

05/27/12

Developing Shiny Ears

- I'd like to begin our time this morning by asking you a question...
 - what would happen if Sunday after Sunday it was pretty obvious that I or one of the other pastors had not prepared before we got up to speak to you?...
 - so there's no handout, there's no power-point, there's no attempt to theme the service in a particular way...I'm just sort of rambling around with whatever pops in my head next...
 - would that eventually be a problem?...the fact that I was clearly not prepared...
 - or maybe it came out in the delivery...where I really wasn't particularly interested in what we were talking about...even though I was doing the talking...
 - but it was just going through the motions...
 - or I kept getting distracted, so while you're turning to your place in the Bible—I was checking messages on my cell phone, or sending a text, or updating my FB status...
 - or maybe someone actually calls me during the service and I went ahead and took the call?...where I backed away from the pulpit and told you this would just take a few minutes?...
 - at some point, would my job be in jeopardy for that?...and I probably don't want to know how many minutes of grace I would get...but a church family has every reason to expect the pastor to be prepared to deliver the word...
 - he may not be smart, he may not be handsome, he may not be eloquent...he may not be a lot of things that might come in handy in this process...but we would all say, there's certainly no excuse for not being prepared...
 - can we all agree to that?...
- Good...now let me ask you this – does that door swing both ways?...
 - Do people who hear messages from the Word of God have any responsibility in the matter?...
 - Should you go through a process of preparation as well?...
 - And if it's acceptable for you to expect me to be ready...and I certainly agree that it is...is it acceptable for the pastor to expect the same level of preparation?...
- assuming you would answer that with a yes (because I know you would)...
 - how much time did you put into preparing for this morning's message?...
 - how much time would you typically invest?...
 - when does your preparation process begin?
 - what does it involve?...
- Now, let's push it one step further...Our church's theme this year...is **Building Core Strength**
 - emphasized in verses like - **Psalm 138:3 - On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul...**that's it—core strength...
- we're focusing on this theme especially in three specific areas during 2012...
 - 1. Shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service.**
 - 2. Planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette.**
 - 3. Preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process in 2013.**

- My question now is – is there any relationship between our core strength...either as individuals and/or as a church...and this issue of everybody in the family being prepared to receive the Word of God together?...I think there probably is, don't you...that's why this morning we want to talk about **Building Core Strength by Developing Shiny Ears...**
- I understand that one will probably need some explaining....so please open your Bible to Luke chapter 8...page 51 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- We're back now in our verse by verse study of the gospel of Luke...
- We took a six week hiatus during the specialty series we did on getting to core of the things that matter most...but now we're back in the study we began back in February...
- So if you're wondering based on what I said in the introduction – OK – who used their smart phone during church last Sunday – that's not the way we do things around here...
 - In fact that's one of the many reasons I enjoy doing expository messages through extended places in the Word of God...
 - No one could say – well, PV is just all over one his hobby horses because of something that someone did this week and he is too afraid to go deal with it one on one...
 - No...I'm talking about this today because it just happens to be the next subject in the text...
 - but I think we'll all agree – it's a very, very, important one...

- Read Luke 8:1-18

- so, we're talking about Building Core Strength by Developing Shiny Ears...
- and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 ways to have a life that shines for God.**

I. Shine by Relating to People the Way Jesus Did.

- the way we're structuring all of this today is pointing to the end of the passage in verse 16...this entire matter of putting your light on a lampstand...
- **v. 8:16 - ...but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light**
- please tell me we're all about that...
- and we know that making that happen involves the way we listen to the Word...because when we get down to verse 18, we read...
- **v. 8:18 – So take care how you listen...**
- that's the point of this rather zany title – an attempt to connect the issue of shining our lights brightly with the way we listen to the Word...
- but Luke sets all of this up the way he does on purpose...
- he says in...
- **v. 8:1 – soon afterwards**
- ...and I realize that since it's been nearly 2 months since we were in this book, we may not remember where we left off...but if you glance up at the end of the previous chapter, you'll be reminded of...
- A. The context of the compassionate woman.**
 - even though Simon the Pharisee judged her, and rejected her...Jesus did the polar opposite...
 - He accepted her act of adoration and worship....and told her that her sins had been forgiven, and that her faith had saved her, and that she could go in peace...
- that's part of listening – is truly wanting to hear what the person has to say because His message is so unique...

