

Be Ye Doers of the Word

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In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, our Lord Jesus speaking to the inner circle of His own intimate associates said, "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinketh he hath." Take heed how you hear. Pay close, careful, and serious attention to the manner in which you attend upon the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in the ordinance of preaching. It is this clear command of our Lord Jesus that has formed the basis and framework for a series of some 14 messages preached over the course of the past several months, all of them culminating in our study today and, God willing, next Lord's Day morning, concluding this series of studies. In the opening up and application of this very basic duty, we have considered how we are to take heed to our hearing of the Word of God under three major categories. We are to take heed to how we hear with respect to our preparation for the hearing of the Word preached or what we do prior to preaching. We are to take heed how we hear during the actual hearing of the Word preached. And thirdly, we are to take heed how we hear with respect to our actions subsequent to the hearing of the preaching of the Word of God. And it is this third area of concern that I propose to address in our final two messages this morning and, God willing, next Lord's Day morning.

I have suggested that there are four key words which embody, at least, the major Biblical directives relative to how to take heed to our hearing subsequent to the preaching of the Word. And these four key words are, "repetition," "supplication," "meditation," and "implementation." Having taken up the first three with you in previous messages, we come this morning and, God willing, next Lord's Day morning to this fourth essential element of taking heed to how we hear as that command focuses on spiritual activity subsequent to our hearing of the Word of God. No amount of repetition, supplication, or meditation has come to its proper fruition unless we are found implementing, that is, putting into practice what we have heard in the preaching of the Word of God. Is it your duty; is it my duty actually to implement, to reduce to personal, practical obedience the truth heard in the preaching of the Word? Well, the answer to this negative example is a resounding "Yes! It is my duty." And failure to do so meets with the frown of God as it did in the days in which Ezekiel preached. In Ezekiel 33, we have the account beginning in verse 30 of the experience of God's professing people under the ministry of Ezekiel:

"And as for thee, son of man, the children of thy people talk of thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from Jehovah. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words...."

What more could you ask? What more could any preacher ask for than to know that throughout the week amongst all the houses of all his people, the topic of conversation was going to hear the preacher the next Lord's Day? That would be heavy stuff for those preachers, wouldn't it? And then to find that when the Lord's Day came, the parking lot was full and the pews were full, and the people were sitting there riveted, listening to the Word of God. You'd say, "Surely, any preacher would go home and fall upon his knees and say, 'bless be Your name, O God, for creating such widespread interest in the Word, such widespread hunger and thirst for the Word, such widespread desire to attend upon the Word. Blessed be Your name, O God'" But Ezekiel had no such grounds to go home and fall upon his face and thank God, for listen to what the Lord says: "Though they do all of this: they come before you, they sit before you, they hear your words but do them not." It does not matter how much enthusiasm has preceded our coming to the place where the Word is to be preached. It does not matter how diligently we find ourselves to the place where the Word is to be preached or how attentively we give ourselves to listening to what is preached. If the heart is not engaged to implement the Word of God, we stand under the patent condemnation of the living God.

The duty of implementation is established first by this negative example so clearly articulated in Ezekiel 33, and then the negative example articulated by our blessed Lord in Luke's Gospel. We're trying to establish the duty of implementation as part of what it means to take heed how we hear subsequent to our hearing the Word preached and taught to us. The first negative example from the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel. Now the second negative example from our Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6. In a section that has many parallels to what we commonly identify as the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, toward the close of our Lord preaching similar themes, we read in verses 46 to 49,

"And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh unto Me, and heareth My words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock: and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it: because it had been well builded. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation; against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in; and the ruin of that house was great."

Here in this passage, our Lord is addressing a people who seriously and solemnly profess a saving and submissive relationship to Him. Look at the language of verse 46: "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord...?" Now the precise significance of the double address "Lord, Lord" is difficult to ascertain. And the commentators, responsible, Bible-believing students of the Word differ, but this much is clear: these who address Him address Him with the language that points to the uniqueness of the identity of His person. "Why do you call Me Lord? Why do you address Me as sovereign? Why do you address Me as Jehovah Jesus? Why do you call Me, why do you take upon your lips language that confesses me to be the Lord?" And by the double usage, it probably is underscoring that that is not the language of mere, what we would say, doctrinal acknowledgement of the uniqueness of His person. "For many shall say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied...." You see, "in that day," the parallel passage in Matthew 7, anyone addressing the enthroned Lord in the day of judgment is acknowledging Him as the sovereign God who is disposing their eternal destiny. But here is not merely the language that underscores the uniqueness

and the identity of His person, but "Lord, Lord" probably points to the language of professed, hearty submission to His authority. "You are not only objectively in Yourself the sovereign Lord, but I address you as my sovereign Lord, the ruler and governor of my life and my will." And that that seems to be the clear significance is found in the very question of Jesus:

"Why do you call Me, why do you address Me with language that acknowledges the dignity of My person and professes submission to Me as your sovereign, and you are not doing the things which I say? Why do you use language that, if it were an expression of reality, would find you in a pattern of universal obedience to Me? Not perfect obedience, but universal, detailed, meticulous, conscientious obedience. Why do you use in your reference to Me language that bespeaks a recognition of the dignity of My person and the rights of My government when the pattern of your life negates the profession of your lips?"

