

Divine Hearing Test

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 11th September 2011

Intro-

- My journey on an overnight train to Cairo, hoping to get a good night's sleep, but an Egyptian man wanted to try out the little English he could speak on me. He spoke very bad English and acted out most of what he wanted to ask me, like a game of charades. He asked me 'in U.K do they have...an implement?...a parliament?...a polo-mint?...an impediment?...an empillowment? It turned out he was asking if they had high levels of unemployment in the U.K.
- For good communication to take place not only does something have to be clearly communicated, but it also has to be clearly understood by the person being communicated to.
- My visit to my Grandad in Devon with my sister when I was but a boy. He woke me up early and gave me clear directions about which bus to get on and what time and where, asking me to also wake my sister up. The next thing I knew I had fallen back to sleep and my grandad was waking me up furious I had not done what he had asked- the crazy thing was I had no recollection even of the conversation- even though I was agreeing with him I still must have been in a state of semi-consciousness!
- When God speaks to us are we really listening to what He is saying? The fruit we bear in this life will testify to whether we have really heard God's voice or not. This morning we are going to look at the 'Divine Hearing Test'.

Read Matt 13:1-23

- We will look at the 4 types of soil in a moment but the first thing to say is that it is God's will that you are fruitful. He wants us to live fruitful lives. This is why He speaks to us in the first place. His word is like a seed sown into our lives, and the purpose is to bear fruit for His glory. This is why a farmer labours- he wants to see the crop succeed. Also the whole purpose of a seed sown is to multiply it. There is a promise here, that if we truly listen to the seed of God's word planted into our lives, we will not fail to bear fruit. In fact Jesus promises it-
"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5). You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (John 15:16).
- According to this parable, the key to bearing fruit is how we listen to God's word. God is speaking to each one of us on a regular basis, but are we hearing what He is saying? How good are we at listening to His word? What is our attitude to His word? How hungry are we for it? Are we like a fish, gobbling up the food or like a frog-catching flies?
- When I first became a Christian I sat alertly listening to every sermon so I could put it into practice and grow. My Christian life has gone in peaks and troughs over the years, sometimes I am hungrier for God's word than at other times- sometimes we need to speak to ourselves and urge ourselves onward- like I did cycling back from Blaenavon in the week, feeling like giving up at some of the hills, but had to pick up the kids- 'come on Stu, you're gonna do it' (got there just as the bell went!) As we look at the 4 different types of ground let's think about our heart attitudes this morning to God's word. Which of the 4 grounds most resembles our hearts this morning? The good news is there is grace for us today, no matter where we have previously been at and God will work in us wonderfully where we are honest with

Him and ask Him to come in.

Fell by the Wayside- 13:19 *'..the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.'*

- This first ground could not be penetrated by the seed- it is the seed that fell on the path- uncultivated ground where it was crushed underfoot and stolen by the birds. This seed did not achieve its purpose.
- Sometimes we harden our hearts in life, and no matter what God says it is not going to make any difference because we have already decided on a course of action, and we harden our hearts to what God 'may' say to us.
- Sometimes it is to do with self-worth, self-image, self-esteem. God speaks words of encouragement to us, and uses others to speak into our lives, but the seed bounces off because Satan is whispering lies in our ears, like one of the birds stealing the seed.
- Sometimes it is to do with temptation we are facing. Sometimes we may say, like Freddie Mercury 'don't stop me now, I'm having such a good time', and God's voice is drowned out by our desires.
- We have a choice either to believe what God says to us, or what the enemy says to us. One action results in fruitlessness, the other in fruitfulness. The biggest choice concerns salvation- two ultimate destinies, but there are also daily choices that come after that. Our salvation is secure, but will we bear the fruit God intends for our lives- this comes down to a daily choice.
- When the Devil speaks often it sounds believable because he is subtle (n.b. The snake in the garden). However he is a liar- Jesus says of the Devil:
'He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44.
The devil wants to steal what belongs to us- the purposes of God for our lives- don't let him.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10.
- **Application-** repent of listening to the enemy's voice. Make a choice to listen instead to what God says. Read scripture and declare it over yourself 'I am a new creation', 'I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength' etc. Find scriptural truth relating to what you are going through- pray it, declare it and believe it into reality. Learn to be alert to the devil, not giving him a foothold and nip things in the bud:
We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2Cor 10:5).

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. Rom 12:2
- Also- **FOCUS**-choose to listen intently to what God says to you- personal time in the Bible, sermons, personal revelation. Meditate on Word- chew the cud. Writing down prophetic words, praying them through, testing them. Repent of any apathy towards His word.

Fell on shallow, stony soil- 13:21 *'..yet he has no root in himself but endures only for a while.'*

- The first thing to note about this type of ground is that things look good at first- they 'receive the word with joy'. It appears they are really eager to follow Jesus, and are really on fire for God. Some of the most enthusiastic 'christians' I have seen have been those who didn't continue with Christ- they only endured for a season and then fell away sadly.

