

ARE YOU LISTENING?

Our text this morning is, *“Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me.”* (John 6:35, 41-51 Text vs. 45b) That verse of Scripture offers great insight into God’s teaching and what your response to Him should be. The book of John has been one of the most praised, and also, one of the most criticized books of the Bible. John defends the immortality of Christ more than any other book in the Bible. And John had the strong conviction that the eternal destiny of every person is connected to belief in Jesus, which is the idea of eternal life. *“And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life.”* (1 Jn 5:11-12) The theme of belief is obvious. Belief is a means to an end. *“This is written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”* (John 20:31) Life that’s available through faith in Jesus is the main theme of John’s Gospel. LIFE!

And John’s view of life was that life began before time. And extends beyond time. Life is found most definitely in Jesus. And as John thought about Jesus’ life, he brought it down to this: *“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) And this shows the reason why the Jews rejected Jesus. They judged Him by human values. By external standards. Their reaction to Jesus’ claim that He was *“the bread that came down from heaven”* while they knew He was a carpenter's son who came from a poor home, and they had seen Him grow up in Nazareth which made them unable to understand how He could possibly be a special messenger from God. But, in rejecting Jesus, they rejected eternal life. And the Book of Romans has the Apostle Paul’s carefully constructed summary of Christian theology explaining God's plan of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ,.

Divinely inspired, Paul presented truths that are followed by believers to this day. And the Gospel of John has had a greater influence on more people than any other book in the Bible. Think of John 3:16. Say it with me. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* That’s the main message of Christianity, declaring God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the human race. It proclaims that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 is often mentioned as the *“Gospel in a nutshell”* because it sums up the heart of God's love and salvation. When the Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, was emperor, he tried to bring the Roman Empire back to its pagan, agnostic state. He said, *“It was this John who by declaring that the Word was made flesh brought all this mischief.”* John’s Gospel has challenged the most sophisticated minds, as well as the simplest. You might compare John’s Gospel to a pool in which a child can wade or an elephant swim. It’s a simple matter.

Yet, it’s profound! Many have witnessed the vast influence this book had upon them personally. No other book has played a greater part in shaping the doctrines of Christianity during the first five centuries. T. E. Lawrence was a British archaeologist, a British army officer and diplomat who, as a writer, was known for his role in the Arab Revolt of 1916–1918, and the Sinai and Palestine Campaign in 1915–1918 during the First World War against the Ottoman Empire known as the Turkish Empire. The Ottoman Empire was a region in Turkey that controlled much of Southeast Europe, West Asia, and North Africa from the 14th to early 20th centuries. T. E. Lawrence’s activities and associations, together with his ability to describe them powerfully in writing, earned him fame as *Lawrence of Arabia*, the 1962 film based on his wartime activities. He was a close personal friend of Thomas Hardy, an English novelist and poet. When Lawrence was serving in the military, he sometimes visited Hardy and his wife while in his uniform. On one occasion, his visit happened together with a visit from the Mayoress of Dorchester, England. She was upset that she had to be part of meeting a common soldier. She had no idea who he was and said to Mrs. Hardy, in French, that never in all her born days had she had to sit down to tea in private with a soldier. No one said anything. Then Lawrence, speaking in perfect French said, *“I beg your pardon, Madame, but can I be of any use as an interpreter? Mrs. Hardy knows no French.”* A snobbish and discourteous woman had made an awkward mistake! She had judged by appearance.

And that’s what the Jews did with Jesus. And it’s what our lesson is saying. You must be careful that you never neglect a message from God because you don’t like, or don’t care for the messenger. You wouldn’t refuse a check for \$1,000 because it happened to be in a plain envelope. And God has many messengers with His greatest message coming through a Galilean carpenter. And for that very reason, the Jews disregarded His message! The Jews argued with each other about it! They were so taken up with their own private arguments that it never occurred

to them to refer the matter to God. They were especially eager to let everyone know what they thought. But not in the least to know what God thought. It might be that sometimes in a church committee meeting when everyone is pushing their own opinion, that it would be better for you to be quiet and ask God what He thinks and what He wants you to do. After all, it doesn't matter much what you think. It's what God thinks that matters the most! And some seldom try to find that out. The Jews listened. But they did not learn.

