

The need to listen

Listen to me, my people; and give ear to me, O my nation. Isa 51:4

Oh, that my people would listen to me. Ps 81:13

When God tells us to do something specific, then we need to take great care to obey him. Ignoring a commandment of God is just as bad as deliberately disobeying one; we sin by omission as well as by commission. One command, which is constantly repeated throughout Scripture, is to listen, and particularly to listen to God's chosen representative. In this paper I will trace this theme, drawing out important lessons on the way.

The command given by Moses

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. Deut 18:15

Here Moses points to the ministry of the coming Messiah. Just as Israel had listened to him and had been governed by him, saints must listen to the voice of Christ.¹

The Messiah fulfils all that the Mosaic Law stood for and without the Christ there was no point to the whole Levitical system. The offerings only had any efficacy as they rested upon the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ; they had no power in themselves but enabled the offerer to show his trust in God's promised salvation. The blood of bulls and goats achieved nothing, but they helped the repentant sinner to focus his faith in God's eventual provision of a blood that cleansed the conscience (Heb 9:12-14, 10:1-10).

In the same way, the value of Moses as a type is that he points forward to the true king of the elect, Jesus Christ. So there is much to learn from the symbolism of Moses as a type. Moses is very instructive in this since he most nearly anticipates the offices and ministry of Christ; it is with good reason that Moses is the most important champion of the Jews. Moses was of a priestly family and many times acted as a priest (even though his older brother Aaron was appointed as High Priest). Moses was the most astounding prophet, granted the most intimate access to the Most High God;² by his words the whole Jewish system of worship and civil order was initiated. But Moses was very much like a king as well; his governorship of Israel was more powerful and effective than any later king and to rebel against Moses' authority led to signal destruction.

In this Moses most closely illustrates the ministry of Christ the true Prophet, Priest and King. David was a great king and a great prophet, but not a priest. Elijah was the greatest of the prophets, but was not a king or a priest. Only Moses comes close to being a true prophet, priest and king, and thus is the best type of Christ.

¹ Jn 5:46; For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. Jn 1:45; Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote -- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'

² Deut 34:10-12; But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

The typology of Moses

The typology of Moses' character

- He was of poor parentage.
- After his birth he was under threat of death from the king in a persecution that killed many other infants.
- Moses was the meekest man in all the Earth, but zealous against sin.
- Moses was a faithful servant.

The typology of Moses' ministry

- Moses was appointed by God to deliver the Lord's people from bondage.
- Moses was sent to Israel to lead them towards the Promised Land.
- Moses came down from meeting with God on high and then brought God's word to the people.
- Moses gave Israel the law, received from God; Jesus brought the Law of Christ the fulfilment and completion of the Mosaic Law.
- Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, acting as prophet, priest and king.
- Moses performed many miraculous signs.
- Moses instituted the Passover; Christ initiated the Supper.
- Moses fasted forty days and nights in the mountain alone.
- Moses sweetened the bitter waters of Marah by casting a tree into it. Jesus sweetens our tribulations by his cross.
- Moses was transfigured on Mount Sinai; Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor.

Listening to Moses

Now the people had to listen to Moses since he brought the mind of God to the nation. Those who chose to rebel against the authority of Moses paid with their lives in instant destruction. By obeying Moses, even when the command seemed insane (such as crossing the Red Sea or overwhelming the giant Canaanites) the people prospered under God's hand. Obeying Moses thus equated to obeying God since Moses was the earthly representative of God.

But Moses pointed forth away from himself and unto Christ. He explained that the true Prophet of God was to come and that those who trust in God must listen carefully to him. This is a key feature of Moses' ministry, which was not lost on the Jews (Acts 7:37) or the apostles (Acts 3:22-23). It is, therefore, of crucial importance that we listen to Christ.

Samuel - the listener

The name 'Samuel' means 'heard of God', pointing to the fact that Samuel had the ear of God and that his prayers were effectual. But Samuel also finds distinction in being a prophet who heard God at a very early age; he is renowned as the prophet, par excellence, who heard God audibly from childhood. None of his prophecies failed.

So Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel *had been* established as a prophet of the LORD. Then the LORD appeared again in Shiloh. For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD. 1 Sam 3:19-21

Samuel also comes close to Moses in terms of importance and is the only other servant who nearly manifests all three godly ministries. He was an important prophet; he was a key judge of Israel in a time of great difficulty and thus had powers close to kingship – indeed,

he appointed two kings. But he also showed some signs of priesthood, being valued for his prayer life, his teaching and, on occasion, he performed significant offerings.

He also manifests many illustrations of the Lord as a type:

- His birth was by divine promise.
- He dwelt from childhood in the Tabernacle.
- He grew up in favour of the Lord and with men (1 Sam 2:26).
- He heard the voice of God clearly.
- He was called as a prophet.
- He judged the people and called for repentance.
- He led the Israelites to defeat their enemy the Philistines.
- He established a school of prophets.
- He anointed kings.

It was Samuel who saw what God really wanted in a ruler and who told Saul his downfall with these words:

**The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him
to be commander over His people. 1 Sam 13:14**

Of course, this pointed to David, the man after God's own heart. The future king of Israel, who would be the main type of Christ as King, was to be a sensitive man who had a poetic character; a composer of psalms as well as a man of war (1 Sam 16:18), not a proud, haughty, impetuous, rebellious, lawless man like Saul.

