

There has been much said about the responsibilities of the preacher [and rightly so], but little is made of the responsibilities of the hearer, CHS—"But in proportion as it is solemn work to preach, it is also solemn work to hear..."

Our text is part of a parable usually referred to as the parable of the sower or four soils—it could rightly be called, The parable of the four hearers—it describes four kinds of people (soil) who hear the gospel message (seed)...

[1] There is hardened soil described in v12—"those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved (Mathew tells us the reason being, they did not understand the message)..."

[2] There is the rocky soil in v13—"but the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away"—that is, these people hear the gospel, profess to believe it, but prove to be but temporary or counterfeit Christians...

[3] There is the thorny soil, v14—"now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity"—that is, they remain to be nominal or professing Christians, who have never been savingly and vitally attached to Christ...

[4] There is the good soil, v15—"but the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience..."—that is, they become true Christians...

Notice that our Savior specifically describes each person as hearing the message, v12—"those by the wayside are the ones who hear" v13—"when they hear..." v14—"when they have heard..." v15—"having heard the word with a noble and good heart..."—thus I suggest to you that the parable could rightly be called—The Parable of the Four Hearers—v18 is then our Savior's application to the parable—"therefore take heed how you hear..."

Our text has two parts—[a] a warning—"take heed how you hear" and [b] a reason—"for whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him"—that is—listening to the word preached—will either have a positive or negative effect—"for whoever has, to him more will be given"—that is—more grace and stronger faith—"and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him"—that is—far from simply remaining the same—he will be the worse for it...

David Clarkson—"The gospel, according as it is heard, is a great mercy or a great judgment, a blessing or a curse, therefore great reason to take heed. The abuse of the greatest mercy may curse it..."

Shorter Catechism Q. 90—"How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation? A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives"—notice our puritan forefathers taught three things concerning the hearing of sermons...

[1] Things necessary before the sermon—"we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer"
[2] things necessary during the sermon—"receive it with faith and love" and [3] things necessary after the sermon—"lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives"—thus I want to organize my instruction to you this morning under three headings...

- I. What to do BEFORE the Sermon
- II. What to do DURING the Sermon
- III. What to do AFTER the Sermon

- I. What to do BEFORE the Sermon

A. Pray diligently

1. This where we must begin—we must diligently plead to God that He would bless both preacher and hearer alike...
2. Ps.127:1—"unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it"—that is, unless the Lord blesses both preacher and hearer, they preach and hear in vain...
3. [1] We must pray specifically—by this I mean—we must pray for specific PEOPLE and for specific NEEDS...
4. Eph.6:18—"pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition FOR ALL THE SAINTS..."
5. We must pray for ourselves, spouses, children, siblings, brethren, and visitors—for the salvation and sanctification...
6. We must also pray for those who will be ministering the word of God—pray for divine assistance and help...
7. 2Thess.3:1—"brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified"—that is, that the gospel may come not in word only but in the power of the Holy Spirit...
8. Notice [2] we must pray expectantly—that is—with a holy expectation at what God will do within our midst...
9. Lk.11:9-10—"so I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened..."
10. Rom.10:17—"so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"—what a great promise to plead in our prayers...
11. Oh dear friends—the Lord has chosen the preaching of His word—as the primary means to save and sanctify...
12. Now—this doesn't mean—preaching is the only means—but it is the primary means—it is the foremost means...
13. Thus—we should pray with a holy confidence and expectation—that God will meet with us in a special way...
14. That He would come, by His Spirit, and fill His temple with His presence—that He would save and sanctify us...

B. Prepare practically

1. By this I mean—we must order the week and especially Saturdays—with an eye to the Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day...
2. Simply put brethren—we must get to bed at a proper time—to ensure that we get the necessary rest and sleep...
3. For some this may mean an extra hour of sleep than usual—for others—they may need less sleep—everyone's different...
4. Furthermore—there's certain occasions that are simply out of our control—a newborn baby or a sick child...
5. But—all I'm here saying is this—we need to do all that's within our power—to come to church alert and rested...

C. Repent sincerely

1. By this I mean—we must search our hearts for all unconfessed sin and seek a fresh and full pardon from sin...
2. We must make a fresh appeal to the cleansing blood of our Savior—that cleanses from sin and unrighteousness...
3. We must confess our sins also to man—both within our individual families and the church family in general...

