

Practice what you hear

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[0 : 00] So I was taking a look at WooTube a few weeks ago. People familiar with WooTube? Double O-O, W-O-O, not YouTube. Many of you would know, who knows what I'm talking about?

Yeah, okay, most VC students would. Anyway, many of you would know that WooTube is run by Eddie Wu. He's that inspirational maths teacher in Sydney, and he's just been named as the Australian Local Hero of the Year.

And he's this YouTube sensation who's been uploading his maths lessons onto YouTube so that students across Australia, maybe even the world, I don't know, can watch his classes online.

Anyway, I was watching one of his lessons, and the reason why I think he's such a great teacher is because he actually tries to solve maths problems in multiple ways.

So the clip in particular I was watching, he was trying to solve a quadratic equation. And even though there was a straightforward solution, he chose to actually solve it another way.

[1 : 03] And the purpose of it was to really try and reinforce the concepts and the lesson to his students. Now I mention Eddie because it's similar with us tonight.

Two weeks ago, our local preacher, Devin Toll, picture of him on the slides, he taught us from the parable of the sower.

So chapter 8, verses 1 to 15. And the big idea of the passage then was, actually I wasn't here. Devin, what was the big idea? Oh really?

Yeah. True disciples obey God's words. True disciples obey God's words. Fantastic. So I think I actually got the right answer here too. So the big idea is that Jesus' true disciples are judged by not only how they hear the word, but the good and true hearer is like the good soil, receives the word, retains it, and then produces a crop of fruit of good works or righteous deeds.

And that's essentially the same point tonight. That to be a true hearer, we must practice what we hear. God's word isn't spoken just for us to hear it, but for it to take root and bear fruit.

[2 : 21] So the passage is different, but the lesson really is essentially the same. And so what I think that will allow us to do tonight is actually to spend more time on application, to see how we can really practice what we hear.

But before we do, we must first of all hear. So let's take a look at this passage, which actually isn't too long. Starting at verse 16, we read, No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed.

Instead, they put it on a stand so that those who come in can see the light. Now, a lot of people struggle to understand how this imagery works. And actually, Jesus uses this multiple times, and we find it multiple times in the gospel.

So it actually comes up again in Luke 11, verse 33. And then if you look into Matthew's gospel, it's actually part of the Sermon on the Mount. But here in this context, right after the parable, I believe Jesus is using the image of light to symbolize God's word and show that it is given to us as lamps, we are the lamps, in order for us to shine.

The whole aim of hearing the word, therefore, is that we shine as a result, shine in what we do and in what we say, so that we display the beauty of God's truth in his word.

[3 : 45] And just as a lamp isn't lit to be hidden or to be put under a bed, so God's word is never given to us simply to store it away or to just archive it in our brains.

Instead, we are to respond with faith and obedience. That's how we truly know that we've heard God's word. It's sort of similar with the seed in the parable from two weeks ago, isn't it?

No one puts a seed into the soil just for it to remain dormant. No, a farmer sows a seed in order to reap a crop.

And so when we hear sermons, for instance, it's not simply just to appreciate the beauty of God's theology. When we study the Bible at growth groups, it's not just for intellectual stimulation. Yes, we must engage the mind, we must work hard to try and understand the passage, but then it must change our lives. And our choices, and how we treat one another, how we live.

[4 : 51] Otherwise, we've actually failed in what God has intended for his word. And so the aim of hearing, as I say in my outline, is that we put it into practice. It's actually evidence that we've truly heard God's word.

So let me pose our first application question for tonight. What changes have you seen in your life as a result of hearing God's word? Let me say that again.

What changes have you seen in your life as a result of hearing God's word? So let me get specific for a moment. Those of us who were studying in our growth groups were studying Romans from last year.

Well, how has studying Romans changed your life? Have we become more patient in bearing with others? Have we become passionate about the gospel?

Or more passionate, if we are already passionate? Are we now intentionally partnering with other gospel workers, praying with them, encouraging them, and supporting them financially?

[5 : 57] These are just three examples that I've got. But do you see what I'm trying to get at? Now, of course, if you've been a Christian for many years, then perhaps they're not wholesale changes because God is already working in you, has probably been working for a number of years.

And so if that's you, it just may be maintaining what you've already been doing or applying one or two changes as a result of hearing God's word. But the attitude still counts, doesn't it?

The attitude of being open to change when God reveals it to us in His word. Now, don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying we then become obsessed, measuring our spiritual growth week by week or day by day.

Every time we do something good, we sort of seek validation from others. Am I being more patient? Am I getting better than this? I'm not saying that because if we do that, that only leads to, as we know, legalism and pride.

But still, we ought to be able to look back at our lives from time to time and actually be able to see the evidence of God's word on us.

