

Our Need Is to Hear.

Text: Isa 29:17-24

Suggested Hymns:

500, 217, 498, 265, 243

1) A brief overview of the text

2) The deaf cannot hear

3) The deaf shall hear

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 29:17–24, *¹⁷ Is it not yet a very little while Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?*

¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. ¹⁹ The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰ For the terrible one is brought to nothing, The scornful one is consumed, And all who watch for iniquity are cut off— ²¹ Who make a man an offender by a word, And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, And turn aside the just by empty words.

²² Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: “Jacob shall not now be ashamed, Nor shall his face now grow pale; ²³ But when he sees his children, The work of My hands, in his midst, They will hallow My name, And hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And fear the God of Israel. ²⁴ These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine.” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The first secret of “*true and laudable service*” of God is to ask. The second is to hear.

But we ask because we have heard, and we ask in order to hear. Faith comes by hearing, by hearing the Word of God; and even hearing itself comes by the Word, by God’s working in us.

We would not know sin except the Law tells us about it. We would not know the Saviour except the Gospel puts us on to Christ. “Know” is a very mental word. “Faith” is closer to the issue.

The relationship we have been given by the grace of God through His Son Jesus is basic to our worship. No one can say that Jesus is the Lord except through the Holy Spirit. The faith that accepts all that God has done is the foundation of all our asking and doing.

That faith is generated by our baptism, nurtured by our receiving the body and the blood of the Lord, and it is sustained by hearing the Word of God. It is a vital task, this hearing, if we are to become better church men, women, and Children.

Our liturgy is something to be done. Most of us do not do our listening liturgy very well. Examine your listening right now — have the words from the Scriptures reached you during this Service? Do you recall what they were about? Did you relate them to your own situation? Did you move into conversation with God about them so that you were moved by them, to praise, to confess, and to “*highly resolve*”?

If God chooses to work faith in us by water, it is essential that we get wet; if He decides to nurture us by eating and drinking, we must swallow hard; if His way of sustaining faith is through words, then our need is to hear! Therefore our theme for today is “*Our need is to hear.*” May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Brief Overview Of The Text

Our text is a prophecy of salvation recorded in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. It looks ahead to the time of the New Testament when inadequacies and injustices will be miraculously replaced by joy and godliness.

It will be as though the cedars of Lebanon started bearing fruit like vines and fruit-trees, and the vines and fruit-trees of Carmel began to produce timber like the forests of Lebanon.¹ The Hebrew for “*fruitful field*” is *carmel*, and in this context it surely refers to Israel’s most fertile and beautiful mountain range.²

Although the scope of this prophecy is wider than the three judgement prophecies that precede it, the continuity is unmistakable. The sealed book³ will be opened;⁴ the eyes of the blind⁵ shall see;⁶ those who challenged the almighty

power of the Creator⁷ will look on the work of His hands and stand in awe of Him;⁸ those who err in spirit⁹ will come to understanding,¹⁰ and those who murmur against the Lord¹¹ will accept instruction.¹²

Our text says, ¹⁹ *The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.* ²⁰ *For the terrible one is brought to nothing, The scornful one is consumed, And all who watch for iniquity are cut off.* With these words a new but very familiar subject is introduced: namely, the exaltation of the poor and needy, and the defeat of the ruthless, the scoffers and the wicked.

The God who “*redeemed Abraham*” will act again. As Abraham was rescued from the idolatry of Mesopotamia,¹³ and from the ordeal of having to slay his own son,¹⁴ so now his descendants, the sons of Jacob, will be rescued from shame and error. Then Israel will worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to quote Proverbs 9:5–6, ⁵ *“Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed.* ⁶ *Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.* ¹⁵

So we can see that God still works to bring people to faith even in a world that can be characterised as sinful, rebellious, and inhospitable to the Gospel.

God can make a wonderful and marvellous change in the human heart. The first verse suggests such a change. Of course, Isaiah is not talking about physical changes where God will turn dry and arid Lebanon into a green and beautiful field and turn even a fertile field into a dense and lush forest.

