

## Listen Up!

It has been well said that God created us with two ears and one mouth so that we would learn to listen twice as much as we talk. Although the word "listen" is found only once in the King James Version of the Bible, the Hebrew word thus translated in Isaiah 49:1 is actually used 1,159 times. It is translated hear, hearken, obey and in a variety of other ways and, again, that's just in the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament we find that the Greek word translated "hear" (and a few other ways) is used 437 times. Nearly 1,600 times in the Word of God someone is being told to hear or listen to something or someone. The careful hearer will gather from this that the Lord wants us to pay attention.

There are advantages to being a good listener. Since faith is essential to salvation (John 8:24), and since faith "cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17), we understand that the greatest advantage has to do with where we will be in eternity. In addition to this there is the advantage of actually being able to learn something that might help us along life's way. Suppose king Rehoboam had listened to the counsel of his father's advisors when they said, "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever." (I Kings 12:7). Perhaps the kingdom of Israel would not have been torn asunder. I wonder how many times we've gotten ourselves into trouble simply because we did not listen to sage instruction.

That brings up the next point, which is the fact that there are hindrances to being a good listener. One of these hindrances is stubbornness. "No one can tell ME what to do," is an attitude that some show, if not verbally express from time to time. Put Pharaoh of Moses' day into that category. Even ten plagues did not stop him from closing his ears to Israel's plea to be released from captivity (Exodus 14:1ff). Another hindrance to being a good listener is having already made up your mind when someone starts talking. The Jewish leaders demonstrated this when they had Jesus on "trial" (Matthew 26:57-65). They had already determined in their hearts that Jesus was a blasphemer and they wanted Him out of their way. Even though the Lord said very little during that mockery of justice, what He did say was immediately twisted around and used against Him because of the leaders' pre-determined opinion of the Master.

There are two very interesting statements in the Scriptures regarding listening that together make a valuable point. The first statement is found four times in God's Word. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; 14:35). The other includes the words, "they have ears to hear and hear not" (Ezekiel 12:2; Matthew 13:13; Mark 4:12; 8:18). In both statements, those with the ability to hear are being addressed. Why then would the speakers tell those who could hear that they needed to hear? The answer is because just having the ability to listen is not sufficient. We actually need to make the effort to take what we hear into our hearts and apply it to our lives. Have you ever had this conversation with someone: "Why didn't you do what I said?" the person asks you. "I didn't hear you," you reply. "But you answered me," the person says. You see, you heard the voice of that individual but for some reason you did not take what they said to heart and therefore did not act on their words. Many people have heard God's Word. Countless numbers of men and women have heard what to do to become Christians. Indeed, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14; I Corinthians 1:26). Unfortunately, the vast majority either reject the message of the Master or listen so casually and carelessly to God's Word that they miss the truth.

Let us learn to listen with our ears wide open and our hearts prepared to learn. May we be as the owl in this short verse:

A wise old owl lived in an oak,  
The more he saw, the less he spoke.  
The less he spoke, the more he heard.  
Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?

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