

Who Hears You?

Numbers 11:16-30, Luke 10:1-24 (ESV)

May 8, 2005

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” These strange words stand at the end of the commission which Jesus gave to the “seventy-two others,” that larger circle of disciples reaching beyond the inner circle of twelve disciples with whom we are more familiar, the “seventy-two others” whom Jesus “appointed” and “sent on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.” On the one hand, these words contain the very gospel, valid then and now, words of truth and life for them and so for us. We rejoice to hear that again. On the other hand, these words pose a tremendous question, both then and now, as to who does and who does not hear the gospel.

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Here is the good news of Jesus Christ. God has not abandoned us. God has not deserted us. God has not remained silent or hidden. God is not a puzzle or a riddle. God is not inaccessible. God has not left us behind. Instead, God has drawn near to us and come to us in the person, work, life, death, resurrection, and words of Jesus Christ. God is in Christ. God has come to us in Christ. God makes himself known in Christ. God draws us to himself in Christ. God reclaims us as his own in Christ. To know Christ is to know God. To hear the word of Christ is to hear the word of God. To love Christ is to love God. The two are one and the same.

This is good news beyond our wildest imagining. Kings and nobles have sought such knowledge. Wise men have sought such wisdom. Prophets have sought such surety. Mystics have sought such vision. And now to us it has been given. It has been given to us that God Almighty, Creator of the universe, Ruler of the world and all that is in it, Sustainer of our lives, Judge of all who are and ever will be, has come to us in Jesus Christ, both to be with us and also to be for us. What more could we ask? In him our alienation has been overcome, our gonewrongness has been set right, our sin has been forgiven, our lives have been turned around, our deepest wound has been healed, our brokenness has been made whole, and our very death has been turned into life. Thanks be to God!

Think together with me about what this means, line by line. “The one who hears you hears me.” The one who hears the proclamation of Jesus Christ yet today hears the very word and voice of Jesus Christ himself. The gospel of Jesus Christ is

communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The presence of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reality of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The work of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The glory of Jesus Christ is communicated in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The one who hears you hears me.” Do you realize what that means for the importance of our worship together, the importance of my preparation, and the importance of our attendance, participation, and hearing? Its value is incalculable. And it is promised to us.

At the same time, “the one who rejects you rejects me.” Jesus here shows us the importance of what we have just said by revealing the significance of its opposite. The one who refuses to hear the proclamation of Jesus Christ refuses to hear the very word and voice of Jesus Christ himself. The gospel of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The presence of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reality of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The work of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The love of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The glory of Jesus Christ is rejected in rejecting the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The one who rejects you rejects me.” Do you realize what that means for the importance of our worship together, the importance of my preparation, and the importance of our attendance, participation, and hearing? Again, its value is incalculable.

Now, on the outside chance that even this strengthened point has been missed, Jesus takes it up to a higher level: “The one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” In that God himself is present with us and for us in Jesus Christ, the rejection of Jesus Christ constitutes the very rejection of God himself. The rejection of Jesus Christ is the rejection of God Almighty. The rejection of Jesus Christ is the rejection of the Creator of the universe. The rejection of Jesus Christ is the rejection of the Ruler of the world and all that is in it. The rejection of Jesus Christ is the

rejection of the Sustainer of our lives. The rejection of Jesus Christ is the rejection of the Judge of all who are and ever will be. In such rejection of God our alienation would reign supreme, our gonewrongness would continue its course, our sin would not be forgiven, our lives would not be turned around, our deepest wound would be left unhealed, our brokenness would be increased, and any remaining life would be turned into death.

We must be entirely clear about this. The rejection of Jesus Christ in and of itself constitutes nothing less than, and nothing other than, the very rejection of God himself. "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." It is a matter of revelation. There is no mention here of another way to God. Any other way is ruled out. This is not fun and games. This is deadly serious business. This is real. This is life and death.

"Whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town." That is to say, even the sin of the Sodomites, as great as it was, and as explicitly condemned as was here, was not as great as the sin of rejecting the preaching of the gospel, rejecting the gospel, rejecting God's Christ, and so rejecting God Almighty himself.