He then goes on to demonstrate that it's only those who come to Him, hear His words and do them whose religious construction likened to a house is the real thing. And when the floods and the streams of the trials of this life and the great trial of death and the ultimate trial of judgment to come, only such a man will be found to have built wisely and built well. All others who may come and who may hear and who may even give assent to the authority and wisdom and grace, but they do not implement with conscientious, meticulous obedience, they will be manifested as fools who built a structure of religious appearance and profession upon the sand of no grace in the heart. And the trials of this life, if they don't reveal it, the ultimate trial of the day of judgment will unveil it.

So I say, from these two negative examples, there is clearly established a duty of implementation, that when the Word of God has been expounded to us (and every part of it is the word of Christ, for it was the Spirit of Christ speaking in all of the Biblical writers through the Old and the New Testament as Peter informs us), when those words come to us, it is not enough that we are there when they are read and expounded and preached and taught. It is not enough that we hear them--and listen, according to Ezekiel's passage, even hear them with pleasure. Crunch time comes when what we hear, must do something with your foot, with your hand, with your eyes, with your ears, with your tongue, and above all, with your heart. And crunch time comes every time the Word of God is read, the Word of God preached, expounded, and applied. And if the pattern of your life and mine is not a pattern described in these words, "We come unto Him, we hear Him, and we do His words," God says our profession is the house built upon the sand. So I say implementation, dear people, is a duty established from these two negative examples.

And here we turn to the book of James, chapter 1. We had occasion to look in this chapter with respect to our duties prior to the preaching of the Word. Verse 21: "Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing [or excess] of wickedness [or malice], receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls." We had occasion to point out that in preparation for the preaching of the Word, there should be renewed acts of repentance dealing with anything and everything in the spiritual gut that would keep us from properly digesting and assimilating the Word of God. We are to put away the filthiness and the overflowing of wickedness before we can hope to receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save our souls.

But our responsibility before the Word does not end with that preparation to receive it as we ought. James goes on to say in verse 22: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." And then he goes on to illustrate and to enforce that directive in terms of a common illustration of a man looking into a mirror and beholding his countenance, etc. But I want us to focus upon verse 22 which comes in a form that unmistakably lays before us the positive command to be implementers of the word that we have received with meekness in a prepared heart. And the first thing we note in the text is that it is perfectly possible to be a hearer only and not a doer, and in so doing, to make myself a deluded person. I can engage in activities which put me in the path of self delusion so that my assessment of myself is not according to reality. If I came before you this morning with a fifty point outline seeking to persuade you that I was a long lost, undiscovered heir to the throne of the United Kingdom and that I ought to be there in Buckingham Palace as King Albert. The kindest thing I think most of you would say is, "Well, that trigeminal neuralgia that was bothering him this past week, I think has crept up into his brain, and he is deluded." And if I were to gather you next week and the elders even permitted such nonsense and give you another fifty points to try to persuade you, you'd still say, "The poor man is deluded." You see, no matter how much I might believe it, and no matter how many arguments I might marshal to my own twisted brain that convince me that I am King Albert, you'd say, "The poor man is deluded." Now listen to what James says: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." Do you want to be as deluded about who and what you really are as I would be if I were to claim to be King Albert? Then just get in a pattern of being a hearer and not a doer.

I spent the greater part of the time attempting to establish the duty, now more briefly, I want you to consider with me the activity of implementation illustrated. If these texts have not persuaded your conscience, I'm convinced it's because you will not be persuaded. And to bring five more would not persuade you. You are willfully ignorant and willfully rejecting the testimony of God. Well, let's look at the activity of implementation illustrated in Psalm 119. When I tried to set before you what meditation was, rather than clog your mind with technical descriptions and definitions, we looked at some illustrations in Psalm 39 and Luke chapter 2. Well, I want to do the same with you. The activity of implementation illustrated. Psalm 119, this wonderful passage dealing with various aspects of the believer's relationship to the Word and law of God. Look at verses 59 and 60: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. [Now notice very carefully verse 60.] I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments." Once he saw the discrepancy between the ways of God and his ways, he said, "I made a B-line to get my feet into God's ways without delay." Why? Because he knew that every moment of delay gave opportunity for his remaining sin to pump smoke and fog up into his moral consciousness. Take heed how you hear, not only prior to and during, but subsequent to the preaching of the Word. Let there repetition, supplication, meditation, and all of it issuing in implementation. The duty established from the two negative examples, from the two positive commands. May God grant that we shall be the unnamed illustrations constantly living out the blessed realities that we've trafficked in this morning.