father, not only do we have the tools to hear, but you've given us the gift of being able to listen closely.

And then Father, as we hear your words, you give us the ability to change, to be transformed by that word and by your grace in our lives. We ask God that again you would continue to speak to us

because our heart's desire is to be like your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
Our heart's desire is to grow in our relationship with you, to know you better. And to do that,
Heavenly Father, we ask for greater abundance of hearing and listening to the word of God.
[27 : 37] Thank you, Father, for all that you say to us. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.
Amen. Amen.
Thank you.