

Listening Ears

Many teachers have used phrases over the years to get attention such as “one, two, three, eyes on me” or “when you hear my clapping turn off your voices” or “all set? (clap, clap, clap).” My four-year-old will say “Hey, hey, Pre-K! Hey, hey, Pre-K!” sung to a cute little jingle. It’s obvious his teacher sings this to them often. What phrases have you heard that grab the attention of people?

In the Old Testament, God was frequently speaking to His people through the prophets and His chosen leaders. Deuteronomy means “second law.” In Deuteronomy, Moses is relaying to God’s people the law a second time as they get ready to enter the promised land with an entirely new generation of people, the majority of whom weren’t even alive when the law was first given at Mount Sinai back in the middle of Exodus. Near the end of Deuteronomy, Moses gives special instructions towards the Levites. Read Deuteronomy 31:24–29.

What is the context of Moses’ warning? _____

Moses is at the end of his life. He knows his time is coming to an end. He wants the people to be aware of all God has said, their promises to God, and the covenant God has made with them. He knows they will rebel. He knows their nature. He has led these people for 40 years. He knows them better than they may even know themselves. He knew their parents and possibly grandparents. He is close to 120 years old when he’s giving this word of warning. Can you imagine how much wisdom he would have after all this time of leadership, training, and closeness with God? Have you been fortunate enough to hear wisdom from those older than you who are close to the Lord? What are some of those words of wisdom that stand out to you?

What does Moses warn them about? What does he know they will do in verse 29? Will they listen?

Have you ever been around children or people younger than yourself, and you just know they are about to make some big mistakes? You can see it coming. You attempt to warn them, but they don’t listen. Or worse yet they say things like, “I would never do that!” But you know the truth, you see it on their faces, hear it in their voices, and easily discern it in their actions. It’s coming. You know it, but they just won’t stay out of trouble. Moses is attempting to let the people, all the people, including the Levites, know God is a jealous God. Earlier in Deuteronomy 4:24 it says, *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* He desires all their worship, all their

praise, all their heart. God does not share. He wants to be number one in their lives, and quite frankly, ours too. Read Deuteronomy 4:25–31. What type of prophesy does Moses give? What do the Israelites ultimately do? Does Moses’ prophesy come true? Does God abandon them?

Read Jeremiah 7:16–30. God is speaking to Jeremiah, and telling him exactly what to say to His people. What are the people doing that has enraged God?

Some of their sacrifices are made to the “queen of heaven” (v. 18). The title queen of heaven was the Babylonian name for Ishtar also known as Ashtoreth (Phoenicia), Aphrodite (Athens), Artemis (Assyrian), Hecate (Sicily), Neith (Egyptian), and Mylitta (Babylonian) (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). Interestingly enough, the title queen of heaven only occurs in the book of Jeremiah. The title is directly linked with the worship of the planet Venus, which various pagan cultures worshipped around the world for thousands of years as a fertility symbol. The title “queen of heaven” most likely comes directly from the Egyptian influence because king Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne by the Egyptian Pharaoh-Necho, otherwise the title may have been used in other books previously. Some theologians believe God was especially enraged by this worship, because it was similar to the worship that He had established for himself (*Pulpit Commentary*). Moses’ prophesy of their turning toward idol worship happens time and time again throughout the Old Testament, but until the time of Jeremiah the southern kingdom of Judah was still intact. Jeremiah lived roughly 800 years after Moses, and here it was, the people were about to all be dispersed and taken over by the Babylonians. Jeremiah is speaking the truth, and God has even warned him they are not going to listen.

What specifically are the people doing in Jeremiah 7:16–30? What is God’s response to this idolatry? Verse 28 speaks of something perishing from their lips. What is it? How does that missing thing relate to us today?

What are we listening to? Do we hear the truth? Or has truth perished from our lips and those around us? Truth is missing. All too frequently it is missing from our mouths, hearts, and lives. Read John 8:31–38. What is the truth here? What will truth set us free from?

The truth is we are slaves to sin. Most of us have never been slaves in the traditional sense of the word. However, Scripture tells us outside of Christ, we are slaves to sin, slaves to impurity, slaves to unrighteousness, slaves to debt, and slaves of the flesh.

Read Romans 6:22. What are we slaves to now? What is the fruit of this slavery? We have been purchased for a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), so we are to honor God with our bodies.

Read John 18:33-38. When Jesus is before Pilate, He tells him that everyone who is of the _____ listens to His voice.

When truth leaves us, we are only left with lies, with our sinful nature and desires. When we flee from the truth, we worship ourselves, our own false idols. What are your idols?

John 1:14 and 17 talks about Jesus coming with truth and grace. John 5:33 talks about John the Baptist witnessing to the truth. The Gospel in Christ is the truth, it is the grace we long for. It is the only thing that can truly soothe our souls on this side of heaven. We were made for worship. God desires worship in spirit and truth (John 4:22–24).

So, why all the discussion about Jeremiah, the weeping prophet? The Israelites had been seduced by the worship of false gods, graven images made by their pagan neighbors. They worshipped the stars and made things over the true God, who had a specific and blessed covenant with them. What about us? Do we worship God faithfully? Do we stray from the worship of the true God toward worshipping things created or in the skies above? Many of us have been guilty of putting our trust in our bank accounts, our health, our family, our work, our knowledge, our understanding, sports, technology, or creature comforts over the Creator of all these things.

When the Truth is on our lips, our focus is on who God is, what He has done, and where He is leading us. But when we focus on ourselves, the truth is not our focus. In 1 John 1:8, we are reminded that when we claim to be without sin, the truth is not in us, but verse 9 reminds us, *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Even when the Old Testament Israelites strayed from God, they eventually repented and returned to God. Sadly, it was not everyone, and many only paid lip service (look at the minor prophets for more on this.) So, what about you? Are you listening to God’s Word? Are you sincerely seeking first God’s kingdom? Are you faithfully repentant and living in a manner worthy of the calling which God has placed on your life? Read Micah 6:8. It gives us a simplified statement of how God wants us to live. What does He want from us? What does Jesus add to this in Matthew 22:36–40?

May God bless you as you listen and seek after Him, following the Truth to peace and love of your neighbor, worshipping the true God in spirit and truth amidst a pagan culture.

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