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Parables: Hearing

By Bryan Hodge

“Nature has given us two ears, two eyes, and but one tongue – to the end that we should heard and see more than we speak.” ~ Socrates

“I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen.” ~ Ernest Hemingway

“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.” ~ Proverbs 18:13

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” ~ Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:43; Mark 4:9; 4:23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35; Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22; 13:9.

“O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD.” ~ Jeremiah 22:29

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” ~ James 1:19

“If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” ~ James 1:23, 24

Let us consider three “hearing” parables.

The Two Builders (Matthew 7:24-27)

The setting (Matthew 5:1-2): This parable is the last words of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. The sermon occurs near the beginning of His ministry. It is spoken to be great multitude.

The parable (Matthew 7:24-27): Two builders are set forth. (1) The first builder hears Jesus’ words and does them. This builder is liken to a wise man who built his house upon a solid foundation of rock. This house would stand the test. (2) The second builder hears Jesus’ words and does them not. This builder is likened to a foolish man who built his house upon sand the sand. Leon Cole comments, “The Savior did not use a far-fetched illustration. He was a carpenter while dwelling on this earth and knew all about foundations. In Palestine, there are gulleies which in the summer are pleasant sandy hollows, but in winter, they become raging torrents of rushing water. If a man were shortsighted, he might build his house in the dried up bed of a river and when winter came, his house would disintegrate. Only a house whose foundations were firm could withstand the storm; and only a life whose foundations are sure can stand the test” (Spiritual Sword Lectureship, The Sermon on the Mount, p. 282 – referencing William Barclay).

The application: (1) Jesus spoke with authority (Matthew 7:28-29). (2) Hearing is not enough. We need to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

No Interest (Luke 7:31-35)

The setting (Luke 7:29-30): Some were hard-hearted. They had rejected the baptism of John. They were currently rejecting the teaching of Jesus.

The parable (Luke 7:31-32): Children are pictured performing for other children in the marketplace. They play the flute, but no one dances. They sing a dirge, but no one weeps. Nothing seems to move the audience.

The application (Luke 7:33-35): The message of John and Jesus were in perfect harmony. Both preached repentance and a coming kingdom (Matthew 3:1-2 cf. Matthew 4:17). Both taught baptism (Mark 1:4 cf. John 4:1-2).

However, their lives were very different. (1) John lived in the wilderness (Mark 1:6), Jesus lived among the people. (2) John was clothed in camel's-hair (Mark 1:6); Jesus dress was more to the norm. (3) John ate locusts and wild honey, and lived apparently under a perpetual Nazarite vow (Luke 1:15 cf. Numbers 6); Jesus had a more normal diet.

Both were rejected. John they accused of being demon-possessed. Jesus they accused of being "a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinner!" Note: Remember the accusation is from Jesus' enemies. The also accused him of casing out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Mark 3:22), and teaching others not to pay taxes (Luke 23:2). Neither of which were true. Jesus did associate with sinful men (Matthew 9:10-11). Perhaps, this was the source of the misrepresentation. Further, it should be pointed out that the term 'wine' (oinos) is a generic term. Just because it says that Jesus drank wine, does not imply intoxicating wine.

The point is that there is no way to please some people. The issue is not in the teacher. The issue is in the hearts of the listeners. They will always have a "reason" to reject the message.

J.W. McGarvey commented, "The lives or works of Jesus and John were both directed by the wisdom of God, and all who were truly wise toward God – children or wisdom – justified or approved of God's course in sending such messengers" (The Four Fold Gospel, p. 286).

The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-31)

The setting (Matthew 21:23-27): Jesus is in the temple. The chief priests and elders of Israel are before him.

The parable (Matthew 21:28-31): A man has two sons. He tells his sons, "Go, work today in my vineyard." One son said, "I will not," but afterward he regretted and went. The other son said, "I go, sir," but he did not go.

Jesus asked, "Which son did the will of his father?" They correctly answer, that it was the son who went.

The application (Matthew 21:31-32): God wants more than mere lip service. He wants obedience. The religious leaders were like the son who professed to do his father's will, but did not. Many tax collectors and harlots had once refused to obey, but now were repenting and obeying [tax collectors (Matthew 10:3; Luke 3:12; 5:27; 7:29; 18:10; 19:2); harlots (Luke 7:39?)].

Think about the following passages – "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).