

“RIGHTLY RECEIVING THE WORD”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the things that distinguishes God’s Word from mere human words is that God’s Word has the innate power to accomplish whatever God purposes.
1. We see this in the creation account, where God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light.
 2. We see it in the vision that is recorded in Ezekiel 37, where God spoke through his prophet and caused a whole host of dry bones to come back to life.
 3. We see it in John 11, where Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out from the place where his body had lain dead for four days, and that man who had died came out of his tomb alive.
 4. There are many other examples like this throughout the Bible.
 5. The Scriptures present God as a being who acts primarily through his speech.
- B. The notion of the inherent power of God’s Word was implicit in the parable of the sower, which we studied last week.
1. In that passage, Jesus likened the preaching of God’s Word to the sowing of a seed.
 2. Just as a seed always has the potential to bring forth life, so also does God’s Word have the power to bring people into the estate of eternal life.
 3. At the same time, the parable also made it clear that God’s purpose is to produce eternal life only in those whom he has appointed unto

eternal life.

4. These are the hearers who are represented by the good soil in Jesus's parable.
5. They are the ones to whom God gives ears to hear.
6. In the text that we are studying today, we see that the fact that God is sovereign over who can truly hear the Word does not relieve us of the responsibility to be attentive listeners to the Word.
7. This is the point that Jesus is making when he says in verse 18, "Take care then how you hear".

II. The Light of God's Word

- A. Our passage begins by comparing the Word of God to a lamp.
 1. In the first century, people depended on small oil lamps to provide light in their homes.
 2. Such a lamp would be utterly useless if you covered it with a jar or placed it under a bed (unless of course you needed to find something under the bed).
 3. The way to make a lamp most serviceable is to place it on a stand so that it can illuminate the entire room.
 4. Jesus is using this image in order to stress that the spiritual knowledge that is imparted in God's Word needs to be diligently used if it is going to be of any benefit to us.
- B. Now, you may recall that there is a similar saying in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus exhorts his disciples to function as light in this sin-darkened world.
 1. In that passage, Jesus calls his followers "the light of the world" and commands them to let their light shine forth so that others may

come to know and glorify God.

2. In Matthew, the image of a lamp on a stand is a symbol of evangelism and faithful witness.
3. This is not the meaning of the lamp symbol in our text in Luke.
4. Instead, Jesus is saying that those of us who have been given the light of God's Word need to make use of it so that we ourselves do not remain in darkness.

C. Light is a highly appropriate metaphor for describing the Word of God.

1. Think about the things that light does.
2. Light gives life and health.
3. It is a source of power.
4. It helps us see what is happening.
5. It leads us on our way.
6. It exposes dangers.
7. The Word of God performs the same functions in the lives of God's people.
8. When we think about the Word of God as light, we begin to see how desperately we need it.
9. We need the Word to keep directing us to Christ and his righteousness as our only source of salvation, and to God's promises as our only source of hope.
10. We need the Word to help us trust that God will see us through the many trials that we face in this life.

11. We need the Word to guide us and give us wisdom for how we ought to live in this evil age.
 12. We need the Word to correct us if we start to go astray.
- D. Jesus further develops this light metaphor in verse 17, where he says, "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light."
1. The point that Jesus is making here is that the person who persistently and unrepentantly ignores the light of God's Word so that he can indulge his sinful desires will be in for a shock on the day of judgment.
 2. The natural instinct of fallen man is to hide himself from God's light.
 3. As it says in the Gospel of John, "the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." (Jn. 3:19-20)
 4. The world is teeming with people who are doing all that they can to avoid having their lives exposed by God's light.
 5. Such efforts are futile.
 6. You cannot hide from God.
 7. A day is coming when all the works done on this earth and all the thoughts of human hearts will be exposed.
 8. Sooner or later, the two-edged sword of God's Word will pierce into every heart, discerning its thoughts and intentions.
 9. You want to make sure that you let the Word do this now, while it is the day of grace, while there is still time to repent.

10. Otherwise, it will happen to you on the day of judgment, when it will be too late to repent.

III. The Urgency of Attentiveness

- A. This brings us to the warning that Jesus issues in verse 18: "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."
 1. We need to be careful hearers of God's Word, lest it prove to be unfruitful in our lives.
 2. Sitting through the sermon on Sundays or reading a chapter of the Bible every day will not do you any good if you are just going through the motions.
 3. You need to come to the Word reverently, believing that it is the Word of God and that every single part of it is reliable and true and authoritative.
 4. You need to come to the Word expectantly, with a desire to be taught by God.
 5. You need to come to the Word humbly, with a willingness to submit to whatever God has to say.
 6. And you need to come to the Word prayerfully, asking God to give you a right understanding of his Word and to bless you through it.
 7. J.C. Ryle points out that this is one of the greatest problems with the way so many people listen to sermons: "They ask no blessing, and so they have none. The sermon passes through their minds like water through a leaky vessel, and leaves nothing behind."
- B. There are three basic steps to follow if you want to get the most out of the preached Word: prepare ahead of time; listen attentively; and reflect afterward.

