

hear! hear!

selections from Nehemiah, 2 Timothy and Luke

God speaks through the preaching and teaching of His Word. Do you listen? Effective listening requires determination and concentration, but it pays off. Today's text mentions three important benefits of careful listening to God's Word.

► Understanding a Good Thing When You Hear It

After a generation of captivity in Babylon and many more years of trying to reconstruct their lives in Judah, the Jews lacked interest in God's law. Few taught from the Scriptures. A priest named Ezra wanted to change the picture. He stepped onto a high wooden platform in the streets of Jerusalem and began reading from God's law. Read Nehemiah 8:1-12 to find out what happened.

- What was the attitude of the congregation as Ezra spoke?
- What did Ezra and the Levites do to help the people as they listened?
- How did the people respond to the reading of the law? Why do you think they responded this way?

► Hear, Then See the Truth

Paul's warning to a young preacher in 2 Timothy 4:1-4 applies to listeners too. God's Word can be distorted by teachers more concerned with crowd pleasing than with telling the truth. Attentive listening combined with honest searching for the truth will expose these lies. Read this warning now.

- What responsibilities does the preacher have when he preaches?
- What does it mean to preach "in season and out of season?"
- According to Paul, why would people reject the Word of God?
- What are some ways a person can check the truth of preaching?

► Growing As You Hear

Along with understanding and seeing the truth, attentively listening to God's Word results in real spiritual growth. Read what Jesus said about this process in Luke 6:47-49.

- What three things must a person do to build a firm foundation for life? (vs. 47)
- What does the flood represent in the comparison? (vs. 49)
- The house built upon a rock withstood the flood. What part does hearing God's Word play in this building?
- What reward does Jesus promise those who hear and obey His words?

Nehemiah 8:2-3, 7-8

²So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁷The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.

⁸They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

2 Timothy 4:1-4

¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Luke 6:47-49

⁴⁷As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

»mon

We are blessed to hear the Word of God each week. But we're also quick to forget it or slow to do it. Think: Can you remember yesterday's sermon? Jot down some of its key points. Then consider ways you might put that message into action.

»tues

Sometimes it's tough to love God because it means we must listen to His voice and hold fast to Him. What are you listening to and holding fast to today?

»wed

The things we do act as sermons for others, showing what a Christian is like. What kinds of sermons have you preached this week? Ask God to help you "preach" His love by your actions today.

»thurs

God wants us to listen attentively for His Truth. Make a list of ways you can do that this week.

»fri

When you listen to the Word being proclaimed on Sunday mornings, you are hearing a message of "good news" (that's the meaning of "Gospel"). Write down at least five items of good news from the Word of God.

»sat

This verse cautions us to listen to God's voice and hold fast to Him. Take a look in the mirror. Talk to yourself for a moment about your Christian commitment. Then talk to God about it.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

—James 1:22

What MAKES A SERMON EFFECTIVE

If you are like many, you've heard a few sermons in your life. Some may have really motivated you. Others may have put you to sleep.

WHAT IS IT THAT
MAKES A GOOD
SERMON?

I want to present one person's view, but first I want to allow you to tell me by putting a check by each statement that is true of a good sermon.