

## *Hearing Ears*

Opening Hymn: #108 — “I Came to Jesus”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s Light.”

Matthew 13:16,17 Blessed are your ... ears, for they hear. ... Many prophets and righteous men have desired to ... hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

As important as the eyes are to all of us, the Scriptures also emphasize the importance of ears. Because we have such ready access to the Bible and we all know how to read, our eyes can teach us so much. But this has not always been true. For most of the Gospel Age copies of the Bible were produced by hand and only the elite of the church had them. The common people worked the land and could not read anything. They knew only what they were told by others. Their learning came through their ears. And that’s the way it was at the beginning of this age. At the end of Acts chapter one we read of 120 who were convinced by Peter to select a replacement for unfaithful Judas. Their choice was Mathius and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Chapter two opens on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:1-4 (NIV) When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound [like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven] filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Three and a half years before this John the Baptist said the one who came after him would baptize not with water, but with the holy spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11). In Acts 1:8 they were told they would receive power when the holy spirit came upon them, but what that meant and when it would happen they did not know. This event was the fulfillment of that promise.

The first part of the miracle was sound: “A sound ... came from heaven and filled the whole house.” It was not wind. We have all experienced sudden, even violent winds caused by natural forces. But the sound duplicating a wind without there being any wind would be awe-inspiring. The second part of the miracle was the tongues of fire. We think of fire as destructive, but it is also a symbol of God’s presence. There was the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses (Exod. 3:2). There was the cloud by day and the “pillar of fire” by night during the wilderness wanderings. In fact the original Day of Pentecost occurred when the law was given at Mt. Sinai, an event associated with both sound and fire:

Exodus 19:18,19 Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in **fire**: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a **voice**.

In Acts when these disciples began to “speak with tongues,” it was not for their benefit. It was to witness to the “devout men out of every nation under heaven” (vs. 5) who filled the city. Most who

explain the “speaking in tongues” (including Brother Russell) say they began to speak languages they did not know. Certainly there are instances in the New Testament when that kind of miracle happened. But in this case the miracle may have been one of hearing. That’s the way the people described it:

Vs. 6: They were confounded because every man **heard** them speak in his own language.

Vs. 8: How **hear** we every man in our own tongue?

Vs. 11: We do **hear** them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

In vs. 14 Peter stands up and speaks to them. What language did he speak? If it is one specific language, most of the audience would not understand him. Yet they do, for at the end of his remarks we read:

Acts 2:41 (NIV) Those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

And what a miracle this would be to those people. If **you** were in a European crowd where all languages were being spoken, you surely would not be surprised if someone on a street corner began to speak in English. You would assume he learned the language in school. But suppose this same person spoke what was clearly not your language, yet you understood his words as though you were at an International convention wearing earphones. That surely would make you excited, so much that others would be attracted and join with enthusiasm. The critics who observed this crowd accused them of drunkenness:

Acts 2:12,13 (NIV) Amazed and perplexed, [the crowd] asked one another, What does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said, They have had too much wine.

In verse 15 Peter says “These men are not drunk as you suppose.” He does not say, “**We** are not drunk as you suppose.” This makes complete sense if the miracle was in the hearing.

But how are we to understand the words of verse 4 where those filled with the holy spirit “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”? Consider something Jesus said to his disciples:

Luke 12:11,12 (NIV) When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

The holy spirit inspired the disciples to go forth and speak about different truths based on recent events as prophesied in the Bible. As those in the crowd circulated from one disciple to another, they heard in their own language what the NIV calls “the wonders of God.” We have the adjective “silver-tongued” which means “having or exhibiting the power of fluent and persuasive speech; eloquent.” On that Pentecostal day these disciples were “silver-tongued” and it is one of the many miraculous things that happened that day. As always the glory belonged to God:

2 Cor. 4:7 We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Using presumably ignorant people like Galileans was just like God. Paul wrote:

1 Cor. 1:27 God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

We are amazed 3,000 of the devout of Israel were so impressed with Peter's message that they were baptized. Nothing like that ever happened when Jesus spoke to the multitudes. There is an obscure Pentecostal type that had its antitype on this same day:

Leviticus 23:16,17 Ye shall number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; **they shall be baked with leaven**; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

When the holy spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, the priest was waving two loaves [see vs. 20] baked with leaven, an exception compared to all the other sacrifices brought to God. There was no leaven in the wave offering of firstfruits and the meal offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven weeks before this. At that time the sinless "head of the body" was accepted by God. But at Pentecost the "body members" who were not sinless were accepted as firstfruits. Having two leavened loaves seems to teach that these would jointly constitute two groups: the Church, and the Great Company (also typified in the underpriests and ordinary Levites). How thrilling to see 3,000 respond to the message of truth and begin their consecrated walk before God.

### **On the Road to Damascus**

The miracle of hearing was used to convert Saul of Tarsus as he was traveling to Damascus expecting to cast Christians into prison. Notice how he describes what happened to him:

Acts 22:6,7,9 It came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and **heard a voice** saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [vs. 9] And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; **but they heard not the voice** of him that spake to me.

