

20. Ears to hear, not ignore

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As I am getting older, I've noticed many things go wrong in my body. I have to wear bifocal glasses, I forget so many things, and I am losing my hearing capability. If I keep this up, before the Lord takes me home, I won't be able to see and hear and think. For what is going around the world, that may not be such a bad idea.

However, we know some people including us, display our selective hearing. For a few examples, you tell your teenagers that they can go to mall in Tucson with their friends after they do their chores around the house first. Somehow, they don't hear what you told them about cleaning their rooms, taking garbage out and other chores. But somehow, they do remember that they can go to mall in Tucson with their friends.

For husband, we get this list of "Honey-Do" list from our loving wives. Such as cleaning the garage, balancing of checkbook, remembering mother-in-law's birthday, etc. We, husbands, have hard time understanding those uncomprehensive requests. But watching Monday night footballs and NCAA play off games, we can remember exact broadcasting schedules from all four network TV stations, so we can flip channels during the game to make sure we don't miss out anything.

This doesn't only happen at our physical realm, but it also apply in spiritual realm. We often turn our deaf ears to our God, because we don't want to hear what the Lord says to us. But for our prayer requests, we want our God to be all ears to hear us. Let's see what Jesus says about this.

A. ARE YOU THE ONE?

Matthew 11:1-3 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

John the Baptist was in prison in the fortress of Machaerus because he had courageously denounced the adulterous marriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias. Why did John the Baptist who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah for Israel previously all of sudden sent his disciples to question Jesus? It is not difficult to sympathize with John as he suffered in prison. Perhaps he himself had misunderstood the ministry of the Messiah, thinking that if Jesus was really the Messiah, He would perform works connected with a political deliverance of Israel from the iron fist of Roman government - or at least the deliverance of John, who was in prison.

Matthew 11:4-6 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

John the Baptist had doubt arose in his heart. But Jesus didn't rebuke him for his doubt. Our Lord's reply to John revealed both tact and tenderness.

Our God is ever so gentle with those who seek Him with earnest hearts. There is a tremendous difference between seeker and scoffer.

B. JESUS' REPORT CARD FOR JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 11:7-8 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

John was not a "popular preacher" who catered to the crowd, nor was he a reed in the wind who vacillated with every change. He was a man of conviction and courage, the greatest of the prophets.

Matthew 11:9-15 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Jesus was quoting Malachi 3:1 regarding John the Baptist whom Jesus considered the greatest of all the prophets. As a matter of facts, John was the last prophet of the Old Testament.

Why did Jesus say that least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist who was the greatest of all the prophets? Because the person with the personal relationship with Jesus Christ have an opportunity to see what the Lord Jesus has done from the beginning of the creation to all the way to the Cross and His resurrection and the Day of Judgement, knows and understands more than all the prophets of the Old Testament. Because what they heard from God to tell the people of Israel was a bit and pieces of information regarding the Savior and the future.

Jesus mentioned, "he is Elijah who is to come." Does that mean Elijah came back to the earth in the form of John the Baptist? Does this mean the Bible support the idea of reincarnation? Absolutely not!

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

When we read the Book of John 1:21, we can get the answer from the lips of John the Baptist himself.

John 1:21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

The Seventh Adventists believe that it was Elijah in John's body. Whom should I believe? The Bible or the Seventh Day Adventists?

I asked you to underline "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". In my opinion, it is Jesus' longing desire for us to listen to Him and pay attention to what He wants us to hear. It is His invitation to this dying world. It is His extended hand that trying to rescue the mankind from ever-falling pit. Some of you who studied the Book of Revelation in the past would remember the similar verses showing up for seven times as Jesus addresses to the seven churches.

Rev 2:7a He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

God wants us to listen to Him.

The Jewish religious leaders refused to honor John, and this proved their unbelief and hardness of heart. Instead of being childlike and humbling themselves, the leaders were childish and stubborn, like children pouting because they could not have their way.

C. JUST GOING THROUGH MOTION

Matthew 11:16-19 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Vaccine contains just enough weakened or killed virus for that particular disease. When we have vaccine in our bodies, we get to build immune system against that disease. Religion is like a vaccine. Religion gives just enough false sense of security of heaven in our hearts that our carnal spirit builds up the immune system to fight against faith and obedience in Christ.

D. NO EXCUSES

Matthew 11:20-24 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

How tragic that these cities should treat lightly their opportunities to see and hear the Christ of God, and be saved! The Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, and the godless cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have repented had they seen the miracles that Jesus and His disciples performed. Five of the ten miracles recorded in Matthew 8–9 were performed in Capernaum.

Can we exchange the names of these cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum to San Francisco, New York, Sahuarita and Green Valley? Are we better than them? We can exchange any of American cities' and towns' names with these cities without losing context of the phrase. Why? Because that is exactly what the majority of Americans are doing. Americans have no excuse to God about not knowing Him, nor following Him.

Luke 12:48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

We want God's blessings, but we don't want God's truth. We want God's protection, but we have nothing to do God's Son Jesus. Hollywood movie production companies are the leading flagship when it comes to using God's name in vain and we endorse it by going to see their foul language movies. City and state government, federal judges are against the Word of God, they would reject God's commandment

any possible way they can. But yet, they want God to bless America. It is the time to repent, it is the time to stop playing game with God, it is the time to pray to God.

E. NO SON, NO FATHER

Matthew 11:25-27 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

The Israel religious people were so bound by their own religious performance and work to please themselves, to impress themselves, thinking how religious they are, that they don't want anything to do with the Gift of God that is Jesus.

F. INVITATION / APPLICATIONS

Why did the religious leaders rebel against John and Jesus? Because they (the leaders) were intellectually and spiritually proud and would not become little babes in humility and honesty. The following verses indicate both the sovereignty of the Father and the responsibility of the sinner. Three commands summarize this invitation and applications.

1) Come

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The Pharisees all said "Do!" and tried to make the people follow Moses and the traditions. But true salvation is found only in a Person, Jesus Christ. And He says, "Done!" on the cross. To come to Him means to trust Him. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of religious legalism. We cannot earn His gift of salvation. It is free for us to take.

2) Take

Matthew 11:29a Take My yoke upon you

This is a deeper experience. When we come to Christ by faith, He gives us rest. When we take His yoke and learn, we find rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience. The first is "peace with God."

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

The second is "the peace of God".

Phil 4:6-8 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

To "take a yoke" in that day meant to become a disciple. When we submit to Christ, we are yoked to Him. The word "easy" means "well-fitting"; He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for our lives and needs. The burden of doing His will is not a heavy one.

3) Learn

Matthew 11:29b-30 and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The first two commands represent a crisis as we come and yield to Christ. But this step is into a process. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. Life is simplified and unified around the person of Christ. This invitation is for "all".