

# Listening to the Lord

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Please turn with me in the Word of God to Psalm 81, the first half of which we've just sang, Psalm 81.

Let us hear God's own Word. Sing aloud to God our strength, shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon on our feast day. For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob.

He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a language I had not known. I relieved your shoulder of the burden.

Your hands were freed from the basket. In distress you called and I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder. I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

[ 1 : 0 3 ] Hear, O my people, while I admonish you. O Israel, if you would but listen to me. There shall be no strange God among you. You shall not bow down to a foreign God.

For I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. But my people did not listen to my voice.

Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. O that my people would listen to me. That Israel would walk in my ways.

I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes. Those who hate the Lord would cringe toward him. And their fate would last forever.

But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat. And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you. So far the reading of God's word.

[ 2 : 0 2 ] I don't know if you've ever given much thought to Psalm 81. It's the kind of psalm we might be inclined to pass over rather quickly.

It doesn't quite fit very neatly our normal or familiar categories for the Psalter. It's not a psalm of lament or a penitential psalm.

It's not a psalm of praise or a wisdom psalm. But I would suggest to you that it is a psalm which explains the whole history of redemption.

Certainly the history of Israel. The tragedy and the hope of the ages and the appeal of God to his people. At the outset we might think of Psalm 81 as a New Year's psalm.

That may have struck you when we read verse 3 of our text. Blow the trumpet at the new moon. At the full moon. On our feast day. Now all of you careful students of Israel's history and law will know.

[ 3 : 0 6 ] That there was only one month of the year. When the trumpet, the ram's horn, was to be sounded. Both on the first day and the 15th day of the month.

And that was the month that was marked by the new year in Israel's history. On the first day of that month, strangely enough from our reckoning, the seventh month of the year was their New Year's beginning.

So you can read this in Leviticus 23. So this is a psalm in verse 3 that talks about blowing the trumpet on the day of the new moon.

On the first day of the month, which was the new year for Israel in the liturgical calendar. This was a psalm for the new year. Not only for the new year.

It's also a psalm for the feast of booths or tabernacles. That was celebrated on the 15th day of the month, that same month, for a week. So this was a psalm appointed by God to aid the people in their celebration of the new year.

[ 4 : 12 ] And in their celebration of this important feast of tabernacles. A feast which remembered the harvest gathered. And a feast which remembered that it was the Lord who had fed his people faithfully in the wilderness.

They dwelt then in tents as a sign that all that they had came from God's hand. So this was a psalm appointed both for the new year and for the festival of tabernacles.

And it's a psalm that then celebrated God and encouraged God's people to come to the Lord. To listen to the Lord. To be faithful to the Lord their God. So this psalm is an important psalm in the calendar of Israel.

But it's also an important psalm in the structure of the book of psalms. As some of you will know, the book of psalms is divided into five books.

Which makes the third book the central book of the Psalter. And this psalm is in that third book. In fact, this psalm is the central psalm of that central book of the Psalter.

[ 5 : 21 ] So there's a special kind of spotlight that scripture itself puts on this psalm as the central psalm of the Psalter. Not numerically. We can't divide 150 by 2 and get 81.

But central in terms of the way the Psalter itself is divided. And it's further interesting to note that not only is this the central psalm in the central book of the Psalter.

But that the central verse of this psalm. The second half of verse 8. Focuses our attention on one of the great statements of God's truth.

If my people would but listen. If Israel would but listen. And in that statement there is an echo.

A repetition almost of what Israel regarded as the single most important verse in their law. The great Shema. That verse from Deuteronomy chapter 6.

[ 6 : 24 ] Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God. The Lord is one. And this psalm then picks up that theme at the beginning of the new year for God's people.

And says to them. Israel. If you would but listen. If you would but open your ears. If you would but hear. If you would but follow me. How I would bless you.

How I would encourage you. How I would meet with you. And this truth for the new year for Israel. Takes on a special pointedness.

A special meaning for us. As we remember that book three of the Psalter. Is a book of a crisis of God's people. It's a book that particularly focuses upon the exile.

Upon the destruction of the land. The destruction of the temple. On the loss of the kingship. On the apparent failure of the promise of God.

