

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

"Ear Trouble or Heart Trouble?"

Lord's Day Morning

January 13, 2008

Pastor Jeff Crippen

Sermon Text: Revelation 3:13

NKJ Revelation 3:13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." "

"Living without faith is like driving in a fog."

"Unbelieving and irreligious men have no ears." John Calvin

"Christ distinguished between doubt and unbelief. Doubt says, 'I can't believe.' Unbelief says, 'I won't believe.' Doubt is honest. Unbelief is obstinate." Henry Drummond

"The natural man does not want to believe that God has spoken." Tom Nettles

"There are no infidels anywhere but on earth. There are none in heaven and there are none in hell." C.H. Spurgeon

"I do not believe there is anybody who ever rejects Jesus Christ on philosophical grounds. The man who continues in his rejection of Christ has a pet sin somewhere – he is in love with iniquity." A.W. Tozer

*"Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die;
Another's life, another's death,
I stake my whole eternity."*

Horatius Bonar

Introduction

Ears. They are pretty curious things. You know an ear when you see it, yet they come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and styles. Big, small, hairy, notched...and now pierced, slit, bejeweled and so on. You probably don't think much about your ears – unless you are a very vain person rather happy about the set you have, or until one gets an infection, or as we grow older they start malfunctioning in some way.

The Bible, curiously, has quite a lot to say about *ears*, and we are seeing that theme right here in The Revelation. At the conclusion of each of these 7 letters we have it –

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

I want to spend some time this morning considering this statement of our Lord's. *He who has an ear, let him hear...*”.

I. Not Everyone Has an Ear

The first obvious implication of our Lord's words is that not everyone has an ear. It goes further to our core – not everyone in the visible church has an ear, not all *hear* the Shepherd's voice –

NKJ John 10:3 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 "Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

NKJ John 10:26 "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 "My sheep

hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

To *have an ear to hear* then is simply a figurative way of saying that a person has a capacity to receive, believe, understand, obey, and recognize Christ's Word. The man lacking an ear to hear considers the Word of God to be so much static on his receiving system. And, of course, we get this new aural capacity through regeneration. Before we can have the ears of faith, we must have a new heart. Christ must touch our eyes and our ears to make the deaf hear and the blind see.

The Enigma of Parables

Now, all of this is rather curious when we consider that God speaks to the deaf *in parables*. One would almost be led to think that *He doesn't want some folks to hear Him*. And so it is!

NKJ Matthew 13:8 "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 "For whoever

has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; 15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' 16 "But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

God speaks to us. He speaks to everyone. His heavens declare His glory to all. But *darkly*. In parables. He doesn't just "lay it out there" for everyone. It is only for those who have ears. For those who seek – they are the ones who find. God's method in this has been described this way –

"God gives us just enough so that those who really want to know Him can. But He does not give us so much that those who do not want to know Him – must."

Here is this recurring theme all through Scripture – you see it especially in our Lord's earthly life in the Gospels –

NKJ Matthew 8:3 Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

NKJ Matthew 9:29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See *that* no one knows *it*."

NKJ Matthew 12:15 But when Jesus knew *it*, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. 16 Yet He warned them not to make Him known,

NKJ Matthew 16:20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

NKJ Mark 7:35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the

more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.

Just enough, you see. Yet not so much that those who hate His kingdom *must* see it. Acceptance of general revelation must precede the giving of special revelation (cf the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts).

NKJ Matthew 11:27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.

NKJ John 7:17 "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*.

Now, all of these *dark sayings* lead to a familiar complaint on the part of the deaf. Last week I heard an account of the death of a famous atheist – I don't remember his name – who said this very thing on his death bed. A pastor had asked him, "*Now, I know that you are an atheist. But just suppose...suppose...for a moment that there is a God. If you could talk to him, what would you tell him?*" The atheist's reply was something like this – "*I would ask him... 'why the deuce didn't you give us more evidence!'*"

Orual's Complaint

One of C.S. Lewis' novels that you do not hear much about (yet which he considered to be his best) is called *Till We Have Faces*. It is based on an old Greek myth – then expanded and reworked. It is the story of one Orual, queen of the kingdom of Glome. (where the pagan god Ungit is worshipped). Orual is the narrator and the story she tells is one of *complaint and accusation*. Specifically, it is an account of her own complaint against the gods. How they have wrongfully dealt with her and in particular what injustice they have committed in respect to her beautiful sister Psyche.

