

Series: The Crucial Commandment
Title: The Listening Heart
Text: Mark 4:1-20
Time: 1/29/2012 (a.m.)

Introduction

A Native American was walking in downtown New York City alongside a friend who was a resident of the city. Right in the centre of Manhattan, the Native American seized his friend's arm and whispered, "Wait! I can hear a cricket."

His friend replied "Come on! A cricket? Man, this is downtown New York."

He persisted, "No, seriously, I really can hear a cricket."

"It's impossible!" the New Yorker replied. "You can't hear a cricket! There are taxis going by. Horns are honkin'. People are screamin' at each other. Brakes are screeching. Both sides of the street filled with people. Cash registers are clanging away. Subways are roaring beneath us. You can't possibly hear a cricket!"

The Native American insisted, "Wait a minute!" he said and led his friend, the New Yorker along, slowly. They stopped, and the Native American walked down to the end of the block, went across the street, looked around, cocked his head to one side, but couldn't find it. He went across another street, and there in a large cement planter where a tree was growing, he dug into the mulch and found the cricket.

"See!" he yelled, as he held the insect high above his head.

His friend walked across the street, marvelling, "How in the world could it be that you heard a cricket in the middle of downtown busy Manhattan?"

The Native American said, "Well, my ears are different from yours. It simply depends on what you're listening to. Here, let me show you." And he reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful of change--a couple of quarters, three or four nickels, and some dimes and pennies. Then he said, "Now watch." He held the coins waist high and dropped them to the sidewalk. Every head within a block turned around and looked in the direction of the Native American.

2. The obvious question is, what have our ears been trained to hear?
3. In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches us about the significance of listening and allowing the Word of God to take root in our life, in depth.
4. Jesus interprets the meaning of the different kinds of soil; He connects each one to hearing the Word.
5. There are three kinds of soil that disrupt our listening and one that is productive.

1. The Hurried Heart (4:14-15)

1. The farmers' fields in ancient Palestine were long, narrow, often serpentine strips divided by little paths which became beaten as hard as pavement by the feet, hooves, and wheels

of those who used them. The seeds merely bounced on these paths or were swept back and forth by the wind. These beaten paths represent the hardened hearts.

2. Their own busy comings and goings and the frenetic traffic of life have so hardened them that nothing of God's truth stirs them.

3. The Word of God can only penetrate to the extent that we stop, spend time in quiet meditation, contemplating its meaning.

4. "Our adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness', he will rest satisfied."
(Richard Foster, Celebration of Disciple)

5. "Mazungu" is Swahili for "white man," it literally means "one who spins around."

2. The Shallow Heart (4:16-17)

1. In Palestine much of the land is a thin two- or three-inch veneer of soil over a limestone bedrock. Here some of the seed falls, the warm sun quickly heats the seed in the shallow soil, and the seeds sprout in exciting growth. But then the sun beats down, the plant's roots meet the bedrock, and it withers and dies.

2. Jesus is describing those who make an emotional profession of faith and with great enthusiasm seem to thrive under the spotlight of new birth but then they encounter the process of transformation which often travels on the road of adversity.

3. We want the benefits, but not the demands. We want Christianity without the cross.

4. "Not everything can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."
(James Baldwin)

5. The biblical word for change or growth is repentance, which literally means to have a change of mind, to think differently, to have a second thought that corrects a first thought.

6. Shallow hearted people want to look good without actually having to be good; to want what God can do without wanting God Himself.

3. The Divided Heart (4:18-19)

1. Here the thornbushes are not visible because they have been burned off the surface, but their roots are intact. When the seed is sown on this soil, then watered and germinated, the entrenched thorns also sprout and grow with a strong violence, choking out the grain before it can produce any fruit.

2. The thorns, Jesus explained, represented "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things." This portrayed a divided heart; a heart divided by irreconcilable loyalties. This heart makes some gestures toward Christ, but "the worries of this life" (literally, "the distractions of this age") draw it back.

3. It is pulled in other directions, leaving no room for spiritual concerns. "The deceitfulness of wealth" ("keeping up with the Joneses") draws them with the promise of great good. This

involves buying things you do not need, to impress people you do not like, with money you do not have.

4. This is a divided heart—like the heart of the girl to which a young man once proposed. He said, “Darling, I want you to know that I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to marry me. I’m not rich. I don’t have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Brown, but I do love you with all my heart.” She thought for a minute and then replied, “I love you with all my heart, too, but tell me more about Johnny Brown.”

5. Is Jesus the attraction or the distraction in your life?

4. The Listening Heart (4:20)

1. The Listening Heart is a heart that allows God’s Word to take deep root in it. It produces first a harvest of character: **Galatians 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Then it produces a harvest of good works: **Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

2. For us to develop this listening heart we must become self-aware. In other words, remain in reality, not in fantasy land about ourselves. Paul put it like this, **Romans 12:3** For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

3. John Calvin writes, “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God.”

4. How do we develop this deeper knowledge of God and ourselves?

- **Place our life next to the truth of scripture...** Our attitude needs to be “Lord show me the truth about myself from Your word.”
2 Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

James 1:22–24 (The Message)

²² Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. *Act on what you hear!* ²³ Those who hear and don’t act are like those who glance in the mirror, ²⁴ walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

- **Develop the discipline of meditation in order to listen deeply**
Psalms 62:1 My soul *waits* in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation.

Most of us are intimidated by the thought of sitting in silence for an extended period. One of the things that silent meditation allows is examination. In Adele Calhoun’s book “Spiritual Disciplines Handbook” she encourages us to examine where we have been in order to prepare for effective service in the present and future. Here are some questions she suggests that we ask the Lord:

- For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?
- When did I give and receive love today? When did I fail to give and receive love?

- What was the most life-giving and life-discouraging part of my day?
- **Build relationships with trusted believers who will help you live in truth**
- **Learn to take faith risk by putting ourselves in uncomfortable places**
As long as we remain in the safe confines of what is comfortable, only minimal growth will occur. Biblical growth compels us to go to territory we have not been before.
Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

If God seems distant and dull, it is probably because we have become distant and dull, God meets us in the stretch.