

He who has ears, let him hear

Luke 20:9-20

Philologist Erich Auerbach- observed that “the Scripture stories do not, like Homer’s, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us-- they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels. “

I find it interesting that the reading of Scripture creates crisis. When we read Scripture day after day and week after week, we find ourselves being exposed to a world that is totally at odds with the world that is regulated through newspaper and television.

The worshipping Christian sees Scripture as something much larger and more active than they can perceive. The believing behavior of a Christian is shaped and renewed by Scripture. God both was and is active in Scripture. The world of Scripture is where God is active everywhere and always. The world of Scripture is a place where God is not put off or delayed, nor is it a place where everything is relative to God and where God is not relative to anything.

Familiarity with Scripture has a tendency to water down or suppress the intensity and sharpness of “raw Scripture.”

For instance, anyone who thinks of Jesus’ parables as sweet little stories about sheep, or seed and soil has missed the point of Scripture. There’s no doubt that the parables of Jesus greatly lifted those who heard the mystery of grace. But make no mistake about it-- his parables caused great crisis for those who were self-satisfied-- religiously!

I like what one theologian says about Jesus’ parables- “Indeed, the parables sometimes stirred up more snakes than they killed -- so much so that, in the end, Jesus was crucified not in spite of his parables but, in part, because of them.” [Thomas G. Long, “A Chorus of Witnesses,” 1994. p. 48]

Whenever I come back from a place like GB, I’m reminded about how much I really love youth and the importance of having an effective youth ministry in place. What amazes me is how much youth ministry, when overheard by adult bystanders has significant impact. Now I admit that it should not be the standard way to address adults through crafting lessons that are deliberately overheard by them in order to give some instruction on what they may need to hear or do. However, even as adults we have to admit that we have on occasion used similar techniques with children. Sort of discussing rather loudly what might happen if little Johnny does (or doesn’t do) such a thing, knowing that little Johnny is around the corner overhearing every word. I recall as a kid a time when I was eating fried clams. I was with my mom, and a friend of hers. While I was eating the claims I overheard my mom tell her friend that children who eat fried claims need to be really good and always obey their parents. Mom went on to say that if they don’t they could die! Needless to say I was pretty good for about a week and figured that she was simply wrong.

You know, Luke tells us that this is exactly what Jesus did when he told the parable of the wicked tenants who abused three of the landowner’s servants and then finally killing the landowner’s son.

These people were simply coming to collect the produce that was originally contracted in the agreement between them and the landowner.

Remember that when Jesus tells this parable, he has just finished speaking and ultimately confronting the chief priests, teachers of the Law and elders who asked him (this is when Jesus is teaching in the Temple), **“By what authority do you do these things?” Luke 19:45-20:2**

Jesus, in control of the circumstances, responds by asking these guys a question: It was about John the Baptist’s authority to baptize-- and wacko!! These guys are put on the defensive because they know that they’ve been caught. **vv. 3-8**

- They couldn’t say that John’s authority came from heaven because Jesus certainly would say-- then why didn’t you believe him?
- Likewise, they couldn’t say that his authority comes from either his own or from some human authority because the people believed John to be a prophet of God-- and frankly, they were afraid of the people and what they might do.

So they respond in the same way that anyone does when they don’t want to admit that they’ve been caught... they say “I don’t know.” But Jesus sees right through these guys and refuses to give them an answer to their question about where his authority to teach and heal comes from.

Watch how Luke transitions in v. 9... **“He went on to tell the people this parable.”** No doubt by now these chief priests, teachers of the Law and elders were somewhere on the edges gathered together complaining about their enemy. However, Jesus moves on to tell the people (not the religious leaders, but the people) “The parable of the tenants.” Jesus evidently speaks loud enough though to be overheard.

And to the credit of the religious elites they are neither deaf nor stupid. For Luke records that they understood Jesus to speak this parable against them. They overhear the story that they were intended to overhear, and they accurately apply it to themselves.

But notice how they dealt with the realization of this understanding and how it becomes a part of the unfolding story of Jesus on his way to being crucified.

These elites understood the parable. I mean they knew that they were accused of being the wicked tenants who had become arrogant and expected to keep something that was not theirs. Curiously though, the realization of who they were in the story does not bring them to repentance, rather, it only strengthened their resolve to do all they could to get rid of this guy who was calling them to account for their sin. Jesus’ words in this parable incited them to play out who they really were. Luke goes on to tell us that they would have taken matters into their own hands right then and there! They would have taken the beloved Son of God outside and killed him right on the spot. What stopped them was their fear of the people who BTW were hanging on every word of Jesus.

It’s unusual that these religious leaders caught onto the parable so quickly and understand that they were the main point of the story. Typically the parables of Jesus use common and familiar circumstances in life, which can easily look safe at first glance.

I like what Clarence Jordon says in his “Cotton Patch Version of the Bible.”

[\[http://rockhay.tripod.com/cottonpatch\]](http://rockhay.tripod.com/cottonpatch) He calls parables “Trojan Horses.” They look harmless at first, and then wacko!! right between the eyes, they’ve gottcha! It’s like Jesus sets a time bomb, covers it up nice and tight with a great story and presented it to his hearers (of should I say over-hearers?).

And by the time his hearers figure out the parable he and the disciples are a few miles down the road... chances are they could hear the bang!

But this is not the case for these religious guys who overhear the parable. They are especially quick to unpack the meaning of the parable. Religious elites like this are good at unpacking things pretty quickly. They were taught very well. Unfortunately, right understanding is not a sure path to the changing of the heart.

Hearing or over-hearing the Word, the Word that is meant for us to hear is still very much our task. At first exposure, what we hear may sound harmless. But when we take it home, it can create crisis and be devastating.

Our prayer for one another is that the blast and the shattering will cause changes of heart, a realignment of priorities, and a reshaping of life.

When we approach the Word, may we approach it (especially the parables of Jesus) with care.

I've noticed that on a lot of electrical items you'll find a tag with large letters warning "to reduce the risk of electrocution..." as if electrocution is the norm and the warning on the tag is there to give us a few helpful hints that might lower the risk a little... sort of delay the inevitable of electrocution that awaits each of us.

I wonder if the parables of Jesus (Trojan Horses) ought to carry a similar warning... "To reduce the risk of explosion..." "to reduce the risk of being called to account..." "to reduce the risk of self recognition..." "to reduce the risk of being addressed by God..." do the following:

1. Do all you can to not hear what might be intended for you in God's Word.
2. If you do hear, then try not to understand.
3. If you do understand, then try not to respond.
4. If you do respond then do all you can to put your shattered illusions back together with a glue that gives you an even tighter bond than you had before.
5. Finally if you want to reduce your risk of being called to account, or of self-recognition, or of being addressed by God, do not come along the rest of the way to Gethsemane, and Calvary and the dawn of the third day. If you do, the risk will be great. There are no warning tags here, and you will undoubtedly overhear much more that is intended for you.

Let us pray

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