Orual herself is ugly. By her own admission. Psyche is so beautiful that people, for a time, were allured to her as to a goddess. Ultimately however, they came to detest her and to call her the Accursed one. The priest of the kingdom, representative of the god Ungit, comes to the king, Orual's father, and informs him that Ungit must have Psyche as a sacrifice, else the kingdom will remain under famine and curse.

And so it was. Psyche is taken bound to a mountain where she is left chained to a tree, prey for the gods. Sure enough, the rains return and the kingdom enjoys peace once more.

Orual journeys to the place Psyche was sacrificed in order to properly bury any of her remains, but when she arrives she finds that Psyche had been released from the chains and not a single shred of her body could be found.

Upon traveling further, and to her astonishment, she looks across the stream and there stands Psyche. Alive!

Now, in the course of the novel, Orual gives us details of her complaint with the gods. Among other things, she accuses the gods of hiding in darkness, of failing to give clarity. Holy things are always dark things. Men are continually kept guessing. Why can't the gods come out into the light and speak plainly? Why, in other words, do the gods speak in parables? Why don't they show themselves?

And yet, the gods do show themselves to Orual. Here, for instance, she meets Psyche, who tries to tell Orual what has happened to her and how the god had taken her into his palace –

“Welcome, welcome, welcome,” she was saying. ‘Oh, Maia, I have longed for this. It was my only longing. I knew you would come. Oh, how happy I am!’...But Psyche, we must be serious; yes, and busy too. How have you lived? How did you escape? And oh- we mustn't let the joy of the

moment put it out of our minds – what are we to do now?’

‘Do? Why, be merry, what else?’ Why should our hearts not dance?’...All those fears are over. All's well. I'll make it well for you too; I'll not rest till you're as happy as I. But you haven't yet even asked me my story. Weren't you surprised to find this fair dwelling place, and me living here; like this? Have you no wonder?’

‘Yes, Psyche, I am overwhelmed by it. Of course I want to hear your story. Unless we should make our plans first.’

Psyche goes on to relate how she came to be here, a resident of the god's palace, enjoying everything fully.

‘You could see it was a god's house at once. I don't mean a temple where a god is worshipped. A god's House, where he lives. I would not for any wealth have gone into it. But I had to, Orual. For there came a voice – sweet? Oh, sweeter than any music, yet my hair rose at it too—and do you know, Orual, what it said? It said ‘Enter your House,’ (yes, it called it my house), “Psyche, the bride of the god.’

Now, all along it is Orual's intent to convince Psyche that she has been

duped by the gods, and that she must leave all this and return to Glome with her. No matter that Psyche is glowing and alive and perfectly joyful. No, Orual will not have it.

"...they dressed me again, in the most beautiful things – and then came the banquet- and the music- and then...the night came – and then- he."

'He?'

"The Bridegroom...the god himself. Don't look at me like that, Sister. I'm your own true Psyche still. Nothing will change that."

'Psyche,' said I, leaping up, 'I can't bear this any longer. You have told me so many wonders. if this is all true, I've been wrong all my life. Everything has to be begun over again. Psyche, it is true? You're not playing a game with me? Show me. Show me your palace.'

'Of course I will,' she said, rising. 'Let us go in. And don't be afraid whatever you see or hear.'

'Is it far?' said I.

She gave me a quick, astonished look. 'Far to where?' she said.

'To the palace, to this god's House.'

'Orual,' she said, beginning to tremble, 'what do you mean?'

'I too became frightened, though I had yet no notion of the truth. 'Mean?' said I. *'Where is the palace? how far have we to go to reach it?'*

She gave one loud cry. Then, with white face, staring hard into my eyes, she said, 'But this is it, Orual! It is here! You are standing on the stairs of the great gate.'

And so she was.

"Stop it! Stop it at once! There's nothing there!...you're pretending. You're trying to make yourself believe it'...Before I knew what I was doing I had her by the shoulders and was shaking her as one shakes a child.'

'So this is what he meant. You can't see it. You can't feel it. For you, it is not there at all. Oh, Maia...I am very sorry.'

Well, the encounter continues, with Orual angrily and even in fury demanding that Psyche end this foolishness. *'Have done with it, Psyche. Where is this god? Where the palace is? Nowhere—in your fancy. where is he? Show him to me? What is he like?'*

NKJ Acts 17:27 "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 "for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

NKJ Romans 10:6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) 7 or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

As Orual returns to Glome – without Psyche – something remarkable happens to her in an instant. It has grown misty and foggy – twilight has come. She goes down to the river to get a drink and as she lifted her head and looked again into the mist across the river –

“...I saw that which brought my heart into my throat. There stood the palace, grey- as all things were grey in that hour and place – but solid and motionless, wall within wall, pillar and arch and architrave, acres of it, a labyrinthine beauty. As she had said,

it was like no house ever seen in our land or age. Pinnacles and buttresses leaped up – no memories of mine, you would think, could help me to imagine them – unbelievable tall and slender, pointed and prickly as if stone were shooting out into branch and flower...And somewhere within it, asleep also, someone or something – how holy or horrible, or beautiful or strange?- with Psyche in its arms....Then as I rose...almost before I stood on my feet, the whole thing was vanished.