[ 7 : 24 ] That David's sons would ever sit on David's throne. And so in the midst of their crisis. The enemy surrounding. The enemy conquering. The enemy carrying the people away from the land of promise.

Destroying the temple. Destroying the kingship. Comes this pointed word from the Lord. At the center of the Psalter. If Israel would but listen.

So it seemed good to me tonight. That we as God's people. Would reflect upon this call of our God. To listen. To listen to his word.

To treasure his word. To follow his word. And so in this central Psalm. We see this central proclamation. That we are called to be a people of the word.

A people who treasure the word. Who listen to the word. Who hide it in our hearts. Who are eager to study and know the word. And to grow in it. And here that proclamation of the word.

[ 8 : 26 ] Reminds us in the first place. That the word of God is a word of deliverance. God here reminds his people of how gracious he's been to them.

How kind he's been to them. How wonderfully he's provided for them. Especially in rescuing them from Egypt. From the house of bondage. When they were enslaved.

When their life seemed so futile. And meaningless. When they seemed far from God. And far from the land of promise. God came to them.

And he rescued them. He delivered them. He reached out his hand. To a slave people. And he saved them. So he wants his people.

To listen to that word of salvation. That word of promise. Spoken so poetically. So beautifully. In this psalm in particular. God says to his people.

[ 9 : 26 ] I removed the burden. From your shoulder. I removed the basket. From your hands. Israel had labored. To build bricks.

To make bricks. To build Pharaoh's monuments. And the burden on their shoulders. And the burden of their hands. Was heavy upon them. And God came and rescued them.

Rescued them. From what seemed to be the most powerful force. On the face of the earth. But God displayed. That he was the great power. It was not Pharaoh.

Whom the Egyptians thought of. As a living God. Who had power on earth. But it was the Lord God of Israel. The creator of heaven and earth. The rescuer of his people.

Who was the great power. And so the Lord reminds his people. With this word of deliverance. I am the Lord your God. Who brought you up. Out of Egypt.

[ 10 : 22 ] And then that word of deliverance. Says. As I acted to save you. And to deliver you. And to show you mercy in the past. So I will in the future.

If you will but listen to me. I will soon subdue your enemies. He says in verse 14. I will feed and satisfy you.

He says in verse 16. The people who had been hungry. In Egypt. The people who had been deprived. In Egypt. He says to them now.

I will feed you. With the finest of the wheat. I will feed you. With honey from the rock. I will satisfy you. That's the deliverance. That I promised to you.

It's the deliverance. That we see in our Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't it? He's the one who rescued us. From the house of bondage. To sin. He's the one who took from us. The burden.

[ 11 : 19 ] Of our shoulders. Our sin. The yoke of the law. He's the one who freed our hands. To serve him. He's the one who has delivered us. And he's the one who promises us.

That there is a great deliverance to come. He's the one who says. There is a new heaven. And a new earth. That awaits us. There is a place in which righteousness dwells forever.

And in which we will dwell in glory. And if we are a people who listen. We will know that deliverance from sin today. And from all sorrow tomorrow.

When the glory of our Lord is revealed. He wants us to listen. To embrace that word of deliverance. He also wants us to listen to a word of direction.

And that's our second point. This psalm reminds us. That God gave to his people. Statutes. Decrees. Laws. For the way that they were to live.

[ 12 : 21 ] The direction guided their worship. It guided their calendar. It guided their lives. They were to listen to him. And to follow him. They were to follow the God who speaks.

Who reveals himself. Who tells the truth. Not to follow the false gods of the nations. So we read in our text. This direction from God. Keep the new moon.

And the full moon. The feast of tabernacles. Blow the trumpet. It is a statute for Israel. It is a decree in Joseph. But what we find in this direction.

Is in fact a complaint about worship. Is Israel busy on the new moon? Do the priests not have a trumpet? That sounds absurd on the face of it.

Doesn't it? But this is the charge of God. That his people have not kept his commandments. Time and time again. Israel is unwilling to obey. Even the most straightforward commands.

[ 13 : 23 ] That God gives. So he tells them again. Like he told Moses. Who summoned all of Israel. And says. Hear Israel. Hear Israel. The decrees.