[7 : 09] It's not something that we boast about. It's something that we give thanks for. But when we look back, we should be able to see God changing us by His word.

Because you see, if we've truly heard God's word and taken it to heart, then I will go as far as to say it is actually impossible not to practice what we truly hear.

Because when God truly changes our hearts by His word, He will also change our lives. And that's why Jesus now says in verse 17, for there is nothing that will not be disclosed and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

That is, what is truly in our hearts, how we truly are, will bubble up, will bubble out, as it were, and show itself in our life, both for good and for bad.

And even if you manage to hide it or fake it, it will all be revealed one day anyway. Particularly, especially when we come before God in judgment.

[8 : 18] And so, you know, you may think, I'm just going to choose to ignore God and His word now. But actually, there's no escaping, is it? Who we are, what we do, will catch up with us eventually.

So, if you're not taking God's word seriously, then, let me urge you, do so, while there's still time. Now, of course, for a lot of us, for most of us, it doesn't even take that long, does it?

It doesn't take till God comes in judgment. Because, I don't know about you, but it's hard to hide your true self for very long. Don't you think? To keep up false pretenses or put on a mask, it's really exhausting, isn't it?

And most of the time, believe it or not, people see through it anyway. How often have you encountered at school or uni or work, you know, someone new, he tries really hard, you know, and they're not even being hypocritical, right?

They just want to impress, you know, super keen, friendly, accommodating. But then, after a while, when they get comfortable at work, when they feel their job is safe or whatever, then we start to see their true colors.

[9 : 23] It just comes out, doesn't it? And that's also true at marriages and relationships as well. Well, it was the same with the Pharisees as well.

If you read the Gospels, outwardly, they did all the right things, praying, tithing, observing the Sabbath. They even memorized the law. But underneath it, there was just pride and self-righteousness, wasn't there?

And Jesus saw through it and exposed them for their true nature. And it all came out in the end, didn't they? Because what did they do? They killed Jesus.

They became murderers. They showed what was truly in their hearts. And, you know, if we care to be honest, I suspect that we're probably not that different, are we?

At least I know that's true of me. I'm always tempted to present myself as better than I am, really, to try and hide my flaws, hoping that no one sees my ugly side.

[10 : 24] And so I'm thankful that because of Jesus, I know that His blood shed on the cross for me covers all my shame and all my sin. Thank God for that. And I know that even if it's revealed one day at the end of judgment, that I am forgiven by God because of Jesus, that He loves me and accepts me because of Jesus.

But still, I think for many of us, there's still that impulse in us, in me, to want to change, to be a better version of ourselves.

And I think actually that there's nothing wrong with that. If we see and we don't like what we are and we want to change, that's actually a good thing. It's a good thing provided we get the process right. Because I think sometimes we are tempted to just focus on the doing and the practicing without first hearing from God. Particularly if you've been a Christian for a while, you think, I know what the Bible says.

I don't need to hear God's Word again. I know I need to do this, this, this, this, this. I need to be good at this. And so we get busy ourselves trying to do all that without first again sitting and hearing from God's Word.

[11 : 35] Hearing and then acting in response to it. And so what we do then is actually we short-circuit God's process. If we remember Psalm 1, that first reading tonight, this was the process that was actually described in that Psalm.

So if you look on the slide in verse 2, instead of listening to mockers and sinners, the person of God delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.

And then what happens as a result? They change as a result of hearing and listening. They bear fruit, just like the tree that's by the stream. whose leaf does not wither in or out of season.

Now some of you may have heard of scams in foreign countries. I think sort of we were warned when we were in Morocco that sometimes at the market the food growers or the sellers would inject water into the fruits in order to make it like the orange, for example, getting a bit, you know, not juicy.

They would inject water into the orange or the watermelon to make it appear more juicy so that you buy it. You guys don't seem to be convinced. Anyway, I've been told. But that's a scam, isn't it?

[12 : 49] That's not what you really should be doing with fruits, right? If you want great fruits, then what do you concentrate on? Are the inputs into the soil, into the, you know, the sunlight, into the nutrients, in order then that the plant will produce the fruit naturally, right?

You don't just go to the fruit and start injecting it with vitamin C or whatever, right? It's like the parable that we saw two weeks ago. If we get the inputs right, that is the soil right, then the plant will naturally produce the good fruit.

And so here at Holy Trinity, we try and pay attention to the inputs. Yes, we want people to abound in good works, but we don't short circuit the process.

We don't focus just on doing good works. Instead, we prioritize the ministry of the Word. We devote time to teaching and preaching. We train others to do the same. And every time we meet together, we try, we do have God's Word as part of our meetings.

Why? So that we can first of all hear God's Word and then have good works arise or come out from it. We want good works to be the result of, not independent of, hearing God's Word.