And now, you who read, give judgment. That moment when I either saw or thought I saw the House- does it tell against the gods or against me? Would they (if they answered) make it a part of their defense? Say it was a sign, a hint, beckoning me to answer the riddle one rather than the other? I'll not grant them that. What is the use of a sign which is itself only another riddle?...There's a divine mockery in it. They set the riddle and then allow a seeming that can't be tested and can only quicken and thicken the tormenting whirlpool of your guess-work. If they had an honest intention to guide us, why is their guidance not plain? Psyche could speak plain when she was three; do you tell me the gods have not yet come so far?'

There is the complaint of human unbelief, you see. Of men without ears. God in His creation, then in His own Son – *has spoken*. Here is His Word given us. God is revealed – the heavens have been opened, yet unbelief will not and cannot hear nor see. It accuses God, just as the dying atheist – “*why the deuce couldn't you have given us more evidence?*” But the evidence is there. *The palace is there. Men are standing right on its steps.* The kingdom of God is among us. The King Himself has come and shown us. Yet man, like Orual, will not have it and continues to put the blame for the matter upon “the gods.”

And this then is why we have it here in The Revelation –

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

To the “liberal-minded” man to whom knowledge is always a quest, never arriving, always inquiring – well, the Word of God will be so much nonsense. These words here in these letters surely must mean something quite other than what they appear, if they are Christ’s words at all. But to those who have an ear, to those who see – well, our Lord’s instruction is plain.

Orual’s Day in Court

Orual, and people like her, accuse God. They write their case against Him and relish the Day when their case will be heard in court. Oh, then they will tell Him. “I deserve. You owe me. You can tell God Himself I said that!”

Well, that Day will indeed come. But somehow, when it does, the written brief they have so diligently prepared by which they intend to charge the Lord with unrighteousness – it turns out that the words will be changed – *righted you might say, edited and corrected* – and by their own, well –

NKJ Matthew 12:36 "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Why did Orual not have eyes to see and ears to hear? The gods gave her that brief glimpse of the palace. She saw it. She met Psyche, joyful and healthy and alive. Why didn’t she then have an ear to hear? Listen in as she finally has opportunity to read her accusations against the gods, and for once finds herself speaking what she really thinks –

“Uncover her,” said the judge. [Psyche had taken to wearing a veil to

cover her ugliness. It worked so well that over the years people began to speak of the beauty of their queen].

'The old crone with her Ungit face stood naked before those countless gazers. No thread to cover me, no bowl in my hand to hold the water of death; only my book.'

'Read your complaint,' said the judge.

'I looked at the roll in my hand and saw at once that it was not the book I had written. It couldn't be; it was far too small. And too old- a little, shabby, crumpled thing, nothing like my great book that I had worked on all day, day after day...I thought I would fling it down and trample on it. I'd tell them someone had stolen my complaint and slipped this thing into my hand instead. Yet I found myself unrolling it. It was written all over inside, but the hand was not like mine. It was all a vile scribble-each stroke mean and yet savage, like the snarl in my father's voice, like the ruinous faces one could make out in the Ungit stone. A great terror and loathing came over me. I said to myself, "whatever they do to me, I will never read out this stuff. Give me back my Book." But already I heard myself reading it. And what I read out was like this:

"I know what you'll say. You will say the real gods are not at all like Ungit,

and that I was shown a real god and the house of a real god and ought to know it. Hypocrites! I do know it. As if that would heal my wounds! I could have endured it if you were things like Ungit and the Shadowbrute. You know well that I never really began to hate you until Psyche began talking of her palace and her lover and her husband. Why did you lie to me? You said a brute would devour her. Well, why didn't it? I'd have wept for her and buried what was left and built her a tomb...and...But to steal her love from me! Can it be that you really don't understand? Do you think we mortals will find you gods easier to bear if you're beautiful? I tell you that if that's true we'll find you a thousand times worse. For then (I know what beauty does) you'll lure and entice. You'll leave us nothing; nothing that's worth our keeping or taking. Those we love best—whosever's most worth loving—those are the very ones you'll pick out. Oh, I can see it happening, age after age, and growing worse and worse the more you reveal your beauty; the son turning his back on the mother and the bride on her groom, stolen away by this everlasting calling, calling, calling of the gods. Taken where we can't follow. It would be far better for us if you were foul and ravening. We'd rather you drank their blood than stole their hearts. We'd rather they were ours and dead than yours and made immortal. But to steal