The laws. I declare in your hearing today. Learn them. Follow them. I am the Lord your God. Who brought you out of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself any image of me. But you shall worship me as I direct you. And what do the people do? They wander after false gods.

They turn themselves to idols. They show that recurring human tendency. To think that somehow we can improve on God's ways.

They think as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it so pointedly. That they can be wiser than God. And they stumble over that. Again and again.

[ 14 : 23 ] Stopping up their ears to live by their own wisdom. So God brings this word of direction to His people. That they would listen. In their lives. Yes.

But first of all in their worship. God says to His people. If you don't listen to me in my presence. When you come to meet with me. And fellowship with me. How will you listen when you're somewhere else?

And that comes then. As a question that we should also ponder in our hearts. Individually and as the people of God together. Do you long to hear God's word?

Do we long to know it? And to follow it? Is it the desire of our hearts to live as God would have us to live? So as we contemplate this text.

Let's examine our hearts. Let's listen to this direction from the Lord. That we should listen to Him. And commit ourselves anew in earnestness to listening to Him.

[ 15 : 22 ] There's also at the center of this psalm a somber word. A word of destruction for the enemies of God. A word of judgment.

Our third point. This psalm reminds us that there is a judgment coming. In the day of judgment the world will be divided into two.

There will be the godly and the wicked. Those who have been delivered and those who are lost. Those who have listened to God and those who have rejected God.

Those who have worshipped God and those who have worshipped false gods. In the last day there will be only two groups of humanity. Only two camps.

And this psalm challenges us to ask ourselves. Where will we stand on that great day? Will we stand in Christ? As His people.

[ 16 : 18 ] As those who have listened to Him. And served Him. And worshipped. And trusted Him. Above all things. Or will we stand with the wicked. And face eternal loss.

That's what this psalm calls us to think about with this word of destruction. But as we see this central proclamation of the psalm.

This word of deliverance. This word of direction. This word of destruction. We also see a great problem. Don't we? That God declares.

My people have not listened to me. That's the tragedy of the time in which this psalm was written. Verse 11. But my people did not listen to me.

Israel would not submit to me. And while we know that may have been particularly true of Israel at the time of the exile. It was true of Israel over and over and over again.

[ 17 : 19 ] Moses prophesied it at the end of Deuteronomy. That the people would not listen. That in the days of prosperity. The people would be forgetful.

And lack gratitude. And in the days of difficulty. The people would complain and grumble. That they would not listen to God. So there is a huge problem here.

Isn't there? The problem is that God promises blessings to those who listen. But the people don't listen. You and I don't listen the way we should. We don't always love the Lord.

And serve Him. We are too prone to turn aside. One of the particularly powerful ways in which God expresses this failure on our part.

Is in verse 12. Where God says. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts. To follow their own counsels. This is a terrible thing to have happen.

[ 18 : 22 ] To get what you want. When we follow our own wisdom. Think about Israel for a moment. Think about Israel for a moment. As it was coming out of Egypt. What was the repeated desire of their heart whenever any trouble came along?

Whenever there was any shortage of water to drink. Whenever there was any shortage of food to eat. What was their counsel? What was the desire of their heart at that moment?

Oh, let's go back to Egypt. Egypt. Egypt. Egypt. Egypt. Where we had it so good. Where we had meat in the pot. Where we had leeks and garlic.

Let's go back to Egypt. Egypt. Egypt. And we stand back and say. How could any people be so foolish. As to think they had it good as slaves in Egypt?

But that was the lie they told themselves. That was the delusion they visited upon themselves. And what a terrible judgment it is. For God to give foolish sinners over to the devices of their own hearts.

[ 19 : 29 ] May that never happen to us. May we never experience that judgment. But this is the problem of the people of God. That over and over again we drift away.

We drift away from the truth. We neglect such a great salvation. As the book of Hebrews cautions us against. We grow cold in our love.

Or at least lukewarm. As the book of Revelation cautions us against. This is the great problem we face. If God will bless us. If we listen to him.

But as a people we are not inclined to listen to him. That we so often drift away from him. What will become of us? We have to ask ourselves.