[14 : 04] because when we do that, then we will know that it's actually God's Spirit at work in us and not just our human efforts. And I have to say, as parents, if you're a parent or you're going to plan to be a parent one day, that's the same process with kids as well.

We don't just want well-behaved kids. No, we want to raise disciples of Jesus who hear God's Word and respond to it by faith and obedience. And so actually, if you notice in verse 18, notice what Jesus actually says.

He says, therefore, consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more. Whoever does not have even what they think they have will be taken from them. Notice that Jesus doesn't actually say, consider carefully how you practice.

Right? The first thing he says is consider carefully how you listen. Because the way to have the lamp shining, the way to have good fruit arise is for us to first of all listen.

Hear well and the practice will follow suit. That's the process that God wants. In fact, hear well and a virtuous cycle kicks in because more will be given to you.

[15:18] Practice what the Bible says and actually the Bible makes even more sense because you've aligned your life and your mind with its views, with its worldview.

Whereas, if you don't, the opposite vicious cycle kicks in. Do you see? For what little you have, what little you've heard, will be taken from you.

It's just like that first and second type of soil again in the parable. The first, the devil snatches away the word from our hearts and in the second, the word, you know, for a while the person rejoices but during tough times they fall away.

Why? Because the word doesn't take root. And so when we hear God's word, right now, every time we read the Bible, there is no neutral option, is there?

There is no, I'll just park it away and come back to it later, I'll just wait and see. You know, when I'm less busy, I'll come back to God's word. No, we either respond rightly and God grows us as Christians or we ignore or reject it and our hearts will become harder and harder as a result of it and we'll stop hearing what God wants us to hear.

[16:33] So let me pause again and give you another chance to think about how you might apply this. So I've put two questions on the screen here. You don't have to talk to the person, just think in your own seats by yourself.

Two questions are, what kind of attitude do you think you need to hear God's word well? And then secondly, what practical things can you do to truly hear his word? Alright, so I'll give you a minute. Just reflect if you want to write something down on paper, that's fine. If not, just do it in your mind. Okay, I'm sure you've got many good answers yourself.

Come and share them to me later actually. But let me share a few of my own, the ones that I prepared earlier, so to speak. First, I think to hear well means we have to hear humbly.

The phrase that Christians often use is that we are to sit under God's word, to submit to it rather than sit over it in judgment. Now, if you're here and you're still investigating Christianity, I know you're often trying to judge whether the Bible is true or not.

[17:35] And for a time, that's fine. But eventually, if you're convinced that God's word, the Bible is God's word, then you have to start treating God as God and you have to submit to his word, sit under it rather than over it in judgment.

And so it means that when we open his word, we need to be open to his correction, to have our wrongdoing and our wrong thinking corrected. And this continues for the rest of our lives.

We who think we're mature should say, for instance, that we've heard it all before, that we've got no more to learn, to switch off. For example, if it's yet another sermon on John 3.16 or Psalm 1 or to tune out when it's only the student minister up here preaching or something like that.

Although I think it's reversed for this in our congregation. But anyway, for those of us who teach and preach as part of our ministry as well, we actually need to be doubly careful, don't we? Because it's so easy for us actually to hear God's word and not practice it but just preach it or teach it.

It's so easy to fall into that temptation but if we look further in verse 21 later, God's command is for us to hear God's word and put it into practice not simply teach or preach it.

[18:57] Now the second way I've got on the screen is a negative one is that we mustn't hear selectively. To hear well means we don't hear selectively. And what I mean is that we mustn't pick and choose the bits of the Bible we like.

The ones that actually affirm how well we're doing and ignore the parts that we don't. You know, I'm generous so I'll read the passage that talks about generosity and feel good and forget about the verses that talk about the love of money being the root of all evil.

And again, at HTD that's why we try and study the whole Bible or the New Testament and we try and tackle difficult books as well. We even tackle the parts which our society disapproves of because they think that, you know, it offends their enlightened sense of morality.

No, all of God's Word is God's counsel and we want to hear what He has to say from it. Which brings me to my third point which is that if we want to hear God's Word well then it helps to apply ourselves to studying God's Word.

That is, to work hard, to dig deep, delve deeply into it. We mustn't be content to just skim over the surface of God's Word or to even give up when things get too hard to understand.

[20 : 18] And so if you read a passage and it doesn't make sense at first, don't assume it's irrelevant to you but ponder upon it and talk to someone. Come and ask me to maybe show you what it actually means.

You see, the Bible isn't just a compilation of feel-good uplifting sayings. You know, the ones that you sometimes see on Facebook and they come up for the day? Inspirational verses or pick-me-ups.

Yeah, those are good as well but it's more than that. Rather, God's Word has the power to actually shape our entire life from the foundations up. But in order for us to really benefit from that, then we must put in the time and effort for that to occur.

