

Speaking in Parables

By Paul R. Blake

Recently, I was listening to the radio and heard an old, familiar song about bridging the communication gap between generations. I had heard it many times when I was younger, but it occurred to me that I had never really listened to it. Ironically, the chorus had a line that caught my attention by saying, "you can listen as well as you hear." Apparently, I was guilty of not listening to what I was hearing.

Jesus spoke a parable to the multitude in Matthew 13 and concluded it by saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear! And the disciples came and said to Him, Why do You speak to them in parables? ... Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand... For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear" (9-10, 13, 15-16).

Jesus explained to His disciples that some would hear Him, but would not understand the parables because they were not listening. In fact, He implied that they would not listen even if He spoke plainly. Therefore, since they would not listen to plain speech, He would address them in parable form, to which they would listen even less (if that is possible). "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (13:12). This simply means that those who are inclined to listen to the Lord will be enriched by hearing the parable, and those who are indifferent to His teaching will be turned away by the parable.

Simply put, if one wants to understand the Lord's will for man, he will listen, regardless of how it is spoken, and he will understand it. If one is not favorably disposed toward the will of God, he will hear it, but he will not listen.

I have often been asked, "Why don't people obey the Gospel when it is preached to them in such a clear and direct manner?" The answer is simple: they hear, but they do not listen. The word of God is spoken; but, the hearer has no sympathy for the suffering Savior, he has no interest in life beyond this present world, and his heart does not respond to the wonder and majesty of the truth.

That is the whole point of the Lord's parable of the sower. The seed is the word of God; the four soils are four different hearts of men. The first heart was hard and disinterested; the seed could not penetrate the surface. The word landed on his ears, but did not enter into his heart. The second was shallow and fickle; the seed could not take lasting root. The word only generated a passing interest. The third was tangled and crowded; there was no room for the seed. The heart was too pre-occupied with other matters to truly listen to the word.

However, in the case of the fourth soil, the ground was prepared and receptive to the seed, and the seed took root and produced. A heart that is interested in truth will not merely hear it, but will listen to it as well. The word of God will produce an effect: it will stir up emotional and intellectual involvement, and it will motivate an active response. But only if one listens as well as he hears.

This is not complex. Nearly everyone can hear; very few are completely deaf. But not everyone who hears actually listens to what is said. Listening requires an interest in what one hears, and it demands that the hearer focus his attention on what is being said, and that he works to assimilate and understand the content of the message. We have the capacity to listen that is also equal to our capacity to hear... if we truly desire to understand it.

Too often, we allow barriers to widen the gap between hearing and listening. In a discussion with others with whom we disagree, we often hear their points, but we do not listen well enough to understand. Occasionally, dislike for someone becomes a hindrance to listening to the words we hear them speak. Even worse, prejudice can make one incapable of listening to anyone from the disfavored group.

Yet, I believe the greatest bar to listening and understanding is the mind that is already made up before getting all of the essential information. For example, the Pharisees did not believe Jesus could possibly be the Messiah. They already had an idea of what the Anointed would be like, and Jesus didn't fit their notion of what he should be. In fact, in their stubbornness they went so far as to dismiss the Christ after witnessing an unprecedented miracle (John 9:24-34). We must resolve to remove these barriers to our understanding, or else remain in ignorance.

Do you want to learn more about the world you live in? Then listen as well as you hear. Do you want to have more productive conversations with others? Then listen as well as you hear. More importantly, do you want to understand the will of God and go to heaven? Then listen as well as you hear.

A Moments Wisdom

--I want to be so full of Christ that if a mosquito bites me, it will fly away singing "There is Power in the Blood."

--The church is a gift from God; assembly required.

--Faith: Forwarding All Issues To God.

--God forgive us, in an hour like this; that we have been dry Christians, preaching a dynamite gospel and living firecracker lives.

--I have more trouble with myself than with any other man I have met.

--Old age is like climbing a mountain. The higher you get the more tired and breathless you become, but your view becomes much more extensive.

--We are often faced with great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.

--A man's mind, stretched by a new idea, never goes back to its original dimensions.

--A loud voice cannot compete with a clear voice, even if it is only a whisper.

--If you spend your day looking for easy work, you will go to bed tired.

--The only people who die over hard work are those who kill themselves trying to avoid it.

--Indifference is something that persons with low moral character often pay back to you with interest.

--If there is anything that we wish to change in a child, we should first examine it and see whether or not it is something that could be or should have been changed in us.

--Science may have found a cure for most evils, but it has found no remedy for one of the worst -- the apathy of human beings.

--Time is of more value than money. One can always get more money, but he cannot get more time.

--It is better to deserve honors and not have them than to have them and not deserve them.

--The only way to honorably settle a disagreement is on the basis of what is right, not who is right.

--Life asks us to make measurable progress in reasonable time. That is why they make fourth-grade schoolroom chairs so small, so we won't fit in them at age 25.

--The truth that makes men free is often the truth they do not want to hear.

--When you meet temptation, turn to the right.

--If the wind will not serve, take to the oars.

--It is much easier to be critical than to be correct.

--Courtesy is the shortest distance between people.

--It has been said that our anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.

--We always admire the other fellow more after we have tried to do his job.

--One thing you can give away and still keep is your word.

--Borrow trouble if you are foolish enough to insist on doing so; but, do not lend it to your neighbors.

--When choosing sides between power and patience, choose the side of patience.

--"...We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Rom. 8:23-25). There is not medicine like hope, not incentive so powerful, and no tonic so powerful as the expectation of something better tomorrow. Take from a man his wealth, and you hinder him; take from a man his purpose and you slow him down. But take from him his hope, and you stop him. He can go on without wealth, and even without purpose; but, he will not go on without hope.