1. The first step is preparation.
 2. Preparation begins by getting plenty of sleep the night before and waking up early enough to get to church on time in an unhurried manner.
 3. You can also prepare by reading over the passage that is going to be preached or some other passage that will help get you into the right frame of mind for worship.
 4. And you should prepare by praying for the preacher and the congregation.
- C. The second step of careful hearing is attentive listening.
1. During the sermon, keep your attention focused on what is being said.
 2. This is not an easy thing to do these days, as many people find that their attention spans have been shortened by the habits into which they have fallen in their day to day lives.
 3. Along with trying to change some of those habits, you might find it easier to listen attentively if you take notes during the sermon, or if you follow along in your own Bible and check on other passages that are mentioned or that come to mind, or if you use the sermon outline to help you stay on track.
 4. Fight the temptation to let your thoughts wander.
 5. If your phone is a source of distraction for you, then leave it out in the car.
 6. I know this may come as a shock, but the Word of God is more important than your smart phone.
- D. The third step of careful hearing is reflection.

1. When the sermon is over, don't let the Word be snatched away from you.
 2. Take time later that Lord's Day to discuss the sermon and to reflect upon it.
 3. Take the things that you have learned and make them a subject of prayer, and then look for ways to apply them in your life.
- E. Jesus offers an incentive for us to be careful hearers of the Word when he tells us that those who make the most of the Word will continue to grow in their spiritual understanding.
1. This is reminiscent of the Proverb that says, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning." (Prov 9:9 ESV)
 2. Every Christian should be teachable.
 3. The person who thinks he is so wise that he no longer needs to be instructed is not truly wise.
 4. Don't let yourself think that you already know everything you need to know.
 5. Preaching is not merely a matter of conveying information.
 6. Preaching is a means of grace.
 7. You might not always learn something new from the sermon.
 8. That's okay, because novelty is not always a good thing.
 9. If you come to the Word with a hungry heart, God will use it to feed your soul with pure spiritual milk so that you grow up into salvation.

- F. Notice that Jesus pairs his incentive to be a careful listener with a warning about not listening.
 - 1. He says, “from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”
 - 2. This underscores the fact that the person who is a careless hearer of the Word will not benefit from it.
 - 3. Not only will he fail to retain what he has heard.
 - 4. He will also lose what little measure of spiritual understanding he thought he had in the first place.

IV. The Mark of Jesus’s True Family

- A. This brings us to the last part of our passage, where we read about a situation that led Jesus to say something surprising about the members of his family.
 - 1. Luke tells us that Jesus’s mother and brothers came to the place where Jesus was teaching and they were not able to reach him because of the size of the crowd.
 - 2. We are not told why they were looking for Jesus, but a similar passage in Mark says that Jesus’s brothers wanted to bring him back home because they thought he was crazy for overtaxing himself in his ministry. (Mk. 3:21)
 - 3. On top of that, there are several instances that show that Mary was far from perfect in her comprehension of what her son had come to do.
 - 4. We are also told by the writers of the New Testament that Jesus’s brothers did not believe in him until after he was raised from the dead.
 - 5. When we put these facts together, they suggest that Jesus’s family members may not have been coming to hear his teaching on this

particular occasion.

- B. Whatever their reason for coming was, when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers wanted to see him he responded by saying, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."
 - 1. In saying this, Jesus was not being disrespectful or unloving.
 - 2. Jesus did not denigrate the family, but he did teach that spiritual bonds are closer than natural ones.
 - 3. As close as we can be to the members of our natural families, the ties that bind us to those who belong God's family are much tighter.
 - 4. Spiritual relationships more important than physical ones.
 - 5. After all, while spiritual bonds will endure into the world to come, mere physical bonds will not.

- C. Jesus's words here remind us that as Christians we have been adopted as children of God.
 - 1. We have Jesus as our elder brother, an elder brother who shares his inheritance as firstborn over all creation with us.
 - 2. And take note of what Jesus says is the defining mark of those who belong to his family.
 - 3. He says that those who hear God's Word and do it are members of his family.
 - 4. The word "do" reminds us that right receiving of the Word is not merely an intellectual exercise.
 - 5. Careful hearing expresses itself in action.
 - 6. It leads to ongoing repentance, persevering faith, and grateful obedience.

V. Conclusion

- A. Listening to the Word of God carefully is a matter of eternal consequence.
- B. The Word is our source of life.
- C. It is the bread that feeds our souls unto eternal life.
- D. The only way that physical bread can nourish our bodies is if we ingest it so that it can be converted to energy.
- E. In the same manner, the only way God's Word can nourish you spiritually is if you take it in and, in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, convert it to energy for godly living.
- F. Remember this every time you open your Bible, and every time you listen to a sermon.
- G. Whenever you come to the Scriptures, your God is saying to you: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." (Ps. 81:10)