On many occasions Samuel heard from God and knew the correct course of action when the whole nation was set on something else. On one occasion the result of Israel not seeking a word from the Lord before an action was the death of 30,000 men and the loss of the ark, resulting in twenty years of oppression from the Philistines. The result of not listening to God and pursuing independent action is always bondage.

Samuel is a picture of the person who listens to God and who thus gains authority. He knows God's mind and understands God's ways. The hearing of God is the revelation of the Word of God, 'the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD'. We see the Lord as we hear his word, and his word is the revelation of Christ the Word. As we listen to Christ in the word we get a greater revelation of God, understand his attributes more, and fathom his eternal purpose better. Hearing God is the key activity of believers. Thus when we come to the New Testament we see that God commands his people to listen to his Son.

Listen to Christ

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. **Hear Him!**'
Matt 17:5 (and Lk 9:35)

The command of the Father, in an audible voice from heaven, is that saints must hear Jesus. When Christ is transfigured to demonstrate that he is God and the fulfilment of the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), the command was to listen to him, to obey him and him alone.

Sadly, far too many of the Lord's people fail to hear him and instead listen to many other voices – the voice of tradition, of legalism, of denominational loyalty, of peer pressure, of men, of wrong dogma; the list is endless. So many fool themselves that they are serving

Christ when in fact they are serving themselves or other men. It is thus of first importance that saints realise that their first imperative is to listen to Christ – and this means studying his word to hear what he says in it.

The way of salvation lies in hearing the Lord:

Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven. Heb 12:24-25

For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' Acts 3:23-24

There is no escape, no other salvation, no other grace, no other help, if we refuse to listen to what Jesus says to us. Failing to listen to Christ results in destruction.

The apostles take this matter seriously and warn believers that it is possible to be deceived and to cease listening to Christ:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.
Heb 2:1

The nation of Israel was reprimanded by God because it did not listen to him, or his prophets, and fell into deep apostasy.

The house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to me; for all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hard-hearted. Ezek 3:7

I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!' But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods. So my fury and my anger were poured out and kindled. Jer 44:4-6

This serves as a lesson for the Lord's people today. The key to living worthy of the Lord is to listen carefully to his words. If we don't listen we won't live.

The example of Jesus

Jesus is the supreme example, of a man who listened; indeed he only said what his Father said and acted only according to God's command (Jn 5:19, 30, 8:38).

Note Heb 10:5-7: 'Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of me -- To do your will, O God.'" This is a reference to Ps 40:6-9 using the Septuagint translation (the Greek OT widely used by Jews at that time). But the Hebrew text differs slightly (these minor textual differences are common), having 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears you have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require ...'. The key difference is that the Hebrew text has 'ears' instead of 'body' (effectively meaning the same since the ears are the point of contact for the body obeying God's word). The point is that when Christ comes into the world to do God's will he has his ears opened.

The Hebrew word for 'opened' in Ps 40:6 is literally 'dug'. Some see in this a reference to the boring of a hole in a servant's ear to symbolise his desire to commit himself to

continual service in the family (Ex 21:6; Deut 15:17). Thus the digging of the ear is a symbol of consecration and voluntary commitment, eminently suitable as a picture of the consecration of Christ to God's will. However, this is not the most likely meaning of the text. The best and simplest interpretation is that when Christ was sent into the world, the Father gave him opened ears; prepared ears; a desire to listen. In describing the preparation of Christ for his mission, the key matter was to be able to listen. Thus Christ, ever desiring to hear from the Father, was rendered utterly dependent upon God's will and not his own.

Those who listen to God are those who are committed to obeying him and not doing their own thing. Listening to God, and his voice in the word, manifests a character that is dependent upon his will; consecrated to his service. Ignoring God or listening to others in preference to God is characteristic of rebellion. If we will not willingly hear his voice, we will certainly feel his chastisement.

Conclusion

The Old Testament is chiefly represented by Moses and the overall direction is to point people to the coming Prophet, to whom the Lord's people must listen. The New Testament reveals that this Prophet is actually the Son of God, though some OT prophecies give hints of this in advance. The NT revelation commands that we listen to Christ with as much force as OT imperatives, emphasising that though God spoke formerly through prophets, now he speaks to us through his Son

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Heb 1:1-2

The spokesman of God now is none other than God's own Son, the heir of all things and Lord of the universe. The command to 'hear him' is universal and the failure to listen will result in damnation.

The greatest problem in the church today is that it often does not listen to Christ. It is bent on hearing many other voices but does not concentrate on hearing the Lord himself. Time and again strategies are pursued, for oh such clever reasons, which the word of Christ forbids. Structures and practices are established that are completely contrary to the word of God; yet they are pursued vigorously. On occasion, some practices are in open contradiction to the word of Christ and yet they become shibboleths to distinguish a denomination and establish it against others; such groups openly champion disobedience. Examples of this are when churches make a certain mode of baptism the touchstone of orthodoxy and create sectarianism or when Charismatics insist on an imaginary second experience of grace in order to be a first class citizen of heaven. This is not hearing Christ at all, who says, 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives Him who sent me' (Matt 10:40). We are to receive one another and to reject a brother for no good reason is to reject Christ himself. Hearing Christ is more important than denominational loyalty.

You who fear God, listen. Acts 13:16

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