



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear family,

For those in attendance, thank you for your attention on Sunday to my message on the hearing/listening relationship between the Gospels and Acts and specifically between what is said and what happens in the story of the early church. Many of you were away on Sunday so I hope you get to download it and hear it / listen to it! Within the first five seconds of your exposure to the biblical text of Genesis 1, you have encountered three related things:

- God spoke: *“God said...”*
- There was a hearing of His voice: *“and there was...”*
- The Spirit effected obedience: *“the Spirit of God was hovering...”*

In a word, the history of man’s sin is a resistance of this creational reality, and thus life becomes uncreated and falls apart, when the Spirit’s hovering and our hearing get disconnected. The history of man’s sin is a story about bad hearing. We have only been reading the Bible a few short minutes when we encounter man’s first hearing responses: wrongly (to the serpent) with the result that sin enters the world) and wrongly again to the voice of God with the result that they *“heard...and they hid.”* (Gen. 3:8) The history of spiritual hearing continues right up to Revelation 22:17, the last words of the Spirit and the Bride in scripture: *“Let him who hears say, Come!”* From beginning to end, the Bible gives reason after reason for why we either do not listen or why we cannot hear: pride, untruth, self-satisfaction, rebellion, disobedience, idolatry, unbelief, cynicism, shame, unconfessed and unrepented sin, unteachableness, distraction, loving the sound of our own voice more than His, unbelief, willfulness, stubbornness, offence and on and on.

I probably referenced over a hundred scriptures about good and bad hearing, that illustrated the relationship between listening and obeying, between what we hear and what we do, between the recovery of spiritual hearing and revival and restoration. What we need to note is that hearing rightly is the key: to knowing rightly and to doing rightly. This was the also the key post-Pentecost.

As in the Gospels, the health of hearing in the Acts of the Apostles determined everything. Acts 2:14, 22 *Fellow Jews...listen carefully to what I say...men of Israel, listen to this...* The proclamation of the gospel opens with the commanding call to “LISTEN!”, a harking back to the Shema in order to get them hearkening forwards to the new covenant. The new age is launched with a Holy Spirit inspired ‘Shema Yisrael’ – this is the continuity of fulfillment of the redemptive plan of God. *“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God...Hear O Israel, let all Israel be assured of this: God (that’s the God of the Shema) has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* (Acts 2:36) Like post-Sinai Israel, the post-Pentecost church was founded on a call to listen.

When Peter’s opening word is *“Listen!”* that is addressed as much to us the readers as to his live audience. In his second sermon, Peter’s emphasis is unchanged as he quotes Moses to his Jewish audience: *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he*

tells you. *Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from His people.*” (3:22) When Stephen preaches and says *“listen to me!”* (7:2); when Paul preaches and says *“listen to me”* (13:16) our own minds and spirits are addressed and our hearing is tested. What will happen in us and to us as we go through the story, will be influenced by how we hear what is said, and how it is said, as much as it influenced those who were in the story. The history of theology and denominations illustrates that – the differences between those who hear the sound of the Spirit as it is blowing, and those who choose not to; those who hear the tongues and sneer or mock or reject them like those in 2:13 or those who hear and are amazed and remain open and do what all good hearing encourages us to do – humbly ask about it.

Pentecost was one massive hearing event, according to Peter. *“The promised Holy Spirit has poured out what you now... hear.”* (2:33) Thousands of people are hearing so many different languages (2:6) and hearing these tongues *“declaring the wonders of God.”* (2:11) How things are heard decides what happens next. In 2:37 they heard and *“were cut to the heart”*; in 4:4 they heard and believed; in 4:24 when the apostles heard the threats against their lives they heard with spiritual ears and their hearing did not give entrance to fear but to faith and the result of that hearing was they *“raised their voices together in prayer to God”*; in 10:22 God sent an angel to Cornelius with the simple instruction to send for Peter and hear what he had to say, and the obedience of their open hearing is in 10:44 *“the Holy Spirit came on all who heard”*; in 11:7 Peter heard a voice that asked him to do something so off the charts, to eat what was unclean, but because he heard and discerned the voice of the Lord, his hearing overcame the centuries of cultural and religious traditions and rules; in 11:18 they heard and had *“no further objections”*; in 13:48 they heard and *“were glad and honored the Word of the Lord”*; in 14:9 a crippled man in Lystra listened and what he heard quickened his faith and he was healed; in 16:14 *“Lydia attended”* and the Lord *“opened her heart”* and the fruits of her attentiveness: her household was converted, a church was planted in her home, and Philippi became the springboard for mission to barbarian Europe; in 21:20 they heard and *“praised God”*; the constant refrain of the apostles was that they witnessed to what they had heard; that was Paul’s testimony in his hearing of the audible voice that called him then to be a witness of *“what you have heard”* (22:15).

But of course, there are the terrible warnings and terrible results that come from ears that will not hear aright. Amidst all the wonderful fruits of good hearing, were *“uncircumcised ears”* and *“covered ears”* (7: 51,57); in 5:33 there were those who were furious; in 7:57 those who heard *“gnashed their teeth”* such was the anger and contempt; in 17:32 the hearing resulted in sneering mockery and in 22:22 those who listened demanded that Paul be removed from the earth; in 27:11 the failure to listen to the word of the Lord through Paul resulted in shipwreck and loss. Anything else to add? Do you remember the repeated reference in all three synoptic gospels of Isaiah’s reference (6:9-10) to dull and calloused ears? How does Luke conclude his Acts narrative? In 28:25 Luke describes Paul’s *“final statement.”* What does he say? Acts finished with the same passage Jesus used, a chilling word for the Jews. Paul’s last words in this history of the early church are: *“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.”* So Acts begins with an appeal to listen and ends with an implied judgment and terrible loss on the failure to do so. I rest the case. We asked the Lord to speak to our spiritual ears the word he pronounced over the deaf-mute: *“Ephphatha!”* “Be opened!”

Pastorally yours,
Stuart