her love from me, to make her see things I couldn't see...oh, you'll say (you've been whispering it to me these forty years) that I'd signs enough her palace was real, could have known the truth if I'd wanted. But how could I want to know it? Tell me that. The girl was mine. What right had you to steal her away into your dreadful heights? You'll say I was jealous. Jealous of Psyche? Not while she was mine. If you'd gone the other way to work—if it was my eyes you had opened—you'd soon have seen how I would have shown her and told her and taught her and led her up to my level. But to hear a chit of a girl who had (or ought to have had) no thought in her head that I'd not put there, setting up for a seer and a prophetess and next thing to a goddess...how could one endure it? That's why it makes no difference whether you're fair or foul. That there should be gods at all, there's our misery and bitter wrong. There's no room for you and us in the same world. You're a tree in whose shadow we can't thrive. We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no one else had any right to her.

'Oh, you'll say you took her away into bliss and joy such as I could never have given her, and I ought to have been glad of it for her sake. Why? What should I care for some horrible, new happiness which I hadn't given

her and which separated her from me? Do you think I wanted her to be happy, that way? It would have been better if I'd seen the Brute tear her in pieces before my eyes. You stole her to make her happy, did you?...Did you ever remember whose the girl was? She was mine. Mine!...'.

"Enough," said the Judge.

'There was utter silence all around me...Now I knew that I had been reading it over and over – perhaps a dozen times. And the voice I read it in was strange to my ears. There was given to me a certainty that this, at last, was my real voice.

At last the judge spoke.

'Are you answered?' he said.

'Yes,' said I."

Till we have faces, you see. Until the veil we hide behind is taken off, not until then do we have ears to hear Christ speak. Not until WE speak truly shall we hear His truth spoken. Not until WE want truth shall we hear the truth. Orual, like every sinner, found out that she did not have ears to hear the gods *because she did not want to hear the gods*. She hated them because they refused to let her be a god. The palace appears in the mist, unmistakably divine, yet men turn a

blind eye and deaf ear to it because they do not want to face the One who dwells within.

And do we begin to better understand why Christ's own family resented Him? Why it is that our "loved ones" so often end hating God for saving one of their own? Because in reality, the sinful human heart is so incredibly selfish, it would prefer to have the object of its "love" in hell with them, miserable forever, than to see them enjoying eternal bliss and happiness with Christ in a heaven where sinners do not rule and possess. How often have we seen this. Here is a wife who prays and prays and asks for prayer. Oh, if the Lord would only save her husband. And then, when He does – the result is not at all what she imagined nor desired.

Conclusion

Here is the end of the matter then – *do you have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches?* Do we want to learn that Christ rules His people? Do we want to hear His admonishment to us? Do we want to hear Him, even if we find out that we are wretched and poor and blind and naked and need to repent? It turns out that ear trouble is really heart trouble.

Do we see our eyes opening, as Elisha's servant's eyes were opened –

open to see heaven? Are we listening and learning and overcoming because Christ is showing us – *things in this life are very rarely as they seem. They are shadows – the reality lies there – in heaven with Christ.* Because surely, one growing sign of an ear that hears the Spirit speaking to the churches, surely that sign will be an increasing longing for heaven, and a decreasing tie to this world. There will be a growing obedience to Christ's commands, even if such obedience be costly to the point of death.

And there will be a progressive *unveiling.* A dropping of sham and façade. Because as we hear Christ speak more and more clearly, we will surely see more and more clearly just what we are and in what desperate need of Him we stand in.

Do we have an ear to hear? Well, if we would, then we must have faces. We must drop the things we hide behind, the characters that we put on to hide the ugliness of our self – we must be moving toward facing full-front, open and laid bare, Christ Himself. Because, people –

“Either the layers are stripped off now in truth and honesty with Christ progressively changing us – or the sham will be ripped away from us on that Day. For one thing is certain. Either we will stand before the Lord

clothed in the righteousness of Christ, all our old rags being gone. Or, we will stand before that terrible holiness entirely naked.”

Tell me, tell me – does the following story have any resemblance to you. I don't mean the precise details. I mean the thing itself – the hiding, the pretending.

[Taken from Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, by Paul David Tripp, pp 161-163]

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