- we love that about the Scripture – don't we?...
- God surprises us at practically every turn...
- then the text says that Jesus just went from city to city, and village to village...and he had His twelve disciples with Him...

B. Remember that God often uses unexpected people in the accomplishment of His plan.

- v. 1 – The twelve were with Him...

- please just sit back and think about how a group of human beings would have put the plan together to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ around the world...
- and I'm fairly certain it wouldn't have included going to little villages...and it certainly wouldn't have included using the 12 stooges...
- we would have gone to the big cities and tried to woo the popular, powerful religious leaders of the day...
- but Luke is pointing out that God delights in using common, ordinary people to do His work...

- that's why Paul would later say...

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 - For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God

- and what is the impact of that to what we're thinking about this am...
- you may have taken the position that...you don't really need to listen carefully to the Word of God...or learn the Word of God...
 - because you think you're not the kind of person God would ever use anyway...
 - you're not one of the beautiful people...or one of the outspoken people...
 - you're not the popular one or whatever...
 - so you can kind of coast along when it comes to listening to the Word and learning the Word because you're not the kind of person God would ever use anyway...
- I hope you'll take notice of what Luke is saying here...Jesus just headed off to the little villages with his rag tag group of disciples – and before this was all over, this little group was being accused of "turning the world upside down..."
- now it really gets amazing when you read this next portion...which helps us...

C. Remember that God often assembles a team whose very makeup shocks the watching world.

- what we've said about the disciples is instructive...but the next piece is amazing...
- **Luke 8:2-3 - and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.**

- history tells us that rabbis never traveled like this...with a group of women and certainly not ones that in some cases had rather sordid pasts...

- but Jesus wasn't just a typical Jewish teacher...
 - time doesn't allow us to think about each person named in verses 2-3, but the one that fascinates me the most is the woman named Susanna...
 - because do you know what we know about her?...absolutely nothing...
 - don't you love that?...and yet Jesus included her, and Mary Magdalene, and "Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward", etc to be part of his ministry team...
 - and when somebody like that is teaching...you want to listen to His Word...because the way He relates to people is so unique...
- so, people start coming from the various cities...and Jesus tells them a parable...an earthly story with a heavenly meaning...
- Jesus often taught that way...for several reasons...to make the message more understandable and memorable for those who really wanted to hear...but also hidden from those who had already rejected Him as their Messiah and Savior...
 - and the point of parable...when understand in its context of what is said before and after is...

II. Shine by Preparing Your Heart Regularly to Hear from God.

- now, I would encourage you, as we walk down through these four options...to be asking yourself...what kind of heart do I typically bring to church?....
- what kind of heart do I typically bring to my personal devotional time?...
- what kind of heart do I typically bring to other occasions where the Word of God is taught?...
- because just like the pastor is responsible to prepare the message...the listeners are responsible to prepare their hearts...
- so please think about the options...

A. Unlike the hard soil.

- In Bible times a landowner would broadcast seed all over the place...
 - and some of it invariably would end up on the hard paths in between the fields or right next to them...
 - that's the point of –
 - **v. 8:5 - some fell beside the road...**
- and please notice what Luke recorded at the end of verse 8...
- **v. 8:8 – As he said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let Him hear."**
 - and the idea is – he said that repeatedly...
- so as He talked about this hard soil...he would call out...if anyone has ears to hear about that, let him hear...
- hear what?...the notion that the kind of heart you typically bring to the process is as hard as a rock...because you allowed it to be that way...
- later when Jesus was explaining all of this to the disciples, He said...
- **v. 8:12 – Those beside the road are those who have heard, then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.**

