

Listen to Jesus!

Rarely is it enough to simply speak the truth. A preacher or prophet must also convince his listeners to hearken to the words. It is interesting to see the various ways Jesus introduced his teachings.

Eight times in the gospels, and seven times in the book of Revelation, Jesus used the phrase “he who has ears let him hear” (Matt. 13:9, for example). On the face of it, this is an absurd statement. Everyone in the sound of Jesus’ voice had ears! But, Jesus was pointing out the universal relevance of His words. If you’ve got two ears and a brain between them, you should listen to what Jesus has to say; moreover, you should think about what He has to say and apply it to your life. Missing out on the blessings of Christ is rarely a case of failure to hear, but rather a failure to accept and obey.

Once, in Luke 9:44, Jesus intensified the exhortation by saying, “Let these words sink into your ears!” Too often, listening to God’s word is superficial. It goes in one ear and out the other, if it goes in at all. Jesus encouraged His listeners to grapple with the truth of what He said; to let the words absorb into the mind and change the heart.

Eight times Jesus asked the question, “Have you not read?” (Matt. 12:3, 19:4, for examples). Jesus found it incomprehensible that people had an inaccurate view of God, when God’s revelation was so close at hand. Most of today’s misconceptions and abuses could be cured by reading the Bible. All of today’s questions could be answered by finding the book, chapter, and verse. Every dilemma could be decided by a nightly pursuit of Scripture.

Maybe the most frequent phrase in all the gospels is, “Truly, truly, I say to you” (or in the old KJV, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee”); found some 77 times, sometimes doubled, sometimes not. With this, Jesus emphasized that His words are not theories, positions, or suggestions, but rather absolute and correct truth.

Jesus’ words are not to be weighed, tested, parsed, and submitted to scholarly review. Jesus’ words are not to be questioned in the light of modern culture or new ways of thinking. Jesus’ words are not to be accepted or rejected as one sees fit. They are true, for they are God’s words. “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day” (John 12:42).

That’s why in Matthew 11:14, Jesus read a passage and then gave the correct interpretation, and said, “If you are willing to accept it.” He didn’t mean by this, “I welcome you to read the passage any way you want.” He meant, “if you have the courage to put aside your preconceived

notions and think about the word of God, He will provide you with the truth.”

It would be like a father saying to a son, “You can get your canoe to go down the stream if you’ll just sit in the back of the canoe and hold the paddle the way I showed you, the correct way.” Jesus realized that not everyone would easily submit to the truth He spoke. Some would stubbornly persist in selfish skepticism. Some persist in sitting in the front and paddling headlong into the reeds and spiderwebs. But in the strongest terms possible, Jesus told them how vital it was to listen and obey. —John Guzzetta

What If You Could Listen To Your Own Funeral?

On April 26, 2006, a van carrying six people from an Indiana university was involved in a horrendous accident. Five people died at the scene, and the last was terribly injured.

Rushed to a hospital, the young woman spent five weeks in a coma. The family of Laura Van Ryn stayed by their daughter’s side the entire time.

But then, as she began to slowly emerge from the coma, she began speaking about strange events, and mentioning strange names. Finally, a physical therapist got an idea, and asked her to write her name on a piece of paper. Rather than writing “Laura” she wrote “Whitney.” Soon after, she wrote, “wrong parents.”

The puzzled parents began interviewing medical personnel, and what happened finally became clear. Two of the young students in the van, Laura Van Ryn, and Whitney Cerak, looked remarkably similar. Medical personnel had gotten the IDs of the two mixed up and had informed the wrong family, the Cerak family, that their daughter had died. The Cerak family, overcome with grief, had declined to view their daughter’s body, choosing instead to remember her as she was in life. They had conducted her closed-casket funeral, and were attempting to move on with their lives. Meanwhile, the Van Ryn family had been standing vigil over the wrong child, her face and body too bruised and mangled to be recognizable.

Obviously it was a moment of elation for the Cerak family to discover that their daughter was still alive! And, it was a moment of devastation for the Van Ryn family to discover that their daughter had actually died.

Whitney Cerak was reunited with her parents, and went on to make a full recovery. She graduated from the university. Both families collaborated to publish a book recounting the

strange events they endured.

Can you imagine the surreal experience of watching a videotape of your own funeral? Seeing the mourners who showed up to pay their respects? Listening to the eulogy recounting your own life? I've heard of a man reading his own obituary when a paper mistakenly printed it. But surely Whitney Cerak's experience must be unique. I don't know, but I would guess that any one of us in that circumstance would be very thankful to have an opportunity to do it all over again, and would decide to correct some things.

Wouldn't it be amazing to hear what is said at your own funeral? Aren't you the least bit curious to see the lives you'd touched, to hear others tell of the deeds you'd done?

Actually, we will all have an experience that's not much different. At the judgment we shall hear a recounting of our lives. In Revelation 20:12–13 John says, I saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them, according to their deeds. For many of us, this will be a shameful, embarrassing moment, to have all our deeds trotted out and displayed before us, even the hidden ones. This even includes "every careless word" (Matthew 12:36).

For those in Christ, however, this embarrassing "videotape" will be followed by the blessed and relieving confession of our Lord, that our sins are covered over by His blood, that He claims us as His own. That these deeds are not held against us, for they have been forgiven and washed away, and we can enter into the joys of our Master!

If you are not now prepared for that moment, what in the world are you waiting for?

—John Guzzetta