

John 8:47

“He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

I have chosen this text on this occasion both for your comfort and for your admonition. For your comfort – because it is only on the basis that the departed heard God’s Word (*even though it was the 11th hour*) that we can therefore hope that he died in faith in Jesus. For your admonition – because no one can be saved who does not hear God’s Word, for: **“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17**

There indeed are many people who do not hear the Word of God. Are these people *“not of God”*? Doesn’t God’s judgment seem rather harsh? Many we know seem so good and true and sincere, but they do not hear the Word of God. Are these people *“not of God”*? God says that they are *“not of God”* if they do not hear his Word. We understand God’s judgment better when we consider what a wicked thing such people are doing. That is the reason I spoke very plainly to the departed in his last hours, showing him from God’s holy law that he had in his lifetime committed a very serious sin by despising God’s Word. It is God’s law that must reveal to us our true nature and character. The law of God reveals that we are by nature lost and condemned sinners and desperately in need of help which only God’s Word can bring.

But just as I spoke plainly to him about his sins committed in thoughts, words, and deeds, just so plainly did I speak about his Savior from sin. Even in this late hour if he would but acknowledge his sin and with a repentant heart turn to Jesus as his Savior, even he could be saved. Since God the Holy Spirit is actively at work through the Word, convicting men of sin and creating faith in Jesus as the only Savior from sin, we can only hope that this saving knowledge was awakened in his heart.

“He who belongs to God hears what God says.” John 8:47 For those people who are still living, these words stand as an admonition. We are not to fall into carnal security and think everything is well as long as we live as best we can and try to do what is right. That is the kind of life Paul led before he was converted. Later in life, Paul had to confess that he was actually dead while he was yet living, because he had put trust in salvation outside of God’s Holy Gospel.

We are not to falsely think that there will always be time to hear God’s Word. **“... now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” II Corinthians 6:2** Friday night I spoke God’s Word to the departed. Saturday I had devotion for him, but whether or not he was conscious enough to hear God’s Word on this last occasion we do not know. Life is too short and eternity too long to neglect something as important as God’s Word. We think of King Agrippa who heard Paul preach and was so

impressed that he declared that he would call him back and hear more at a more convenient time. As for the present, he had other plans and other undertakings. Sad to say in the case of Agrippa - that time never came. True, in scripture we have the case of the dying thief who heard the word of God in the 11th hour and came to faith. But certainly there is a good reason that Scripture only records this one case of an 11th hour conversion. The reason is that God wants us to be prepared to meet our Maker at all times. For no one knows when the Son of man will come.

Of course hearing God's Word does not mean a mere listening that goes in one ear and out the other. It means believing it with the heart and then trusting in it. Nor does it mean an off and on hearing of God's words. The apostle not only states that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone that believes, but he states that the same word is the power that keeps us in the faith. **"... who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." I Peter 1:5**

Yes, the hearing of God's Word is a serious matter. God offers in his Word food for the soul and yet people say: *"I don't want your food."* God offers them advice and they say: *"I don't need your advice."* God offers them wisdom and they say: *"I prefer my own."* God offers help and they reply: *"I can take care of myself."*

God offers salvation and they say: *"I want my own way."* Now we can certainly see why God's judgment is so hard. Those who despise God's Word say in effect: *"God, you just keep your wisdom and your love to yourself - I am not interested. Keep on talking - I am not listening. I'll go my way, you go yours."* Of such people God says: **"... you do not belong to God." John 8:47**

It is in his Word that God manifests himself and is present among us. Those who do not hear God's Word separate themselves from God and, if they persist in this, it means eternal separation from God. To be without God now means to be without God in eternity.

It is after all in the Holy Gospel that all saved souls find their only joy and comfort. Can there be found a better comfort and trust than in Jesus who says: **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. "** John 11:26 Thus the Christian's trust and comfort is not based on something that one has done, but that which our Heavenly Father has done for us out of grace and love. What he has done for us is revealed and brought to us through his Word, found in the Bible. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16**

As our substitute, Jesus bore our sins and suffered the punishment for them on the cross; he then finally entered into death for us. His death is our death and his resurrection is our resurrection. His victory is our victory. Let us thank God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ Jesus that God's love and mercy is revealed to the sinner. Outside of Jesus there is no mercy or forgiveness.

If you desire in your death's hour to have a true, sure and unshakable comfort and hope - then you must learn to give your whole heart to Jesus Christ your Savior. But you say: *"Who can give me such a faith? Can anyone here in this life do this?"* Indeed not, with any mortal person it is impossible - but with God nothing is impossible. It is a mystery that no one can have saving faith except through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that works faith in an individual and this Holy Spirit works through: the Gospel (*found in the Bible*) and the Sacraments. Therefore Paul says: **"... no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." I Corinthians 12:3** Yes, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it. Pray to God for the enlightenment of his Holy Spirit so that his Word will be your staff and guide throughout life. When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death you do not need to be afraid for the Lord will be with you.