- and you undoubtedly know people like this...they do not want to hear the Word of God....or they do not want to hear certain parts of the Word of God
- and we may have a few people who come to church like that...
- you say, why would anybody come to church if their heart is like that?
- people come to church for all kinds of reasons—some of them not so good...
- some people come just to keep peace in the house...so they have the "my wife drug me here by my ear and when is this going to be done" look?...
- well, the apostle Paul himself could preach that morning and an individual like that isn't going to be impacted...not because of the condition of the sermon but because of the condition of the heart...
- other people come to a church like this because it's the respectable thing to do in the community...that's really a problem down south...I'm not sure it's as much an issue here...
- some people come because it's a pool of potential business...they're here for money...
- others come because they think the girls are cute...there are all kinds of crazy reasons why people come to church...
- and you might say – well, if that's me, what should I do?...
- and the first answer is – to admit it before God and repent – turn around right away while you have the opportunity to do so...
- and to admit the pride and rebellion of your heart and ask Him to begin softening you...
- and also to acknowledge how serious an issue this is – Jesus said that the devil comes and takes away the Word....our adversary hates the Word and he will do everything in his power to take it away from any person's heart and life...
 - this is anything but a laughing matter...
- and you might say – well, what if I know someone like this?...there might be a point at which it becomes non-productive to keep talking to someone about Scripture—the Bible uses that fascinating phrase – don't cast pearls before swine...
 - but we ought to be very, very careful about assigning someone to that condition...
 - the best approach would be to live for God yourself and try to find opportunities to winsomely speak God's Word...
- now, you might say – I don't think my heart is like that – that's great news...but let's keep moving....

B. Unlike the rocky soil.

- **v. 8:6 – Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.**
- The Lord explained that condition later when He said...
- **v. 8:13 – Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.**
- when we hear this one, we might think of ground that has stones mixed in with it....
- that's not the picture here – the stones would have been turned up by the plow and removed in this kind of field...

- the idea here is a field that had bedrock just under the surface of the ground....
- so there was dirt – it wasn't very deep...
- and so it looks like the seed was accepted...there was even joy...
 - but there's no follow through...as soon as a temptation comes, the person falls away...

- I John 2:3 – By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

- and you can look around the room this morning and see a lot of people whose hearts are not like rocky soil...
 - because they persevere...
 - they're not perfect...but they are learning to put sinful temptation behind them...
- so what does the preparation process look like?...
 - part of it is praying in advance of the services (and other opportunities to hear/read the Word) and asking the Lord to help you honestly want to hear the Scriptures...
 - and to humbly be prepared to accept confrontation if that is what is needed...
 - and to acknowledge that you are ready to repent of anything God's Word may reveal...
 - and you're ready to change to become more like Christ...

- it's like getting the tiller out and plowing up the soil before coming into the church-house...
 - do you do that?...
 - do you do that faithfully?...
 - do you do that deeply?...

- how you listen during the message – concentrating, admitting—not arguing, etc
- what you do after the message...
 - taking time afterward....

- what are the specific ways I need to rejoice as a result of what I learned about God today?...
- what are the specific ways I need to change?...
- what other resources do I need to keep heading in the right direction...

- you can almost hear the sound of the tiller doing its work on that person's heart...

- now, what's the third possibility....

C. Unlike the thorny soil.

- this is an entirely different condition...

- v. 8:7 – Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out.

- v. 8:14 – The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

- the Word in this case isn't crowded out by suffering—it crowded out by pleasure...

- this is why Jesus had said in the sermon on the mount – **Matthew 6:24 – You cannot serve God and money.**
- Paul said – **1 Timothy 6:9 – Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.**
- it's not that money is bad in and of itself---it's the love of money that is the root of all evil...
- but when a person organizes their life around material things, there is no place, or time, or even joy left for the things of God...

D. Like the good ground.

- **8:8 – Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.**
- **8:15 – But the seed that is in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.**

- now, when you choose to live that way...where does that take you...

III. Shine by Allowing Your Listening Heart to Produce a Vibrant Witness.

A. Put it on a lampstand.

- **v. 8:16 – Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand...**

B. Encourage others to come to the light.

- **v. 8:16 - ...so that those who come in may see the light...**

C. Take care how you listen.

- **v. 8:18 – So take care how you listen...**