And there are different kinds of listening. There is the listening of criticism. There is the listening of resentment. There is the listening of superiority. There is the listening of indifference. There is listening only for the moment, because you can't wait to get the chance to speak. The only listening that's worthwhile is that which hears and learns. And that's the only way to listen to God. The Jews resisted the drawing of God. Jesus told them, *"Stop grumbling among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."* Only those who accept Jesus are drawn to God.

The word which John uses here *"to draw"* is in the Greek translation of Hebrew when Jeremiah heard God say, as the King James Version has it, *"With loving-kindness have I drawn thee."* (Jeremiah 31:3) The interesting thing about that word *"draw"* is, it almost always suggests some kind of resistance. It's the word used for drawing a heavy net full of fish to the shore (John 21:6; John 21:11). It was used of Paul and Silas being dragged before the magistrates in Philippi. (Acts 16:19) It's the word for drawing a sword from the belt or scabbard (John 18:10). Always there's the idea of resistance! God can draw people. But people's resistance can defeat God's pull. Jesus said He is *"the bread of life"*, which means that he is essential for life.

So, to refuse the invitation and command of Jesus is to miss life. And to die! The Rabbis had a saying: *"The generation in the wilderness have no part in the life to come."* It's in that old story in Numbers where the Jews, who refused to brave the dangers of the Promised Land after the report of the advance scouts, were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. Because they would not accept the guidance of God, they were forever shut out from the Promised Land. The Rabbis believed their fathers who died in the wilderness not only missed the Promised Land, but they also missed the life to come. To refuse the offer of Jesus, is to miss life in this world. And in the world to come. To accept His offer is to find real life in this world. And glory in the world to come.

The most eloquent preacher of the ancient church was John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople. While pastor in Antioch, about 390 A.D. he preached a series of 88 sermons on John's Gospel. Irenaeus, a Greek bishop in the southern regions of present-day France at the end of the second century, was known for his role in guiding and expanding Christian communities. He told of John's strong belief that God's judgment would come upon those who reject it. And those who heard Polycarp, a personal disciple of the Apostle John lived between 70 and 155 A.D. and was a Christian bishop of Smyrna. He died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake. Then stabbed when the fire failed to destroy his body. He told about John, the disciple of the Lord, going to Ephesus to bathe. And when he saw Cerinthus, an Gnostic who believed the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, and that Christ was an messenger of a far-off supreme divine being, there bathing, John rushed out of the bath house without having bathed saying: *"Let us flee lest even the bath house cave in, for Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is within."*

And Jesus said, *"Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."* You must listen to God's voice. But are you a good listener? It's an essential skill in every relationship. And that includes your relationship with God. Most are better at talking to God than listening to God. Quick to tell Him your needs. But in such a hurry you overlook what He has to say to you. The sad truth is, many would rather skip reading the Bible than skip something else in their daily routine. Yet, God's Word is the foundation of faith. *"The bread of life."* You need to feast on it regularly if you're to grow spiritually. Daily reading of Scripture develops a transformed mind. And that's what changes your perspective, your desires, your attitude, the choice of words you use, all of which should be within the Lord's will. Although every verse in the Bible is inspired by God, and given to you for your benefit, you won't hear His Voice until you make His Word a priority in your life.

If you ask, He will draw you to Him and teach you to listen. He will help you understand what He is saying to you in Scripture. If your spirit is drawn to the Father, and your sensitivity to Him has developed through prayer and meditation on His Word, that's when you will have a submissive heart that obeys His commands. You must accept His truth, and His wisdom, knowing that your faith leads you to Christ. So, seek God's voice through Scripture and prayer. Grow in understanding and faith. And embrace His love and salvation. And enjoy your eternal life with Him. AMEN