No, God’s prophet is talking about spiritual changes. That is clear when He refers to the deaf and the blind. The spiritually blind, deaf, and needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah refers to “*the words of the book.*” But in these passages the deaf hear and understand its message. God’s Word causes such a change. The message of the scroll is the Gospel, and it brings light to the gloom and darkness of human sin and death.

The Gospel changes hearts so that they rejoice in *the Holy One of Israel*. Isaiah is fond of that term for God. Isaiah encountered this Holy One of Israel in the temple when the door-posts shook and the angels sang, “*Holy, holy, holy is*

the LORD Almighty."¹⁶ It is a miracle of God's power that sinful human hearts are turned from sin and rebellion against the Lord - to faith, love, and joy in the Lord. This miracle occurs through the means of grace — the Word and the Sacraments.

Judgement will come on all unbelievers and for them, there is no hope. True, they may enjoy success at times in the world. In Judah, the ruthless, the mockers, and the dishonest persisted in their activities even in the courts. Eventually, however, judgement does come, and there will be a change for them too. Instead of success, fortune, and prominence, they will perish in the heat of God's wrath.

God's faithful people always look ahead. They know that God will make everything right in the end. They may suffer. Their hearts may grow weary and faint. Their faces may grow pale with troubles, but God's faithful people are optimistic about the future. In Christ the future is secure.

Paul encouraged the congregation in Rome to look forward with these words, Romans 8:18, ¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Isaiah pointed the believers of his day ahead too. The day will come when sin will disappear and all the believers will stand before the great God of grace. As evil as the world of Isaiah had become, yet a remnant remained faithful to the Lord. That faithful remnant would stand in awe of the God of Israel and rejoice in His blessings.

These few verses proclaim the great triumph of the Gospel. Through the Gospel, God will raise up new generations of believers. The Gospel will continue to change human hearts so they no longer complain, but eagerly accept the instruction of God. The Holy Spirit will continue to use the Gospel to call, gather, and enlighten believers. Those believers will confess their faith in the Holy One of Jacob and stand in awe of all God's grace and mercy.

2. The Deaf Cannot Hear

Let us begin with a very obvious statement — the deaf cannot hear. It is important to state because, like the man in the Gospel,¹⁷ when a man cannot hear, he will also have *"an impediment in his speech"* — in our terms, the man who cannot hear will certainly be impeded in his worship.

Unable to Hear

The man in the Gospel could not hear. His problem was such that something had to be done about his ears. We are not told exactly what his physical situation was. Perhaps a skilled surgeon of our day could have been able to restore his hearing as well as Jesus did. But the miracle of healing is not the most important thing for us to be hearing in this account.

People of that day were quite sure that somebody's sin was at the root of things like blindness and deafness, and sicknesses like palsy and leprosy.

The Old Testament foretells of the day of the Messiah used healings to describe how God the King would begin to move in with His rule. Words like those of the text pictured His kingdom: *“¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. ¹⁹ The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.”*

Unwilling to Hear

The deafness of Israel to whom Isaiah wrote had little to do with their ears. The deafness of those who are unwilling to listen is even more of a catastrophe. It is an indication of their rebellion against God. It is the blocking out of the way God would wish to move in to change them, to forgive them.

The refusal to hear the Word of God brought about Israel's terrible troubles, exile, and the desolation of their homeland, and enslavement to *“the terrible one and the scornful”* as mentioned in our text. God called to them, pleaded with them, but they would not hear.

We are in the Good Physician's presence right at this moment. If we are really hearing, we know that a diagnosis of our own response to the Word of God is being laid out before us in words. God's diagnosis in every Worship Service is a challenge to our hearing.

We need to hear Him. And often we simply watch the word in the lessons and sermon go by, like a man who idly watches the screen of an electrocardiogram (ECG) looking at the ups and downs of his heartbeat, curious but not comprehending.