4. Matt.5:23-24—"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift..."
5. 1Pet.2:1-2—"therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious..."
6. [1] Repenting, v1—"therefore, laying aside ALL malice, ALL deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and ALL evil speaking..."
7. This includes a personal examination—wherein all known sin is confessed, mourned over, and free grace procured...
8. [2] Desiring, v2—"as newborn babes, desire [crave] the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby..."
9. We must not only put away our sins—but we must create within our souls—a hunger for the word of God...
10. Let me change the imagery from hungering to plowing—if the word of God is as seed then our hearts are soil in need of plowing...
11. We must plow up our hearts that the seed would find good soil—that it would bring forth fruit—thirty, sixty, even a hundred fold...
12. David Clarkson—"We must get our hearts warmed in private, that we may be kindled in public, so as our hearts may burn within us when he speaks to us. Those who have experience of the Lord's presence and workings, find there is a vast difference, as to the efficacy of the word, when they come negligently and preparedly. When they step immediately out of the world into God's presence, their interviews are not so delightful, so advantageous, the word not so powerful, melting, inflaming, as when they have endeavored to dispose their hearts for so great a work..."

II. What to do DURING the Sermon

1. Now—before I go further under this heading—I want to introduce it with several thoughts that could be misunderstood...
2. Thus—I want to take a little more time introducing this point—to ensure that what I'm saying is rightly understood...
3. Let me start by saying this—we don't merely come to hear about Christ but we come to hear the voice of Christ...
4. That is—when we assemble to hear the word read and preached—we've assembled to hear from our Master...
5. Last week we were reminded—that Christ fulfills the office of Mediator—as Prophet, Priest, and King—in future weeks we shall learn that He performs the office of Prophet and King—through the ministry of His word...
6. Thus—every time we sit beneath the faithful exposition of His word—we are actually hearing the voice of Christ...
7. Now—this does not mean—that whatever the preacher says is true—nor am I denying the need to examine it...
8. Acts 17:11—"the Bereans...received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so..."
9. Preachers are fallible—that is—they can err—they can err in what they say and they can err in how they say it...
10. Thus—what they say must be compared to the Scriptures to ensure what they say lines up to the mind of Christ...
11. But—to the extent that what they say is a faithful exposition of Scripture—it must be received as Christ's voice...
12. Lk.10:16—"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me..."
13. 2Cor.5:20—"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God..."

14. Eph.2:17—"And He [Christ by His messengers] came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near..."
15. 1Thess.2:13—"for this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe..."
16. 1Pet.3:18-19—"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison..."
17. [1] Listen humbly—that is—we must remember who's word we have assembled to hear—the word of God...
18. My friends—we must remember—we do not come to judge the word or preacher—but to be judged by the word...
19. Thomas Watson—"If a judge gives a charge upon the bench, all listen. If a king speaks, all pay attention. When we come to the word, we should think within ourselves—we are to hear God in this preacher..."
20. Thomas Boston—"Though the voice is on earth, the speaker is in heaven, and we should consider it so as to come to hear what God says to us..."
21. Jas.1:21—"therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness [humility] the implanted word, which is able to save your souls..."
22. [a] What we are to do—"receive with meekness [or humility] the implanted word"—the word scattered by preaching...
23. [b] Why we are to do it—"which is able to save your souls"—that is—save initially and continually by sanctification...
24. [2] Listen aggressively—that is—listening to preaching is not a passive but active labor—it takes hard work...
25. It is a faulty view of worship that the preacher does all the work and the hearer merely sits back and enjoys...
26. We must remember that hearing the sermon is as much a part of worship as is preaching, praying, and singing...
27. We as new covenant priests are to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God—would you offer a lame and blemished sacrifice...
28. Lk.19:47-48—"and he was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear him..."
29. Literally—the people were—"hanging on every word"—they were listening both attentively and aggressively...
30. Now—the reasons for this are many—let me simply suggest one—because the enemies of our souls oppose it...
31. Here of course I'm thinking of Satan and his demonic host—who'll do all they can to hinder you from hearing...
32. Exactly how this takes place is mysterious—but the fact that it takes place is proven by Scripture and experience...
33. Lk.8:11-12—"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved..."
34. "The devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts"—this of course refers to those who are unconverted...
35. But—there's an application here to Christians—the devil seeks to keep us from profitably hearing the word...
36. Thomas Watson—"The devil is not one who refuses to come to church; he attends, but not with any good intent; he takes away the word from men. How many have been robbed of the sermon and their souls both at once..."
37. [3] Listen believably—that is—we must mingle the word with faith—or, we must apply the word to ourselves...