In Acts 26:14 he adds the detail that the voice spoke to him in the "Hebrew tongue." But since his traveling companions heard nothing at all, clearly the fact that Saul heard anything was a miracle. I like to think that from Saul's perspective if God were going to speak to him, it would certainly be in the Hebrew tongue.

And of course God speaks to us and all who seek him regardless which language we think is "God's language." He speaks them all. In fact his word, the Bible, has been translated into all the major languages of this planet, and most of the minor ones as well. And no matter which language is used to pray to him, "he hears" them all.

### **The Importance of Tongues**

God has always used human tongues as the way to call his elect out of the world. Consider the events in Acts chapter 8. A eunuch of great authority was riding in his chariot and reading Isaiah:

Acts 8:29-31 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what

thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? [vs. 35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

The eunuch's words are as true today as they were then: "How can I understand unless some man should guide me." Some say we follow a man. I once visited a Bible Student-oriented convention and saw a booktable filled with literature I had never seen before. Evidently the convention sponsors felt it was acceptable to follow the guidance of those who had written what was on the table; it was not acceptable to follow what was written by those whose works were not on display.

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and **how shall they hear** without a preacher? [vs. 17] So faith cometh by **hearing**, and hearing by the word of God.

We should all consider ourselves preachers sent out to hold forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

A great commission was given by the risen Lord to the eleven and to all who would follow after them:

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

## God Hears

We have talked about how important the sense of hearing is because it has historically been the way the truth has been brought to those who are seeking after God. We have two instances in the wilderness experiences of the Israelites where it is the Lord who is described as "hearing" what rebellious ones were saying. The first incident was the people:

Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord: **and the Lord heard it**; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

In the following chapter the ones doing the speaking are Moses' brother and sister:

Numbers 12:2 And [Miriam and Aaron] said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? **And the Lord heard it.**

The anger of the Lord was kindled against them and Miriam became leprous. I'm not sure why Aaron was not punished. Some say it was to not contaminate the priesthood. Others think it was really Miriam who was the instigator of this rebellion and Aaron had only a passive role.

These two examples show that God will not tolerate rebellion. He hears and at the appropriate time he acts. So let us be sure our words always bring glory to God because he hears everything:

Malachi 3:16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: **and the Lord hearkened, and heard it**, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

1 Peter 3:12 The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.

## Those who have Ears—Hear!

Matthew 11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Our Lord used this expression on a number of occasions. What does it mean? Can those with ears not hear? Of course. Those who don't like a message are certainly not going to listen to it. The verse just before the one we quoted at the beginning of this lesson reads:

Matthew 13:15 This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing.

Personal prejudice affects one's judgment. If you believe the earth is the center of the universe, you won't listen if someone tells you the earth moves. This actually happened in the early 1600s when Galileo used the newly invented telescope to prove the earth was not the center of the universe; the Roman Catholic church claimed it was stationary. Church officials refused to even look through the telescope. Galileo was warned to keep his theories to himself, but he didn't. Eventually he was summoned to Rome by the Inquisition to stand trial for what was called "grave suspicion of heresy." He was forced to recant and punished by house arrest. (In 1992 a papal Commission formally acknowledged the Vatican's error.)

Such can happen among Bible Students. Certain "venerable traditions" can be considered sacred and defended as truth without a single scripture offered in support. This can be especially true when it concerns scientific knowledge. A Seventh Day Adventist might believe the creative days were 24-hours long because the Bible says they were, while others might claim they were 7,000 years long because that's how long the seventh day is and they are all of equal length. Any contrary idea from the scientific community is rejected much like those who refused to look through the first telescopes. The Bible was never given to us to be a scientific textbook. Misusing it this way can only bring discredit to the gospel message.

When our Lord said "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," he is saying to those around him that those with an ear to hear **spiritual** things should do more than hear the words—they should obey them. On another occasion he made that point directly:

Luke 8:21 And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which **hear** the word of God, **and do it**.

In the book of Hebrews we are told the gospel or good news proved of no benefit to most of those who came out of Egypt in the exodus because they had no faith:

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith** in them that heard it.

So we must hear and we must obey. And this we will do because we have faith in the one who speaks to us.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more **earnest heed** to the **things which we have heard**, lest at any time we should let them slip.

The "things which we have heard" are the words of the Lord. May those who have ears to hear, earnestly hear!

Closing Hymn: #164 — “Hear the Call”

**Songs in the Night — October 26**

*Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept.—Isaiah 30:29*

It is a fact that those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, those who have received the joy which no man can take from them, those who have tasted of the grace of God in Christ, will not only rejoice and literally sing musical songs with their lips, but they will also rejoice to have their entire lives a song of praise and thanksgiving unto God. The song will bubble over on every occasion, **wherever hearing ears are found**: so fully will the cleansed, justified, and consecrated heart appreciate God's goodness.

—Z'97-306 R2232:5 (Hymn 179)

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