Now for the question. "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." These words convey to us the very gospel of Jesus Christ, as much so today as two-thousand years ago. At the same time, these words pose a tremendous question as to who does and who does not hear the gospel, still now as well as then. This question continues to have implications for us as individuals, for us as the church, and for the world in which we live. Here it is: In that we who would be followers of Jesus Christ are sent forth to live and share the gospel, Who hears us? Who hears you? Who listens to you? We live in a world intent upon finding its own way, apart from any guidance by God. We live in a society that prides itself on its secularism, as if that were some great wisdom. So the question is raised for those of us who would follow Jesus Christ: Who hears us? Who hears you? Who listens to you? These questions continue to have implications for us as individuals, for us as the church, and for the world in which we live.

Let me make some observations and suggestions in this regard. It is likely the case for most of us that those of us here in church today as adults were brought to church by our parents. This is not the case for all of us, and I will get to that in a moment, but it is likely the case for most of us. That is to say it is most likely that we heard the gospel of the love of God in Jesus Christ from our parents, who

brought us to church. On the one hand, this becomes an occasion for gratitude. The most important thing our mothers and fathers could give us is the good news of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, this becomes an occasion for responsibility. The most important thing we can give our children is the good news of Jesus Christ. This is one group of people who hear us. This is one group of people who listen to us. This is one group of people for whom we have special responsibility, the highest responsibility, and this is one group of people whom we do not want to fail.

If you are not here in church today because of your parents, or if you have come back to church after some long absence, it is likely that you are here because some other family member, or perhaps a friend or neighbor, invited you and brought you to church. That is to say, someone whom you know and respect is probably responsible for speaking a word that helped to bring you here today. Again, on the one hand, this becomes an occasion for gratitude. The most important thing our relatives, friends, and neighbors could give us is the good news of Jesus Christ. And on the other hand, this becomes an occasion for responsibility. The most important thing we can give our relatives, friends, and neighbors is the good news of Jesus Christ. This is another group of people who hear us. This is another group of people who listen to us. This is, therefore, another group of people for whom we have special responsibility. Who hears us? Who hears you? Who listens to you? The people whom you already know are the ones most likely to hear you. The people whom you already know are the ones most likely to listen to you. The people whom you already know are the ones most likely to respond positively to your invitation to church. There may not be anyone else here who knows the people whom you know. It is up to you to speak a good word for these people to hear.

There are people in the Fan, people in the West End, people in Church Hill, people on the North Side, people on the South Side, people in Henrico, Hanover, and Chesterfield Counties, and beyond, who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. And they need to hear it from us. Research shows that this congregation includes about two-tenths-of-one-percent of the population living within a five mile radius of right here. I submit to you that God put Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church here for us to tell the other 99.8% of those people the gospel of Jesus Christ, to share with them the forgiveness of sin, and to love them with the love of God.

Beyond this, there are people around the world who have heard the good word about Jesus Christ because of the mission work of the Christian church. There are people around the world whom you and I have never met who know the gospel of Jesus Christ today because of the mission work of the Christian church. Some of them we do know. Our own Vivien Chen and Zhuping Ling are children of a church started by missionaries in China. Our own Hyung June Ji and Grace Kim are children of a church started by missionaries in Korea. Our own Grace Njoroge and

Grant Mwakio are children of a church started by missionaries in Kenya. Our own Sanny and Alpheaus Zobule and children of a church started by missionaries in the Solomon Islands. And if you think about it, all of us here today are children of a church started by missionaries. The church did not start in the United States. The church did not start in Europe. The church started closer to that part of the world from which the families of our own David Saleeba and Becky Yonan came, but even those churches were started by missionaries, perhaps one of the seventy-two about whom we have read.

All of us here today are children of a church started by missionaries. Again, on the one hand, this becomes an occasion for gratitude. We are grateful to God for the missionaries of times past who brought to us the good news of Jesus Christ. And on the other hand, this becomes an occasion for responsibility. The most important thing we can give to all the world is the good news of Jesus Christ. If we cannot go as missionaries ourselves—and we acknowledge that our own Evelyn Tower has been a missionary to Korea—if we cannot go as missionaries ourselves, we can at least support the mission of the church through our tithing, giving ten percent of our income to the work of the church. There are people around the world needing to hear, wanting to hear, and waiting to hear a good word about God. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Let us not fail in this opportunity and responsibility.

It is significant that Jesus gave this commission to his second string, that larger circle of disciples. We do not even know their names. These were not the twelve starters. But even this B team received the promise and the gospel inherent in this commission. It was not limited to the elite. And even this B team understood the importance of the question for their mission. Consider the joyous response of Jesus to their first report back to him of their ministry: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” So Jesus commissions even you and me, the church yet today, sending us out into the world and saying, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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