**Hearing but not listening** –

What’s the difference between “hearing” and “listening”?

Hearing is receiving words spoken, sufficiently, to know what actual words were spoken.

Listening is paying attention and understanding what the speaker is meaning to say.

 

When we read the gospels we observe that often when Jesus spoke, people heard his words, but didn’t understand what he was meaning to get across. However, Jesus encouraged people to pay attention to him by saying, often in a loud voice, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Jesus wants us take seriously what he says, and think about it.

Like us, the disciples of Jesus had this problem of hearing but not listening. Towards the end of his public ministry Jesus began to focus more on his chosen purpose of being on earth, which was dying for the sins of the world, by means of crucifixion, then rising again.

Over the past three years, the disciples had increasingly been experiencing and learning the importance of who Jesus was, the promised Messiah and Son of God, who was going to establish his kingdom and, that they were going to have a significant part in it. Finally, they got this part of Jesus’ mission, “You are the Christ (promised Messiah, anointed to reign), the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:16

However, Jesus knew that they needed to know how his kingdom was going to be established and knew that they had a different concept of how his kingdom functioned and their part in it.

Because their ideas were so strongly fixed, due to “listening” from selfish aspects, we are told, “From **that time on** Jesus **began** to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things”, (before rising again), Matthew 16:21. This was the first of many times that Jesus tells them. However, we are also told many times, “they didn’t understand”.

What led to these thoughts? My reading today was Matthew 20: 17-28 NIV

### Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

### *17Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 18“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”*

**A Mother’s Request** 

***20Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.***

***21“What is it you want?” he asked.***

***She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”***

***22“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”***

***“We can,” they answered.***

***23Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”***

***24When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

This was not the first time that the disciples don’t seem correctly impacted by what Jesus is telling them.

- Shortly before while in Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:21-23), Peter is telling Jesus that it’s not a good idea what Jesus said he must do, which is go to Jerusalem, be killed and rise again.

- Then on their way back to Capernaum we learn from Mark 9:30-32, Matt 18:1-6 that Jesus kept away from the crowds so that he could get the disciples attention and get through to them that he was going to be betrayed and killed. However it seems they hadn’t been “listening” because when they arrived back in the house (Peter’s?), Jesus asked them what it was they were arguing about on the way there. They obviously weren’t focussed on Jesus’ coming death or who could be the one to betray him. Instead they had been thinking of themselves. They were arguing, who among themselves, would be the greatest in the coming kingdom. Remember, they had recently confirmed that Jesus was the king, Messiah, which means “anointed”, and they were his closest friends. And hadn’t Jesus just told them (Matt 19:28) that when He sits on his glorious throne, they would sit on thrones as well. This is the part they were listening to, not to what Jesus was telling them about his coming crucifixion; hearing but not listening.

To illustrate what true greatness was in God’s economy, Jesus placed a child among them (Matt 18;1-5, 10-14), probably one of Peter’s if they were in Peter’s house. Jesus then stressed that true greatness came not from having ambition to have power and importance for oneself but from having a belief in the value of others and from serving others. Jesus stressed that even a wayward child of God ( a lost sheep) was of worth to God and should be valued and sought after.

After Jesus ministers in Capernaum, his hometown, he makes his way for the last time to Jerusalem accompanied by his entourage of followers, including his twelve disciples, the group of devoted women who provided for them out of their own means and other followers of his.

From the passage we read earlier: (We talk about what is on our mind). Jesus was talking about the cross which was on his mind. James and John and their mother were talking about the prospect of having a special place next to Jesus in his kingdom, which was on their mind. No doubt the other ten disciples had the same ambitions. They expressed anger at John and James because of their request via their mother. Were they angry because they felt James and John had taken an opportunity to get ahead of them? Maybe they were jealous that James and John had been invited to be with Jesus while he was transfigured on the mountain. Even Peter must have been angry with James and John, even though he had experienced special closeness and experiences with Jesus, because we’re told the “ten” were angry with them.

So what we see, is the disciples jockeying for position in Christ’s kingdom while Jesus is facing his coming suffering at the hands of cruel Romans and hateful Jewish leaders.

Notice, that even when Jesus tries to get James and John to understand the significance of what they’re asking and the way to “glory”, they are so fixed on the “glory” part they are not listening to what Jesus is saying. They answer Jesus’ question by, “We can drink the cup”.

I’m sure we often do the same as the disciples were doing. We can take on board the good bits of what Jesus and the apostles are teaching but gloss over the unpalatable parts.

We all like to hear the good news.

Let me share my own selective reading of the Bible.

For many years I enjoyed what Paul tells us in Romans 8:14 -17. Paul mentions that we are children and sons of God as a result of spiritual birth through the Holy Spirit. He then points out that this logically means we share with all other sons of God in the inheritance, calling us heirs of God. But not only that, we are also co - heirs with Christ. Remember Jesus refers to us as his siblings in Hebrews 2:11. Paul says we will share in Christ’s inheritance, sharing in his glory. Amazing!

However, there is a condition. I read this passage many times but paid no attention to the condition. Vs 17b “we share in his suffering in order that we may also share in his glory”.

Paul says in Philippians 3:10 “ I want to know Christ (relationship with Christ) … and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, …”. Paul realises that sharing or fellowshipping with Christ means walking the same pathway as his, a pathway that includes suffering.

As with Christ, so for us. Hebrews 12:2 “who for the joy set before him endured the cross”.

May we not despise the sufferings on our way, which leads ultimately to sharing with Christ in glory. As Rick Warren points out, “When we remember WHY we started what we’re doing, we are motivated to persevere in what we’re doing.”