

All Ears!

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ... If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Every book has a purpose. Take a phone book. Grandparents, this is not the book you read to your grandkids while they sit on your lap. This is a phonebook. It’s one purpose is to tell you the phone number and address of a person or business. That’s it. It can tell you where to buy an apple pie, but it can’t tell you how to make one.

The Bible is a book, too, and like any book, it has one purpose. That purpose is stated in our text: “...**humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**” This book saves you. That makes this book very important, doesn’t it. What good is a teacher if the students don’t listen? What good is a stop sign if no one pays any attention to it? And what good is the Bible if no one listens? And that is our prayer this morning, that we are all ears when it comes to Bible. We want to listen to it because by listening we learn, and by learning we are saved.

I. Listen to learn.

Imagine a game. The team is down, but the coach knows of a play that will give his team the best chances of winning. So he calls a time out and huddles all his players around him. But imagine if three or four players argue over who should get the ball. Imagine two players yanking the board away from the coach, erasing his play and drawing up their own. Imagine another kid who is so upset he just sits down and pouts. Imagine other players who find it more amusing to poke each other in the ears. The team will lose.

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Next time you look in the mirror, open your mouth and look inside. What do you see? You don’t see an eardrum, or auditory canal or cochlea, all parts of the ear that enable you to hear. Instead you find an unattractive tongue and some dangling thing in the back. There is an old phrase, you can’t hear with your mouth.

So, we need to be reminded once in a while to be quick to listen. Some people are not quick to listen. I remember something Art Glass shared with me. He was often criticized for being a Bible believing Christian. His response was wonderful: read it first and then we will talk. Be quick to listen, and to help listen, be slow to speak. That is why teachers have rules. No speaking unless called upon, raise your hand if you want to speak, etc. Speaking drowns out the teacher’s voice so no one hears the teacher.

But there is another kind of speaking that prevents us from hearing. It is when we think we know better than the teacher and question and challenge every word. It is the player telling the coach what play to call instead of listening to the coach’s play. Imagine if God speaks to us in his Word, and we instantly question him, argue with him and offer our own solutions to our problems? Then we are not listening.

And another thing that keeps us from listening is anger. When people disagree, they want to talk more. Arguments erupt and anger results. The truth is, the Bible will say something that will anger you. It will criticize you. It will accuse you of sin, many sins.

“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” Imagine Nathan. God told him to go before the King and confront the King with the sins in his life. The King is the law. He could order your execution and no one would question him, and now you have to tell him he is a sinner? He doesn’t want to face his sin. That is why he tried to cover it up by murdering a woman’s husband, marrying her, and hoping no one would count up the months and realize the baby she gives birth to was David’s. Go ahead, dare to tell him that. But Nathan did. David had his excuses. He could have blamed the woman, Bathsheba. Why was she bathing on her roof when he was looking? It’s her fault. He could have argued with Nathan. He could have in anger ordered his execution. But he didn’t. He humbled himself and admitted, ***“I have sinned.”*** He saw his filth, shut his mouth, and turned aside his anger so he could listen. And what did he hear? Nathan said immediately, ***“You are forgiven.”*** That’s what we learn when we listen. ***“...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”***

That’s what you learn when you listen to God’s Word. It starts off telling us how things came to be: God created everything. It was perfect. Then he tells us why women experience pain, sometimes even death in childbirth and why there are famines and starvation and fights and divorces, wars, and murders in the world. God’s perfect man and woman listened to the devil,

disobeyed God and by one man sin entered the world and death through sin.

But the Lord gives his first salvation promise. Some time in history a descendant of that woman will be born. He will destroy all the devil has done. Chapter after chapter shows that promise kept alive, and then we get to the New Testament, and if we listen, what do we learn? When the time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law facing the possibility of sin and temptation every day of his life, but he did not sin. God's Son, Jesus Christ, had no sin. What do we learn? We see him on the cross. There were no excuses. He didn't cry foul because he was being punished for sins he did not commit. Rather he gave up his life, died, and rose again, and he promises whoever believes will not perish, but have eternal life even if he should die.

"...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." You will not find this in a phone book, or in the works of philosophers or at the doctor's office. You find it only here. Listen to learn you are saved.

II. Learn to do.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Good, you listened, but the devil has one more trick for you. He really doesn't mind if people go to church. He will even encourage it. He doesn't mind it as long as they listen, but don't do what it says. The Pharisees in Jesus day fell for this trap. They were super believers, in church all the time, publicly praying before people, giving twice as much to church, even making up extra rules to follow.

They did all of that, yet what happened? They walked out of church and did the opposite of what they heard. They divorced their wives for no Biblical reason. They bad-mouthed other people, calling them sinners, shunning them, even paying criminals to lie about them so they could be put to death.

The same trap exists today. You see it when we can't wait for church to get over so we can get on to other stuff. We see it when we tell the pastor, "Good sermon," and then do the opposite of what the sermon said. **"If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.** Lies, gossip, cursing, come rolling out of mouths supposedly washed clean by the blood of God himself. This is not religion. Such have not listened. They have not taken their sins to the cross for forgiveness. Instead, just as God wants to forgive our sins, we yank them back and say, "No." It is like a dog who loves to roll in mud, but the moment you try to give him a bath, he runs away.

That's because God shoots beyond outward behavior to the source, our hearts. You heard Jesus talk about it earlier, **"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."** And then he opened up the human heart for us so we can see what truly lives there, **"For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"** So if the heart doesn't change, there is a worthless religion.

But did you catch it in our reading? **"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."** Through this Word, this book, God does something. We are born again. Something that wasn't there before is now there. It is faith and a new man. It is like God performed a transplant surgery, but he put in us a second heart. The old heart is still there with all its sin, but there is a new heart which is completely different.

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

The Lutheran Home in Belle Plaine first opened in 1898. The long, German title back then is roughly translated a home for widows and orphans. Really, the difference here is the heart, an attitude. Instead of wanting to say all sorts of nasty things with our mouths, this new heart loves just as God loves us, and sees and cares for people like orphans and widows. It wants to tame the tongue, remove the moral filth, be different because it is different. It is saved.

We are like that dog who rolls in the mud, only now we will let the Lord give us a bath. We will still get muddy, but we want the bath. Remember, we have two hearts, and the one will still want to sin, but with a new heart, we let God wash us clean in the blood of Jesus Christ and then, clean, turn around to love with his love.

Looking for a place to have your radiator fixed? Try the yellow pages. What do we do with the Bible? Listen to learn, and **"...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."** INJ Amen.