What will become of us? What is our hope? In a situation where God says. If you listen I'll bless you. But that the history of God's people. Is that we are not very good listeners.

[ 20 : 28 ] The solution I think only hinted at. In this psalm. Is that we need someone. Who will listen in our place.

It's interesting then. How Psalm 81 begins. Sing for joy. To God our strength. Who will fight for us.

Who will listen for us. Who will save us. Who will deliver us. Only God. Our strength. He's our only hope. And if we turn back.

To Psalm 80. Part of the context. For Psalm 81. We find. There a great prayer. For deliverance. A prayer that God would act. That God would restore.

And how will God act. How will God restore. Turn again. We read. In verse 14. Of Psalm 80. Turn again. O God of hosts.

[ 21 : 27 ] Look down from heaven. And see. Have regard for this vine. The stock. That your right hand planted. For the son. Whom you made strong. For yourself.

And in verse 17. Of Psalm 80. Let your hand. Be on the man. Of your right hand. The son of man. Whom you have made strong. For yourself.

Israel needs a redeemer. Israel needs a son of man. Israel needs God. To arise. And provide a savior.

For them. In their hopelessness. And so. This people. In the midst. Of a crisis. Of kingship. Need to look forward. To a king.

Who will be God's strength. For his people. It's intriguing. That Hebrew word. For strength. Is found. In the name. Of one of Israel's own kings.

[ 22 : 24 ] Uzziah. Uzziah. Uzziah means. The strength. Of Jehovah. But Uzziah. Of course. Was a failure. As a king. He died. A leper.

Because he did not. Listen to the Lord. But in a real sense. We can say. That the Lord Jesus Christ. Is the true. Uzziah. He's the true strength.

Of God. The true son of David. The true one. Who comes. To rescue his people. To be the strength. Of God for us. When we are weak. In ourselves. And what is.

The great. Or one of the great. Essential truths. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. He always. Listened. To his father. His father.

Always. Could say of him. This is my beloved son. In whom. In whom. I am well pleased. It was Jesus Christ. Who came and said.

[ 23 : 20 ] I have come to do your will. And he did it perfectly. Because he always listened. We can see that wonderfully. Can't we? In the temptations.

Jesus faced. At the beginning. Of his public ministry. There he was. In the wilderness. Forty days. Hungry. Weakened. And the evil one.

Came to him. And tempted him. By saying. Turn these stones. Into bread. He had a right. To eat. It seemed. In some ways. A reasonable request.

But how does. Our savior respond. How does God. Our strength. Respond. How does the true. King of David. Respond. He says. Man.

Shall not live. By bread alone. But by every. Word. That proceeds. From the mouth. Of God. Jesus. In the temptation. Was a listener.

[ 24 : 16 ] To God. And because he stood. In that temptation. God also gave him. Bread to eat. And then the second. Temptation comes. And the devil.

Wants him. To throw himself. Down from the temple. And the devil. Quotes the scripture. And says. He'll give his angels. Charge over you. Lest you dash your foot. Against the rock. And how does.

Jesus respond. He responds. By quoting the scripture. And saying. Do not put the Lord. Your God. To the test. It's a reference.

To that incident. That the Old Testament. Scriptures refer to. Again and again. Isn't it? Israel at Rephidim. Exodus 17. Referred to here.

In our text. In Psalm 81. Verse 7. Where Israel. Grumbled. Against God. Where Israel. Doubted. God's presence. Doubted.

[ 25 : 11 ] God's provision. Of water. To quench their thirst. When he brought them up. Out of Egypt. That place. Finally called. Massa. And Meribah. The place of. Complaining.

Against God. But Israel. Who had seen. God's power. Over the Red Sea. Israel. Who had seen. God's power. Turning the Nile. To blood. Israel was stupid.

To think. That God. Didn't think. Far enough ahead. To realize. His people. Would need. Water in the desert. Israel was thirsty.

In the wilderness. And complained. Against God. Jesus. Was thirsty. In the wilderness. But he said. I will not. Put the Lord. My God. To the test.