38. The word of God will never benefit us—if we do not believe it—[a] believe it's true, [b] believe it's true of us...
39. I fear that often times—we are quick to apply the preaching to others—and yet slow to apply it to ourselves...
40. But—first and foremostly—we must apply the teaching to ourselves—we must believe the word as true of us...
41. Heb.4:2—"For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it..."
42. Faith is the necessary ingredient, without which, our hearing would be in vain—hearing must be mixed with believing...
43. For example—let's say we desired to make chocolate-chip cookies—but for whatever reason—forgot the chocolate chips...
44. Regardless how often we baked the cookies—we would never have chocolate-chip cookies—without chocolate-chips...
45. So too—regardless how many sermons we heard—if we failed to hear them with faith—they will never benefit us...
46. Thus we must expose our hearts to the word—we must open the gates of our hearts to let the King of glory in...
47. Jeremiah Burroughs—"As there must be attending to the Word of God, so must there be an opening of the heart to receive what God speaks to you..."
48. Thus every threat, exhortation, rebuke, and promise must be taken to heart and applied to our own individual case...
49. George Swinnock—"When the glad tidings of peace are preached, let thine heart leap with hope...When the law comes in like an acid, eating out the festered flesh and corruption...when the threatenings, like wine, search the wound, and the promises, like oil, heal it. Then it comes with authority and majesty. If search be made by a reproof for thy beloved sin, do not, like Rachel, hide it, neither do thou fret when thy sore is touched, but hold thine arm forth to that knife which should prick thy vein, and let out thy bad blood. Be not angry when a prophet smites thee in the name of the Lord; believe it, he that hates thy sins most, loves thee best..."
50. [4] Listen affectionately—by this I mean—we must receive the word as coming from our Father and Savior...
51. Think of an obedient child—who sits before their loving father—eager to hear his instructions and commands...
52. Because the child loves his father—he loves his word—he loves his voice—he loves to hear his mind and will...
53. Or else—think of a newly wed bride—who lovingly and affectionately—hears the instruction of her husband...
54. 2Thess.2:10—"they did not receive the love of the truth [they did not love the truth], that they might be saved..."
55. That is—because they did not love the truth—they did not receive the truth—or, they did not hear it with love...
56. [a] We must love the gospel—that is—those portions of Scripture that specifically tell us what God has done in Christ...
57. [b] We must love the law—that is—those portions of Scripture that specifically tell us what we're to do for Christ...
58. 1Jn.5:3—"For this is love for God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome..."
59. Brethren—we must love to hear and receive the whole counsel of God—not merely those parts we like best...
60. We must love to hear about our Savior in His priestly activities—but we must also hear Him as prophet and king...

III. What to do AFTER the Sermon

A. Pray

1. Here we come back to where we began—we must pray that the Spirit of Christ would write what we heard across our hearts and minds...
2. That was a wise statement of CHS—"Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees..."
3. We must pray that God would bless His word to our souls—that we would be more than mere hearers of the word...

B. Ponder

1. By this I mean we must intentionally and intellectually reflect upon what we were taught within the sermon...
2. Heb.2:1—"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it..."
3. Notice—we must "pay closer attention to what WE HAVE heard"—that is—we must carefully reflect upon it...

C. Practice

1. This is the final end or goal of preaching—that our hearts and lives would be practically and eternally changed...
2. Lk.11:29—"Blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it"—hearing without doing doesn't benefit...
3. David Clarkson—"The word, if you apply it not, will no more profit than meat not eaten"—it must be heard and obeyed...
4. Jas.1:21—"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves..."
5. Oh my brethren, simply listening to sermons will profit no one, unless they find their way into our hearts and lives...

IV. A Brief Examination

1. [1] Are you growing in your overall knowledge and understanding of Scripture—are we seeing the "big-picture"...
2. [2] Are you growing in your knowledge of your sin and native inability—this is a sure sign of growing in grace...
3. [3] Are you growing in your dependence upon God and His grace—are you beholding the glory of God's grace...
4. [4] Are you growing in your love and faith in Jesus Christ—are you beholding the glory of His person and work...
5. [5] Are you growing in holiness and Christ-likeness—that is—are you becoming more and more like Christ...