- Wrong mindset- they think it is always going to be easy and feel good as a Christian. As a result there is no root of relationship to ground them in times of testing- it is a shallow relationship based on what God can do for them. Sometimes the gospel can be presented as 'come to Jesus and it will all be okay'. We know that ultimately in glory this will be true but sometimes things need to get a lot worse before they get a lot better. Sometimes we want the crown without the cross.
- Jesus is now glorified at the highest place, but to get there He had to go to the lowest place first. For the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross:
Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)
He also promised persecutions to all who followed Him (to all who live a godly life) – a tough time of daily having to pick up our cross to die to ourselves to follow Him- this is real seeker friendly stuff!
- Common phenomenon is the plateau experience- e.g. a new President, Pastor, etc. At some point the honeymoon ends, and you experience life together warts and all. People can go into marriage thinking 'well if it doesn't work I can always get a divorce' rather than 'we will make it work'. The same can be true of church life and also our relationship with God. We need to get past the 'plateau' mentality which gives up when things get tough- we need to develop the attitude that Paul had:
Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:13-14)
- We live in a society of instant everything- instant coffee, instant mash, fast food, instant win, instant internet access, faster broadband, instant messaging, speed dating, slim-fast, courier delivery, fast trains, fast cars, quick-fit fitters and instant gratification. The best things in life come to those who wait. Fruit takes time to grow. Let's choose to be in it for the long haul. Me doing Raglan fun-run and winning for the first few metres- felt great and then I slipped back into last position. We need to pace ourselves in the Christian life.
- Love grows stronger and relationships grow stronger when they have come through times of testing. God prunes each one of us to make us more fruitful. Trials are the way we are tested.
Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)
- Peter says of our trials:
These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1Pet 1:7)
- Many marriages get closer in times of suffering. When your relationship with God is tested will it come out stronger or bust up? Are we in it just for what we can get out of it, or have we truly fallen in love with God because of who He is, for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health till death do us meet face to face?
- **Application-** Develop intimacy with God- vision alone is not enough to sustain us in testing times- we need the security of relationship- that if everything goes pear-shaped we still have Jesus, the One we love. Bring all relationships to God- choose to work through the rubbish and get to the gold- there is gold to be had in each relationship- work through the tough times to get to it.

Fell amongst thorns - 13:22- *"..the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becomes unfruitful."*

- At Bang Goes the Theory live they said about how to get CO₂ out of a bottle, it being heavier than oxygen can be poured on things but is invisible. Showed demo of it being poured out on a fire and the fire went out even though you couldn't see the CO₂. In Cameroon there is a lake called Lake Nyos. It is a deep crater lake high on the flank of an inactive volcano along a line of volcanic activity. A natural dam of volcanic rock contains the lake waters. A pocket of magma lies beneath the lake and leaks carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the water, changing it into

carbonic acid. Nyos is one of only three known exploding lakes to be saturated with carbon dioxide in this way. On August 21, 1986, possibly triggered by a landslide, Lake Nyos suddenly emitted a large cloud of CO₂, which suffocated 1,700 people and 3,500 livestock in nearby towns and villages. When this happened to a similar lake 100 miles away killing 37 people the cause was not immediately known and was thought to be terrorism (as the gas is invisible) but later the cause became known.

- What are the subtle, almost invisible things around us which we are allowing to crowd in and suffocate our relationship with God? Jesus highlights the main candidates- the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.
- In the world people long for such things as- to be successful, to be loved, famous, married, single again, have a certain job, promotion, be retired, have a certain house, car, sex, money, power, happiness. Jesus is basically saying that if we are purely driven by our desires rather than God's word then we will not bear the fruit which God has intended because His word will take second place to our desires.
- One day we are going to stand before Christ- He will not be impressed by fame or fortune, but simply will assess whether we listened and obeyed Him- 'well done good and faithful servant'- those words are what we are to live for.
- **Application-** declutter, reassess, re-prioritise- work out what the important things God has called you to do with your life are, and do them with all you have within you. Cut out time for relationships with God, family, church. What do we worry about? These things will crowd in and crowd God out if we let them- deal with our anxieties- give them to God, give up gossiping and worrying about others- choose to get our own walk right to model to others.
- Look at end result of our desires, not just instant gratification- look at where things lead to ultimately.
- As a garden how are our lives looking? What weeds need to be pulled out? How much space are we allowing God in the flowerbed?

Fell on good soil- 13:23 -'he who hears the word and understands it'

- The 5 loaves and 2 fish of a little boy were multiplied through obedience to Jesus' word. As we hear what He says to us and are obedient He will take what He has given to us and also make it multiply.
- We are stewards of the gifts God gives to us. God will bring people across our path for us to speak to and sow into their lives to multiply what He has given to us and we can speak something unique. Genesis- each reproduced after their own kind- God has made you to reproduce yourself in others- not to make a clone, but to bless others with your unique 'contribution' (sounds cheesy 'Network'y, but is still true).
- We have each been chosen to make disciples. Fruitfulness is making disciples- inspiring others to follow Christ as we have.
- Use what you have, maximise your resources and God will give you more- He who has been faithful with little will be faithful with much. 'Gather up all the fragments so that nothing is lost'- feeding of 5,000- be a good steward of your resources. Me making a conscious decision to sell fretless bass and buy a guitar for worship, choosing to type in sermons for internet- maximise what you have for God. Listen and do- me trying out word of knowledge in the park and getting it half right- never know until you try.

Summary

- Listen to God's word
- Focus on it despite Satan's lies and temptations
- Keep going through times of testing to get to the blessings
- Give God space in your life

- Multiply what He has already given you as a good steward and He will give you more.

Songs: I will set my face to seek the Lord. Purify my heart