What is even worse — and does this not describe us all too often — is a realisation of the diagnosis and then a rejection. *“It’s really not that bad. All I need is a little hearing aid. Fasten something in my ear and give me a small battery. Then I can hear well enough, well enough at least to get by.”*

“Get your fingers out of my ears!” Imagine the deaf man garbling that through his impediment. Realise our saying such a thing, clearly, faithlessly, angrily, pushes the Saviour away. The deaf cannot hear.

We all too often will not hear. The hearing aid we need is first aid, in a very original sense, the aid that only the Creator who first made us can give. We need a new touch by the finger of God that can change us into hearers of the Word. And we need it now — we need it each time the Word of God reaches us.

3. The Deaf Shall Hear

The second part of the Word in this sermon is just as simple a statement as the first was. “The deaf cannot hear” is where we began. “The deaf shall hear” is where we make our new beginning.

By Friends and The Friend

The way it happened for the deaf man in the Gospel recalls how it has happened for us. He had friends, for one thing. They helped him to understand that there was more to life than what he had been able to comprehend.

There were birds to hear and songs to sing, and the deaf man could understand his need because his friends wanted to bring him to Jesus. But there was a vital element in his healing that came before his having friends. He had a Friend. God cared. It was because God cared that Jesus was there to heal.

The loving Father sent His Son to take on our humanity, to bear its sorrows and griefs, and then Himself to hear the judgement of death, which we deserved, spoken against Him. But that was not the end. When they laid Jesus in the grave, deaf in death, the voice of God spoke again, “Let there be life!”

And God made Jesus alive, and by that resurrection life, He released the power of life for all people into the world. The power to hear, and beyond that, having heard, the power to believe and, having believed, the power to live to God, is available to all people, is offered now in this moment of hearing the Word, to each one of us. Do we hear?

By the Power of Christ

Our ability to hear is God-given. God touches us through the power of His Son and through His Holy Spirit. But this ability to hear must be utilised by us in the power of our new life. When God's Son takes His fingers out of our ears, we have the terrible option of quickly thrusting our own fingers into those healed ears to block out the sound of His Word.

Even more dangerously possible for us is the ability to block out the Word by closing our inner ears. By our own reluctance to enter into the new pattern of life, we can effectively reject God's changing power.

Here is where the significance of asking becomes apparent once more. The Holy Spirit has touched our tongues, removed the impediment so that we can speak plainly. The Lord gives us the example. He looked up to heaven, He turned to the heavenly Friend, and prayed, "***Be opened.***"

That is the secret of how the deaf shall hear in the liturgy. We consciously converse with God as a lesson is read, and as a sermon is preached. We pray, "*Lord, open Thou my heart to hear!*"¹⁸ And then with open ears, open hearts, we receive for ourselves the warning of deafness, we gratefully accept the new Word of resurrection life, we become the men, women, and children whose lives have been changed by Jesus who does all things well.

God's grace is sufficient for us as for Paul. We read in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, ⁷ *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.* ⁸ *Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*

⁹ *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* ¹⁰ *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

In conclusion, God's power is made perfect when, having heard the Word about our weakness, we hear the Word of grace. The power of Christ rests on us. The deaf hear, the dumb speak, and as our text says, "¹⁹ *The humble also*

shall increase their joy in the LORD, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.” Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Kings 5:8–10

² e.g. Isa 35:2; Jer. 50:19; Song of S. 7:5

³ vv. 11–12

⁴ v. 18

⁵ vv. 9–10

⁶ v. 18

⁷ v. 16

⁸ v. 23

⁹ v. 10

¹⁰ v. 24

¹¹ vv. 15–16

¹² v. 24

¹³ Josh. 24:2

¹⁴ Gen. 22; Wisdom of Solomon 10:5; Ecclesiasticus 44:20

¹⁵ Sawyer, J. F. A. (2001, c1984). Isaiah : Volume 1. The Daily study Bible series (243). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

¹⁶ Isa 6:3

¹⁷ Mark 7:31-37

¹⁸ Hymn 498