

"Hearing the Gospel"

God gave us ears to hear, but are we listening? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're going to explore the importance of listening to God, so stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for the Lord's will. We want everyone to hear and to know the Lord. We know that the true way to know the Lord is through a thorough study of His Holy Word, the Bible. We can't count on feelings or the thoughts of men. We want to hear God speak for Himself, so we go to the Scriptures. And we want to study with you every single week.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD in Amos 8 verses 11 to 12, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger from sea to sea, And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, But they will not find it." For many today, there is a famine for the Word of God. And I fear what happened to Israel in the eighth century before Christ is happening today.

While the Bible is still the number one bestseller of all time, and while 82 percent of Americans revere the Bible as sacred literature, they simply don't read it and don't know what it actually teaches. In a recent report by the American Bible Society, 79 percent of the people believe that they are knowledgeable about the Bible, but only 45 percent could identify the four gospel accounts of: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Sadly, many people know very little about God's teaching on sin, the soul, salvation, or the judgment. You know if we want to live with God eternally in heaven with joy and peace, then we must hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you want to study more about this topic, and so we offer this information on this program free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Peter 1:22 to 25, and then we'll explore the need for hearing the gospel.

Our reading today comes from I Peter, chapter 1, verses 22 to 25. "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word which was preached to you." That's from Peter's first epistle. And oh, how we need to hear. Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to be good listeners, to pay attention to Your Word and to love it and obey it. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Proverbs 1 and verse 5 says, that "A wise man will hear and (he'll) increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel." You know, from our earliest days in school, our teachers encouraged us to listen and to follow directions. You know listening, really listening, may be one of the hardest tasks of life. We can hear words, but have we learned to listen and to receive the message that we heard? Have we sought God and treasured up His words in our hearts?

The Bible everywhere emphasizes the importance of listening. The psalmist sang in Psalm 119 verses 10 to 16, "With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word have I treasured up in my heart, That I may not sin against You. Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word."

Some say they don't like rules, I hear that a lot, but the psalmist rejoiced in the ordinances or rules that God gave. In fact, he set his heart to delight in them, to store them up, to meditate upon them, and to consider them significant, so he would not forget them or wander away from them or sin against God. I hope that you seek the Lord with all your heart and that you love God's Word like that.

You know, every parent who loves the Lord wants to see his children follow God's ways and wisdom. Solomon said in Proverbs 2 verses 1 to 5, "My son, if you will receive my words, And treasure my commandments within you, And make your ear attentive to wisdom, And incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; And if you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God." Solomon knew how important, how utterly important knowing God and His word was to his children. Do you know? Have you made the Word of God a priority in your home mothers and fathers?

The Lord Jesus more than once said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (as He did in Matthew 13 and verse 9). In the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, we can read seven times: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." God wants and demands to be heard. God spoke from heaven to Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration about Jesus. And He said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him" (Matthew 17 and verse 5).

Now Matthew, Mark, and Luke record one of the Lord's parables. And some call it the parable of the sower, and others the parable of the soils. It really describes how hearts respond to the teaching of Jesus. Now we'll be looking at Mark's account. And if you will, turn with me to Mark 4:14-20. And there the word of God says, that "The sower sows the word. These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. In a similar way these are the ones on whom the seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones whom the seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and they accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Now in this parable, the seed is the word of God, the gospel. The first group is like the soil beside the road. And Matthew 13:19 explains, that "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and he doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what's been sown in his heart. And this is the one on whom the seed was sown beside the road." Now just as the seed never quite breaks into the soil, so the word never quite breaks the hardened heart. Some never take the word seriously, never believe, and they lose their opportunity to become Christians.

John 1 verses 11 to 13 tells how Jesus "came to those who were His own, and those who were His own didn't receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of

God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, but of the will of man, (and not of the will of man) but of the will of God (rather).” Now Satan came and stole the Word from them, so they never heard what was necessary for them to know about the truth and so be saved. Many today never have the Word planted in their hearts, never truly hear the gospel, and never know the truth about Jesus.

The Jesus that they think they know and the Jesus that is revealed in Scripture are really for them two different people. Why? Because Satan is a deceiver. He doesn't want people to have the truth in their hearts, and so he substitutes a mythical Jesus for the real one. This is a Jesus that never challenges them, that's Satan's Jesus, that never condemns anybody, that's Satan's Jesus. Oh, He's very attractive, but He's phony. He's not the Jesus of the New Testament.

Then, there's the rocky soil. These folks hear the message and they believe quickly; but when temptation comes, they fall away because they lack the deep spiritual roots that they need. Their shallow, superficial faith isn't strong enough to sustain them. They only believe for a while. Trials or persecution cause their faith and their commitment to Christ to just dry up. They heard the good news of salvation, yes, but they didn't treasure it up in their hearts, so they leave their faith behind.

