

"Earing" God's Word Luke 8:5-15 Sexagesima 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Can you palm a basketball? By that, I mean can you grip a basketball with one hand so that you can pick it up off the floor and wave it around without it slipping out of your hand? I can't palm a basketball and there's nothing I can do about it. I stopped growing a long time ago. My hands won't get any bigger than they are.

You may not be able to palm a basketball either but I bet you can palm a Bible. Even children have the ability to grip a small Bible with one hand. So what? Holding a Bible does us no good unless we open it and listen to what God has to say there. So instead of asking whether you can palm a Bible I should ask whether you can "ear" the Bible. "Earing" God's Word is not the same as hearing it. Jesus makes that clear through the Parable of the Sower. There he urges us to "ear" God's Word by listening to it prayerfully, persistently, and attentively.

A pair of functioning ears doesn't make one into a good listener anymore than a luxury car makes its owner into a good driver. Both listening and driving takes focused concentration. Jesus makes that clear in regard to listening when he compares God's Word to a seed that fell on a path. Before the seed could take root birds snatched it away. Jesus is describing those people who hear the Word of God but don't listen to it and so Satan takes it away from them before it can create

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faith. These people may be swayed by the so-called experts who say that the Bible is nothing more than a book of myths. Instead of checking out these claims for themselves, they gladly accept them. And why not? If the Bible is true, then they won't be able to stand before God on their own two feet because of their sins. That's not something their pride would like them to admit.

But it's not just outright unbelievers that have a hard time "earing" God's Word. So do we. Instead of listening prayerfully to God's Word and asking for understanding as we read and hear it we're tempted to ignore teachings we think will make life difficult. For example, the student may choose to gloss over what God says about creation in favor of what her professor is teaching about evolution. It just makes it easier for her to fit in with the class that way. Or a pastor may choose to "skip over" the class on the antichrist or fellowship to make it "easier" for people to join the church. What he'd be saying though is that he knows better than God regarding what his listeners need for their eternal safety. He'd be like the woodworking instructor who doesn't insist that his students wear safety goggles when they work. Sure, a piece of splintered wood may never tear into his students' unprotected eyes but why take the chance?

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With the Parable of the Sower Jesus wants us to know that we ignore his Word, any part of it, at our peril. No, I'm not saying every Bible teaching will be easy to put into practice and faithfully confess. But one who "ears" God's Word will continue to listen to the Word prayerfully and ask God for understanding with the tough doctrines so that we may continue to stand strong in the faith. Our prayer will be "Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

The only thing that will lead to overcoming our unbelief is listening to God's Word persistently, seeking depth of knowledge and conviction. Again, this is not something every Christian does and will suffer the consequences. Jesus illustrated that truth by describing seed that fell on soil with rock beneath it. Although a plant quickly grew in that spot it just as quickly withered when the heat of summer hit because it didn't have deep roots with which to find moisture.

This scenario describes people who at first listen to God's Word, believe it, and rejoice but because they don't do anything to deepen their knowledge of Jesus their faith withers when hard times come. Does that describe you? It may if you harbour thoughts like: "Going to church is good but I don't want to become a fanatic about it. After all I have a life to live!" Or "There's not much else I need to learn about the Bible. I've gone through confirmation. And it's faith in Jesus that saves

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right, not faith in all the other Bible doctrines?" Yes, faith in Jesus saves but all the other doctrines support your faith in Jesus. If your faith isn't sending its roots deep into God's Word, it will be ripped from the heart when your world comes crashing in on you. What would you think of a soldier who after going through basic training refused to keep working out, take target practice, and do manoeuvres with his platoon - his reasoning being that there is no war now and therefore sees no need to waste energy on these tedious activities? That's not a soldier who's going to last long when fighting does start is it? (Mark Braun) The reason a soldier constantly trains in time of peace is because war can break out in an instant and he wants to be ready to survive it.