I trust God. I listen to God. I rely upon God. And so. God gave Jesus. What he needed. To drink. Having withstood. The test. And this psalm.

[ 26 : 06 ] Interestingly. Promises us. Something. From the rock. Too. Not just water. But honey. Something better. Something more glorious. He will satisfy you.

Is the promise. In our Lord. Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ. Always. Listen. And in the third. Temptation. The devil said.

Bow down. And worship me. And I will give you. All the kingdoms. All the kingdoms. Of the world. And Jesus. Once again. Quoted from. Deuteronomy. Chapter 6. And said. Worship the Lord.

Your God. And serve him. Only. Jesus. Listen. Jesus. Was faithful. Jesus. Served. Only. His father.

And his father. Gave him. The kingdoms. Of the world. That's the savior. You and I have. That's the savior. Who has listened for us. Perfectly.

[ 27 : 00 ] And completely. So that we don't have to be. Fearful of the father's wrath. Against us. Because Jesus has taken it all. Do you know that.

Between new year's day. And the feast of tabernacles. In the Israelite calendar. There was another important feast. On the first day of the month. Was the new year's celebration.

On the 15th day of the month. Began the feast of tabernacles. Celebration. But on the 10th day of the month. Was the day of atonement. When God provided a substitute.

For the sins of his people. When God was the strength. For his people. And Jesus Christ is our substitute. Is our strength.

Is our sin bearer. Now that doesn't mean that. Because Jesus listened. We don't have to listen. Because Jesus listened.

[ 27 : 59 ] And he is our strength. And we are in him. We should desire to listen. Out of gratitude. And thanksgiving. We should yearn for the word of God. To be more alive in our hearts.

But as we listen. And as we confront. Our own dullness of hearing. And our own sinfulness. We can rejoice in the fact. That the imperfections.

Of our listening. Are covered. By the perfection. Of Christ's listening. As we read this psalm. We should long to do God's will. Should be eager to serve the Lord.

According to his word. We should spend our time. And energy. To know that word. To hide it in our hearts. To treasure it in our lives. But as we struggle. To do that faithfully.

We can rejoice. That we have a great king. Who listened perfectly. Who assures us. As his people. That we will not be numbered. Amongst the wicked.

[ 28 : 57 ] But if we are in Christ. If we've known him. If we've trusted him. And relied upon him. We will know. That he has listened. Perfectly. That he was the lamb of God.

Who took away the sins of the world. And that in him. We have life. And we have hope. Are you in need. Of encouragement.

Are you discouraged. By the difficulty you face. In our culture. To hear the word of God.  
Are you tired. From the constant struggle. Against the world.

And the flesh. And the devil. Are you in need. Of refreshment. For your soul. Oh if my  
people would. But listen. Says the Lord. Jesus listened.

And therefore. He earned the right. To say to you. Come to me. All you. Who are thirsty.  
Come to me. All you. Who are hungry. Open your mouth. Wide. And I will fill it.

[ 29 : 56 ] I will feed you. With the finest of wheat. And with honey. From the rock. I will satisfy you.  
May that be the experience.

Of every one of us. Here tonight. That we would find. Our satisfaction. In Christ. Amen. Let  
us pray. Oh Lord.

Our God. How we do. Thank you. For your word. In which you have revealed. Your holy  
will. That will. Which is good for us. And directs us. In the paths of life. That word.

Which calls us away. From the company. Of the wicked. And the mockers. And the  
scoffers. And calls us to be. Those blessed ones. Who walk in your way. But we do  
confess.

Before you. Oh Lord. That we are often. Those who are dull. Of here. That we are  
inclined. To the foolishness. Of our own ways. So we do.

[ 30 : 55 ] Thank and praise you. That you have provided. For us. In our need. A great king. A mighty  
savior. One who is strong. Over sin. One who is strong. Over the devil.

One who is strong. In his listening. And in his obedience. We do thank you. For Jesus  
Christ. The righteous. For Jesus Christ. Our strength.

And we pray. That we would be a people. Who grow in a love. For your word. But even  
more. That we would be a people. Who grow in dependence. Upon Jesus. In faith in him.

In love for him. And it is in his name. That we pray. Amen.