

Look and Listen Part 4

Isn't it amazing how people can view the exact same event so differently? A politician makes a speech and someone says "that was brilliant" and another says "that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard." "That's going to save the country." "That's going to destroy the country." They are talking about the same thing, but seeing it from such different points of view. An official makes a call at a football game and fans on opposite sides start shouting. Even watching the instant replay, one side insists it was a catch and a fumble out of bounds, the other side says it was an incomplete pass. "He didn't make a football move!" "Yes he did! What do you call that?" We're watching the same thing, but we view it through a different lens. We see and hear through our own bias and prejudice and opinion, from the perspective of our own experience.

I called this series Look and Listen. We are talking about looking to and listening to Jesus, but I said last Sunday it matters which Jesus we are looking to and listening to. Is it the Jesus revealed in the Scripture or the Jesus shaped by our culture? It matters how we see him. What lens are we using?

Jesus said, **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”** **He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” John 12:32-33** John explains that Jesus is talking about being lifted up onto the cross, dying that agonizing death for us. If we are going to really see Jesus, to look and listen to him, then we must see Him through the lens of his cross, through the lens of his sacrifice. If we are going to look to and listen to Jesus, then we need to see him as John saw him not only in his gospel, but in the Revelation. Revelation means an unveiling. The book of Revelation is not just an unveiling of what is going to happen someday in the future, it is an unveiling of Jesus. John sees the crucified and risen Lord in Revelation 1 as the First and the Last, the one holding the keys to death, hell and the grave. He sees him as the one who was dead and is alive and lives forever. John sees Jesus in Revelation 5 as the crucified Lamb, in Revelation 13 he sees him as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is Jesus, looking like a lamb that had been slain that John sees standing in the center of the throne in heaven, the one that is able to open the scroll and break the seals, the one that is able to advance the plan and purpose of God. John sees him as the slain Lamb before whom the elders and saints in heaven and the angels numbering ten thousand times ten thousand sing "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." And they

sang to him “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” And then John heard every creature in heaven and on earth singing, “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” It is as the Lamb that was slain that He sits on the throne, with the Father, and rules and reigns forever. If we are going to look and listen to Jesus, then we must see him through the lens of the cross, the crucified and risen Savior. We must see him as the suffering servant. We must see him in flesh, in weakness conquering death through his death, possessing the kingdom through his poverty, inheriting the earth through his meekness. We must see him as the peacemaker, merciful, compassionate, pure in heart, not grasping for position, making of himself no reputation but being a servant, the greatest in the kingdom who is like a child, as the last, the least, the youngest. We see him as the one who is obedient even to death and through his humility and obedience he is exalted above every name and power and principality. Through his sacrifice he wins, he rules, he reigns. Look and listen, but see him through the lens of the crucified Lamb.

I mentioned last Sunday the Jesus that some proclaim is the Jesus who comes to take names and settle accounts and is in a bad mood. The good news is Jesus has come and he settled accounts and whoever believes in him their sins are forgiven, the account is settled and we have eternal life! The Jewish people were looking through a particular lens for a Messiah sent from God to be ruler and king and liberator. Some began to look and listen to Jesus, but they were putting expectations on him that were not ordained by God, trying to make him fit their plan for a liberating Messiah and not God’s plan for a redeemer according to the Scripture. They saw him through a different lens as did the Pharisees. Threatened by the response of the people to him, or perhaps their motives were purer than that, perhaps they were trying to be guardians of the law, but they saw Jesus as a law breaker, a blasphemer.

In Matthew 9 a series of events happened that convinced the Pharisees Jesus was not sent from God and that they had every right to try to silence him and stop him. They were looking with the wrong lens, looking at the wrong things, placing their expectation on Jesus and not considering what God’s word said. In Matthew 9:1 some men brought a paralyzed friend to Jesus and Jesus said, “Take heart son, your sins are forgiven” and the man was healed. The teachers of the law said, “This fellow is blaspheming” because he attributes to himself things that only belong to God like forgiving sins. In Matthew 9:9 Jesus calls Mathew to come follow him and

then has dinner at Matthew's house. Matthew's rowdy friends showed up for dinner with Jesus, fellow tax collectors and "sinners" by the Pharisee's standards. The Pharisees were upset by the crowd Jesus associated with. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Righteous people shouldn't have anything to do with sinners, right? Jesus tries to tell them that it is the sick that need a physician; that God desires mercy not sacrifice. All they could see was the letter of the law, not the mercy of the Lord and his desire to redeem the lost. Then Jesus cast a demon out of a man and his critics said since he has missed it on all these other counts, surely he must be casting out demons by the prince of demons. They refused to see him in light of the Scripture. They couldn't see that the very things they accused Jesus of doing were actually validations of his messianic calling and ministry! Jesus was doing exactly what the Father sent him to do, what the Spirit of the Lord anointed him to do. Writing prophetically of the Messiah, Isaiah wrote, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to declare the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of recompence; to comfort all that mourn..."** Isaiah 61:1. Look at the Scripture and then look at what he does, look at how he ministers, look at who he ministers to. This is how we know him. This is what the Messiah has come to do. Jesus cares about the poor, the broken hearted, the ones that life has beaten down. He cares about prisoners, those in bondage physically, emotionally, spiritually, in bondage to addiction, he comes to bring sight to the blind, literally and figuratively, to declare the year of the Lord's favor and to comfort those who mourn. This translation says it is a day of recompence. Recompence is something given to make up for a loss. It means wrongs are made right. Do you find yourself somewhere in there? Blinded, broken, grieving, bound? Jesus is calling for you! He has good news. It's the year of the lord's favor!! Look to him and listen.