In the same way going to Bible class or doing your daily devotions may seem tedious (it's not), but it's there we train for war – a war that Satan wages against you seeking to take you down with him to hell. Be persistent in listening to God's Word, seeking a depth of knowledge and conviction that will hold you in good stead when Satan really starts firing his arrows at you.

Listening to God's Word persistently, however, is not an easy thing to do. That's because there are many other things vying for our attention. Jesus illustrated that truth by describing seed that fell among thorns. This seed grew at first because the soil was good but the thorns

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there eventually strangled the good plant. Jesus explains that the thorns represent worries, riches, and the world's pleasures that choke faith to death when we divert our attention to them and away from Jesus. We "ear" God's Word then when we listen attentively to the Word, blocking out earthly cares and concerns.

But how can we afford to block out earthly cares and spend our time listening to the Word? Doesn't Jesus know the price of milk these days? Doesn't he know that the housing market has spiraled out of control? Isn't he aware of how long it takes to get help at the ER? Blocking out those cares seems a bit like sticking your head in the sand, doesn't it? It's not. It means sticking your head in God's promises like this one from Jesus: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:31-33). Is that promise any less valid than Jesus' promise that your sins are forgiven? Of course not! Your heavenly Father is on the job. He will provide the things that you need so that you can "ear" God's Word by listening to it attentively just as Mary did when Jesus came to visit her home. When Mary's sister Martha complained that her sister wasn't doing anything constructive and asked Jesus to tell Mary to help with the meal preparations, Jesus

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said that Martha was distracted by many things and that it was Mary who had chosen what was better (Luke 10:42).

We too will do well to make better choices. Instead of mindlessly watching that infomercial, why not read your Meditations? Instead of engaging in a text messaging marathon with a friend you'll see the next day, why not turn to your heavenly Friend in prayer? Instead of working extra hours to pay for a big house you don't really need, become more regular in worship. Don't let the cares, concerns, and delights of this world put a squeeze on your faith. Instead, aggressively root them out the way a gardener attacks the weeds in her garden.

I think one reason we're reluctant to "ear" God's Word is because we underestimate its power. I mean really, what can words from the Bible do? A lot, says Jesus. "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:8). I don't think it was an accident that Jesus compared the Word to a seed. Let's face it. A seed doesn't look very pretty, does it? It's small, hard, and dull. But look what happens when you plant it. A tasty vegetable comes forth. A raspberry bush shoots up. A gorgeous black walnut gives shade. Likewise God's Word doesn't seem like much but "ear-ing" it leads to a great harvest. That harvest is first the eternal life that is ours in Christ Jesus. Before Jesus took hold of us, we were

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covered in sin. We looked like a garden after the snow melts: a hard brown patch of dirt with weeds poking up here and there. Not a pretty sight. But Jesus went to work on us. He tilled the soil, he planted the Word, and he sent the Holy Spirit to produce faith. That faith drinks from the never-ending supply of forgiveness Jesus gives so that what was once a dirty patch of brown now explodes with edible greens.

The produce from this garden of faith is not just eternal life; it's also the fruit of Christian living. God's Word has the power to make a difference in your daily life. Are you struggling in your marriage and think there is no hope? Come, let's "ear" God's Word together and see what a difference that will make in the way that you approach your spouse. Do you wonder how your child will ever get back on track? Keep sharing the Word with him. It set the Apostle Paul straight. Wonder how this church is going to grow? Spend more time sowing the seed than worrying about what the greenhouse is going to look like. A gardener who builds a greenhouse with all the bells and whistles but doesn't plant seed won't have anything to harvest. Likewise if we get so caught up in our building program that we forget about sharing the Word, we won't have anyone to bring into the new church. Instead throw God's Word out there "carelessly" like the farmer scattering seed in the parable not screening your audience first for those whom you think will believe the message. Let God surprise you at whom he brings

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to faith. After all he brought you and me to faith. Now stay in that faith by “ear-ing” the Word as you listen to it prayerfully, persistently, and attentively. Amen.