

"Consider carefully how you listen"

Luke 8 v 18 (ESV)

How to listen to preaching as part of worship



He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit
says to the churches

Revelation 2 v 7

Four ways in which the context & content of the Letters to The Churches in Revelation chapters 1 - 3 help us to effectively hear and apply the preaching in our church

Introduction

A hugely important subject - There is a great deal about hearing God's words throughout Scripture but the words of Rev 2v7 (*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*) are repeated seven times in Rev chapters 2/3. In the context of the economy of words in the Bible, that is something worthy of note!

A matter of communication - there is a definite 'chain of communication' shown to us in these chapters. The message is instigated by Christ in glory, communicated to 'the messenger' who in turn communicates it to the relevant church. Then that message is applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearers of the message in the church. They are to hear what the "Spirit" says - to engage with its particular application.

A present day reality - those seven churches are no more but they represent churches that are just as real today - including your church! Seven is the perfect number & the application of every message communicated is just as real in every church today as it was in those seven churches of the 1st Century.

A note about the 'messenger' - many Bible versions use the term 'angel' but the original Greek word '*aggelos*' simply means '*messenger*' - one who brings the message that he has received from Christ. In the churches today, this is clearly meant to refer to the 'preacher'. His task is not to bring his own message but to bring a message from the Word that God has communicated to all of the churches to the end of time - from the Bible! He must not add to it

or take away from it but is to declare it, expound it & explain it. The Greek word for "preach" in the original is to "herald" - just like the old fashioned "Town Crier"!

A responsibility to hear - is placed on every member of each church. The messenger may be excellent, eloquent and faithful but if the hearers don't hear, the whole communication process falls down and becomes purposeless, profitless and even senseless!

A crucial piece of advice - from the Saviour Himself is found in Luke 8v18 where Jesus says, "*take heed how you hear*". In other words, the *what* may be of excellent quality and truly the message that Christ has purposed for the members of the church to hear but if it is not heard & applied, the hearers are to blame, not the messenger (and certainly not Jesus who instigated it !)

How should we hear?

1. REVERENTLY

The one who initiates the message that we are to hear is the risen glorified Jesus Christ. The letters to the churches in Rev 2/3 flow directly from the one who is described so wonderfully in chapter 1 & who is intent that every church should see Him (1v11).

Such a view should give us the same sense of reverence, awe & wonder of Christ that John had in 1v17. It should give us a holy fear, not that He is against us but that He is for us! When we hear the word of God preached in the context of our church, we should wonder that Jesus high in glory should send His message to us!

Such a view stops us from being sermon tasters, sermon critics, sermon sleepers or even sermon ignorers! Our attitude should be one of reverence - if Jesus Christ has sent this message then surely I should do all I can to hear it and take it in.

2. EXPECTANTLY

The opening of each one of the seven letters to the churches contains an aspect of the fuller description of Christ in chap 1. This gives the message a heightened expectancy! It reminds us that we should pray with expectation, come with expectation & have practical helps to make that expectation a reality. If we don't have a Bible open in front of us and a pen & paper readily available, can we really say that we are expecting to hear the message that Jesus has sent to us? How will we retain the particular parts of it that are of help, challenge & encouragement to us?

These letters say nothing about the preacher - he is simply the 'messenger'. The force of these chapters of Scripture is that Jesus Christ has a message suited to us. The messenger must faithfully deliver it and we must expectantly be ready to hear it !

In Ezekiel 33 v 30-32 we have a classic example of a great preacher - eloquent, truthful & faithful in his preaching. The people loved him & his oratory BUT they did not hear & they did not do what God had said! They had no expectation of personal application to their circumstances.

3. SPECIFICALLY

Acts 2 v 14 shows us an example of gospel preaching (in the open air) preached to all indiscriminately. But the specifically targeted message in each of the letters to the Christians in Rev 2/3 is, "To the church which is at..." (Greek Ekklesia - the "called out, called together ones" in that particular place).

As part of His message to each church, Jesus says, "I know your works". He knows everything about that church, every individual, all their needs, sins, failings & successes. He suits the message specifically to those people.

On the internet, we can hear good preaching every day of the year! The web allows us to hear the greatest preachers & conference speakers in the world. We must realise however that the most important message that we

hear every week is that delivered from Christ by His messenger to our church and applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We must never judge the preaching in our church by setting it alongside our favourite internet preacher! We must come each Sunday with the mindset that the message we hear is specifically to us.

4. SINGLE MINDEDLY

In each message from Christ to the individual churches, we can see that He expects action! Preaching is always "for change" & never just to inform us or teach us facts! For example in Rev 2 v2-5 the people in Ephesus were to 'remember' & to 'repent & do'. The message was so relevant that the actions required were clear & plain. The need of the hour was single mindedness in actually doing what Christ had instructed them to do.

James strikes the right balance of hearing & doing in James 1 v 22-25. He parallels these chapters perfectly! In v25, James says that there is great blessing in the 'doing'. Christ says at the end of each message in Rev 2/3 that will be blessed when we are 'overcomers' - specifically obeying His word.

A wonderful example

The church in Thessalonica were a wonderful example of Rev 1-3 in action -

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. 1 Thess 2v13