Then third, Jesus tells of the thorny soil. They hear the word, but they let other things choke the word of God out of their hearts. They have room in their hearts for God, a little bit, and a little bit for His word, but because of the cares of the world, because of their delight in riches, because of the pleasures of this life which become their focus, the word of God gets pushed out.

Colossians 3 verses 1 to 4 says, “Therefore if you've been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” You see that's where our hearts must be, where we must remain if we wish to live with Christ in glory. The psalmist said in Psalm 119 verse 10, “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments.” We need that way of thinking, otherwise we too might have hearts filled with distractions that take us away from God.

The fourth soil is made up of “good and honest hearts.” Oh, they hear and they understand the Word. And rather than argue with God, they accept it and they hold fast to it. In the end they bear fruit with patience, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. You see a good and honest heart is willing to be in subjection to God because He loves Him and he's willing to be honest about himself. Many hearts lie to themselves about their need for God or about their need to change and repent. Many hearts would rather argue about what is and is not sin than really to listen to what God actually says. An honest and good heart will listen to God and make then the needed changes.

God is able to produce fruit in a good and honest heart, because His Word is firmly fixed there. Now if you're not willing to listen to God, God cannot help you; but if you're willing to listen, God can do great things in your life! Many want to claim the promises of God in the Word but they're unwilling to let God's Word be the moral and spiritual authority in their lives. But you can't have the promises of God if you're unwilling to accept the rest of what God says. God is God, and we are His creatures. We don't know more than He does. We're not wiser than He is. We must listen to Him rather than think that we can tell Him what we ought to believe.

Listening to God means that we regard His written Word as the final authority. And instead of going out with our “gut feelings” or listening to other voices that are in this world, we're going to listen to Him in the Word. Listening means that we quit trying to rewrite what the Bible says, quit trying to

remake God in our own image, and quit thinking God is subject to our culture. God is God. And He was God before He created the world, and He'll be God after this world comes to an end. He doesn't change, and His Word doesn't change. Psalm 119 verse 89 says, "Forever, (forever) O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven." What was true when Jesus spoke it in the first century is settled in heaven and has not changed. The Lord Jesus said in John 10 verse 35 that the Scripture cannot be broken. That is, you can't change it, you can't edit it, or dispose of it. It stands written.

The book of Galatians reminds us that there is one, unchangeable gospel. The gospel of Christ is not a cafeteria, where people can choose what they want and leave the rest. No, the Lord determines what the gospel is, and our task is to hear and to be obedient.

Paul wrote in Galatians 1 verses 6 to 9, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we've said before, so I say now again, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" My friends we must follow the one, true gospel. We must not imagine any other gospel will do.

The one, true gospel points to Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15 verses 1 to 4 says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Now why is all this important? It's important because we can be deceived, and many frankly, many people have been. If we believe a gospel that has been tampered with, we'll be following a lie. We must hear and obey the one, true gospel. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 4 and verse 24, "Take care what you listen to." A false gospel will only destroy those who follow it. The devil likes to counterfeit the gospel and deceive people. He likes to make people think they are saved, even when they're following a lie. We must be careful not to fall into his trap and lose our souls. We're going to spend this month looking at what God desires from us to obey that one, true gospel. And so, please study with us each week this month. Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that in Your Word You gave us the truth. That we might know what is right, and be able to keep away from the deceptions that the devil would give to us. Father help us to hold fast to the one true gospel. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:24 to 27, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it didn't fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

The Lord Jesus defines a wise man as one who hears and does what He has said. He doesn't add to the gospel, or doesn't take away from it. He doesn't suspend what God has said or try to rewrite the gospel. He simply hears and obeys the words he heard. On the other hand, the foolish man hears, but he does not do what he heard. He does something else. He builds a house yes, but not a house built on the solid foundation of the words of Jesus. So, when the time of testing comes, the one who listens

and obeys survives, but the one who ignores what he hears and does what he wants to do, that person is going to be ruined.

Hear the Lord and obey Him; become a Christian today! Put your faith in Christ and confess Him, repent of your sins, and be baptized into Jesus Christ and into His death. And when you're baptized, the Lord will wash away your sins (Acts 22 and verse 16) and He'll raise you up to walk in newness of life (Romans 6 and verse 4). My friend, today is the best day for you to hear the Lord and respond to His message.

Well we hope that today's emphasis on listening to God has challenged you to think. If you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. And we offer Bible correspondence courses to help you learn more about God's will. Now if you want one, that is a Bible correspondence course, let us know. We also offer free study sheets that go along with our program. Now you can download these study sheets before each program, and get them from our website or you can call and request them. Now if you get a hold of us we won't ask you for money, and we won't put you on a list.

So we do ask that you please worship with a church of Christ in your area. They're the reason that we don't ask for money. And if you're looking for a church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Now churches of Christ love and they want guests, and you'll be glad that you attended. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.