It's like the roots of a tree that needs to go deep and the deeper they go, the stronger our faith. Especially where you then, having heard, put it into practice.

Well, we've just covered three verses and that's probably more than enough incentive, I would say, to prompt us to practice what we hear. But Luke actually gives us one more thing, an incident in verses 19 to 21 to show us why it's so important to practice what we hear.

[21 : 31] Now, the scene is probably familiar to you. The house is packed. Jesus is teaching. It's hard to get in anymore. And news arrives that Mary and Jesus' brothers are here and they want to see Jesus.

Now, if you haven't read this story before, what would you expect Jesus to say? You probably think, oh, Jesus is going to ask the crowd to just step back and let his family in.

Don't you think? Instead, what do we read in verse 21? Jesus says this, my mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.

A pretty dismissive, maybe, but nevertheless, a shocking response to me, don't you think? Especially as the society back then actually valued family greatly.

Even now, in our society where it's a bit more individualistic, I think his words would have raised a few eyebrows for some of us. But if we think about it, there's actually two ways to take this, isn't there?

[22 : 35] It could mean that Jesus doesn't care for his family, which we know isn't true because later on, even as he was hanging on the cross, do you remember what he was doing? He was looking after Mary, his mother, wasn't he?

Handing her over for John to look after. So it couldn't be that. What he could mean instead is that even though he loved his family greatly, there was something more important for him.

And that more important thing was to preach the gospel, to speak God's word so that as many people as possible could hear and put it into practice. I think this is the better explanation for Jesus' response.

And if you look back, just a page, actually I've got the verse on the slide I think, chapter 4 and verse 43, we see him actually put that same priority when he was being asked to heal people and he said, no, no, no, my purpose is to come here to preach the good news of the kingdom.

And so if we consider the love that Jesus does have for his family and then we look at what he prefers to do, then hearing God's word and putting it into practice must be really, really important, isn't it?

[23 : 51] so much so that he would sacrifice time with his family in order to allow people to do it. Which means as we gather each Sunday, much as it's great to be praising God with our lips and we should do that and we keep doing that, what is more important and pleasing to God is that we hear his word and then go out and practice it.

That is, if you like, what true praise and worship to God is like. Because worship with just our lips is empty praise. Now the second thing about Jesus' remarks is that if we put, if we practice what we hear from God, then Jesus regards us as part of his family.

That is, we are in God's kingdom, we belong to him, we are precious to him, as precious as his mother and brothers, if not more so. And that makes sense, doesn't it?

Because these are the ones, we are the ones that actually Jesus will give up his life for. And we are the ones on whom God will then afterwards pour out his spirit on us.

Now some of you may be thinking, as you're hearing this whole sermon about hearing and practicing, you might be thinking, isn't becoming a Christian all about just putting our faith in Jesus?

[25 : 18] Is that not what makes us belong to his family? Why is Jesus now talking about practicing what we hear as well? Does this mean now we are saved by works? Well, no, because if we read God's word carefully, then the first thing we realize is that when God asks us to put his word into practice, the first thing we do is actually to repent and put faith in Jesus.

That's the first and foremost response that God wants of us. But then even after that, as we've believed, as a Christian, everything that God asks us to do afterwards are actually works of faith or works arising from faith.

That is, we do them, we practice them because we trust in God's word, we trust in his promises. Jesus. When we obey him, we believe that it's what's best for us, even though we may not be able to see the fruit or the result or the blessing or the reward for it right now.

So, for example, when we are asked to live sacrificially, to think of others before ourselves, we believe that when we do that, God still cares for us, whatever the cost.

He will continue to provide for us and look out for us and love us. When we forgo sinful pleasures in the world, we believe that God himself will satisfy us and give us the joy and the peace that we desire.

[26 : 43] When we forgive, even when we've been wronged, we trust that God will deal justly, that he will come and he will sort things out so that everything, all justice, is done in the end.

Can you see what I'm saying? Practicing God's word requires faith and faith comes from hearing his word and trusting in it. And so, friends, as I conclude, I would like us that as we come together each Sunday for 2018, when we study the Bible together, whether it's one-to-one or, you know, in a small group, let's consider carefully how we will hear.

Perhaps some of the points that you've written down, turn them into some action items and then commit to putting them into practice. Let's do that because God commands us to hear his word and then put it into practice.

And those of us who do that are part of Jesus' family. Well, let me pray that God will help us to do this yet. Father, humble us that we may hear your word and gladly receive whatever correction and change you desire of us.

Give us the discipline and strength to put it into practice, even though it may be hard. Give us the joy of knowing that we belong to Christ and there is great blessing in putting what we hear into practice.

[28 : 04] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.