Hearing and Doing

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Luke 6:46-49

Sermon Series: Life is Messy

Hearing and doing, these two active verbs, are two of the most essential words to being a Christian.

This morning we come to the climactic conclusion of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain.” It’s similar to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mountain, in Matthew’s Gospel. Here in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is somewhere just north of the Sea of Galilee up on a “plain” or level place in some mountainous terrain. In his Sermon, Jesus has been describing for His followers what a true “Kingdom-Life” looks like. And what is a true Christian’s life? It is a life founded and built on two things: the constant, daily hearing of Jesus’ words and then doing His words.

There are just four final verses. Here are the first two verses: Jesus says “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them” (Luke 6:46-47).

It’s quite sobering, isn’t it, when you see people around you who don’t profess to be “Christians,” who outperform you in doing Christ-like things! A non-believer one-upping me, who “walks the talk” better than I do. That’s hard to swallow. Jesus puts it to His followers: “Why do you call me with such affection, saying “Lord, Lord!” and why do you profess to have such a personal, intimate relationship with me, when you do not do what I say?”

Two summers ago, I had had a particularly full-up, crazy busy stretch here at church. I hadn’t been home much, I hadn’t had time to get out and mow the lawn (which I actually LOVE to do!). To make matters worse, it had been raining a lot, too. The grass was turning wild. I came home one night, exhausted; I pulled into the driveway at nightfall and there was Susan, our neighbor, on her riding mower, finishing up the last patch of my overgrown lawn. I was moved. Our neighbors, Susan, and her husband, Jan, work office jobs Monday thru Friday, then work retail on Sundays. Church is NOT on their radar at all. But Susan and Jan went out of their way to mow our lawn, simply out of their loving kindness. That was a huge Jesus-thing for me.

Hearing and doing, these two active verbs, are two of the most essential words to being a Christian. Walk the talk. Remember Pastor Pete’s stick figures three weeks ago? Talking and walking need to stick together. Head and heart need to work together. Hearing
Jesus’ words and doing them are foundational to a well-built life.

Two months ago, early on a Saturday morning, I was working on one of our cars. I wasn’t having any luck, and I realized I was going to have to probably take it into the shop. So I called up another neighbor, Vic, to get a referral for a mechanic closer to where we live out near Chantilly. Instead, without hesitation, Vic dropped what he was doing and insisted on coming over. He brought over his tools, got on his back and underneath the car, and fixed the problem. And he wanted nothing in return. Now, when I’ve talked to Vic about spiritual matters, it’s clear Vic wants little to do with God. But Vic has a God-shaped heart and he is constantly doing what Jesus would do. If this doesn’t “up the ante” on my Christian life, I don’t know what will! I don’t want to be out-performed, or one-upped by a non-believer, how about you?

So, what are some of the core things we hear Jesus saying? And, therefore, what are some of the core things Jesus is calling us to do? How about, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Or, “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News.” “Pray without ceasing.” Or, “Abide in me.”

People who make it their life’s work to hear and then do the words of Jesus are conscientious and responsive. Wise Christians are not knee-jerk; they think before they act, but they do act when they are ready. Scholar Dale Bruner was here with us in March 2012. He puts it like this: wise builders “build the house of their lives on solid foundations, such
Jesus doesn’t say that someone hearing and doing His words will somehow be spared from trouble.

In verse 49, Jesus says, But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the sand without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house. Here is Dale Bruner again: “The house that crashes is the house who finds Jesus’ words important enough to hear, but not realistic enough to live. For such Christians, this Sermon of Jesus’ isn’t practical enough for the demands of modern life…or Jesus’ words are so naïve for today’s fast-lane life; or, perhaps, most common of all, what Jesus says is just too hard to do.” Bruner ends by saying, “Jesus sees this chemistry of hearing plus non-doing as forming a compound of sand…such, that, when the storm is over, the house is gone” (p.361).

Jesus says it’s a fool who builds his house without a foundation. It’s a house not up-to-code! What does a life built on sand look like? Maybe it’s that short cut I took that fudged the truth; maybe it’s that angry outburst, or that cutting, critical word you said. It’s that moment when we withhold forgiveness; or, it’s that cold shoulder to someone in need. It’s my lackadaisical commitment to my own growth in Christ; it’s that lackadaisical commitment to your children, or to your marriage. It is like living “half-hearted Christian lives,” hearing only but not doing.

Deep down, you and I really do want to hear and do what Jesus says. Deep down, we really do want our lives to be built on solid ground. We do want to be wise, not foolish, with the gift that God has given us in Jesus Christ the “Cornerstone.” I just know that building a life solidly on Christ doesn’t happen overnight. The combo of faithfully hearing Jesus’ words and then putting those words into practice doesn’t just magically happen. So I liken this to “muscle-memory.” For a dancer, for a musician, for an athlete, it is days upon days, months after months, yea years upon years of building up their “muscle-memory,” right? It’s doing one je’té, one leap at a time. It’s learning one specific musical score, one note at a time. It’s taking one shot after another—one forehand, one backhand, one swing of the bat—one at a time, again and again, with the goal of constantly building up your muscle-memory, so that it becomes seamless second nature.
Hearing and doing take discipline and practice and desire—spiritual “muscle memory,” if you will—one step at a time. My own plodding, patient journey of standing secure in Christ looks more like building a life on Christ one decision at a time, one thought at a time, one action at a time. I’d like to think that Jesus is calling us to “DIG DEEP” with Him, one act of mercy at a time, one saving word at a time, one act of forgiveness at a time, one gesture of love at a time. I’d like to think that one of those footers with rebar, or one of those steel rods filled with concrete are like one prayer at a time, one worship service at a time, one Bible study at a time, one “Bible-Doing” at a time. If you are building a life like this, you are wise.

In your “Becoming Like Christ, Together, For the Sake of Others” Spiritual Growth Plan—where are you intentionally working on your spiritual “muscle memory?” In your daily devotional time, is it one prayer, one Bible verse at a time? In your spiritual friendships, is it one cup of coffee (or tea) at a time? In your ministry activity, is it one volunteer spot at a time?

Seven years ago, in his hometown of Talladega, Alabama, Bryan Townsend decided he wanted to put together a Men’s Bible Study group. So he invited lots of his friends. Some of Bryan’s friends were millionaires, and some of them were homeless. It didn’t matter. He and his friends met for Bible Study; they got together every week and they studied Jesus’ words. But, after a couple years, these guys realized they wanted to do more together than just study Jesus’ words. Bible study was great, but they realized they wanted to do some “Bible Doing,” too! So they found an abandoned warehouse in Talladega, bought it, and turned it into a place for people who were out on the streets to come in of off the streets to have Bible study and get a bowl of soup and a sandwich. The Men’s Whosoever Will Bible Class built the Red Door Kitchen and Food Pantry! Bryan Townsend and his friends, they spent time feeding on Jesus’ words and ended up feeding the hungry. Hearing Jesus’ words and doing it. Paul says to Timothy, and to us, “God provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Upon hearing God’s words we are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that we may take hold of the life that really is life…a solid, grounded, life with Christ” (1 Timothy 6:17b-19).