The Pharisees are watching him even closer now. They are looking and listening, but for all the wrong reasons, looking with the wrong lens. Matthew 12 tells us, **"At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.'" He answered, 'Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread - which was not lawful for them**

to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah; 'Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.' Matthew 12:1-21

Jesus challenged their traditions, their perceptions. He wanted to help them see beyond just the words of the law, but to see the purpose, the morality, the spirit behind the law. He tells them, the purpose of the law is to serve God's people, not for God's people to serve the law. He is giving them a glimpse into the heart of the king and the kingdom of God if they will only look and listen. The kingdom and the King are about mercy, about healing, about people over policy and politics. He accuses the Pharisees of valuing their sheep more than their fellow man, valuing their possessions more than their relationships. This isn't the way of the kingdom. He wants them to see and understand who he is and who sent him. It's why he keeps saying "He who has an ear, let him hear." Look and listen. He's trying to tell us something, to show us something.

Matthew then uses the longest Old Testament quotation in his gospel, identifying Jesus as the Messianic servant the prophet Isaiah speaks of. Here is the Jesus we are to look to and listen to, the one the Father loves and has chosen, the one he has placed his Spirit upon. This gentle,

Spirit anointed servant Jesus has been sent not only to Israel, but to proclaim justice to the nations. In proclaiming the way of justice he is announcing truth and declaring his righteous ways to everyone, not just to the Jews of Israel. He introduces his kingdom to the nations, bringing hope and good news to every tribe and nationality and people.

He is the Messiah of Israel. They may have been expecting a military leader and liberator, but look at what the prophet says of this Jesus. **“He will not quarrel or cry out, no one will hear his voice in the streets.”** He is not quarreling, not picking a fight, not trying to dominate others or shout others down, not trying to humiliate or bully others, not talking over those who oppose him, not raising his voice in the streets in self-advertisement or advancement. Remember Jesus came not making a reputation for himself according to Phil. 2. This is the Jesus of the Scripture. He isn’t like the Pharisees, quarreling, intimidating, shouting judgement. Instead, Jesus said of himself that he was “gentle and humble in heart.” (Mat 11:29) This is his nature and this is how his followers should be. Remember, we are to come not merely bearing his name but bearing his nature as well.

Isaiah said, **“A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”** What does that mean? J. Alec Motyer in his commentary on Isaiah writes, “To this servant nothing is useless, even the bruised reed which is useless as a support or for anything else. Neither is anything, (a smoldering wick) too far gone towards extinction.” A reed that has been bruised, abused, bent, but he won’t break it. It’s a picture for us of people who have been used, abused, beaten down, feeling they are too far gone. If you feel useless, worthless, think again. Jesus won’t break a bruised reed and he won’t break you! He’s come to heal and mend.

In the same way, a smoldering wick he won’t snuff out. Gayle Erwin expands on this in *The Jesus Style*. He writes, “When I was in Boy Scouts, we made fire from flints or from rubbing sticks together. We would take a handful of very flammable material called tinder and place it where sparks from the flint could fall into it or heat from the sticks would make it begin to smolder. Quick action would soon have a spark in the tinder. I never saw anyone look at that single spark and in disgust stomp it out complaining all the while that it was only one spark. To the contrary, they would pick up the tinder, cup it in their hands and blow through it in an effort to provide additional oxygen and create a flame. That seems so descriptive of the way Jesus treats us and so unlike the way that we treat each other.”

Jesus isn't looking to snuff you out because you aren't enough, because you aren't shining brightly enough. Instead, he is here to gently blow on the tinder of your life, to fan that tiny spark into a flame. That's who he is, the gentle Jesus who comes to encourage, to mend, to heal. Isaiah said he won't quit until he leads justice to victory and until the nations put their hope and trust in him. This Jesus is the one we look to, the one we listen for. Look for him through the lens of the Scripture. Look for him through the lens of the cross, the suffering servant, the lamb that was slain, the one who is gentle and humble in heart. Look to him. Live for him. Live like him. This Jesus extends an invitation to all of us today in Matthew 11. It so sounds like Jesus. It is so in keeping with his nature. Can you hear him as he says, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** Matthew 11:28-30.

The Pharisees were famous for heaping man made burdens on the people, but Jesus says my yoke is easy, my burden is light. I offer rest for your souls. If you are being driven, if the voice you hear is telling you you are never enough, never good enough, that you aren't doing enough to earn God's favor or mercy or forgiveness, you're listening to the wrong Jesus. He calls us to holiness, he calls us to justice, he calls us to truth, to righteousness, and he calls us to rest and to peace. If you feel like the world is about to snuff out the little bit of spark left in you, look to Jesus. Let him fan that into a flame. He will be found by you if you will look and listen to him. Why not take him up on his offer?