

A few years ago, Lori and I were flipping channels on TV looking for something to watch. We stumbled upon a small group concert with singing. They sang beautiful songs with harmony. I love harmony. These guys were very good at it. So, we pushed the record button so we could go back and hear them again.

We soon discovered they were a little-known group called Celtic Thunder. We liked their music so much, we looked up their concert dates. We were delighted to discover that they were coming to Edmonton at the Jubilee Auditorium. So, we took the whole family for our kids were still too young to think that Mom and Dad's music was ancient. We enjoyed a wonderful concert. We attended several more concerts over the years. We left inspired, joyful, and appreciative.

But I don't think our lives changed much because of Celtic Thunder. We didn't come out of the concert resolving to do things differently in our lives. We did not do a deep dive on our values and priorities. We just enjoyed the concert which is what concerts are all about. If you think of some of the concerts you've attended, you may remember special moments in the concert or fun you had with family or friends. The same occurs in going to a movie. We might laugh or cry because of the story. But then we come out of the theater and go back to our lives.

Now there's nothing wrong with going to a concert or a movie to enjoy it, talk about it and forget about it. But is it okay to take the same approach with a worship service? What if we went to a church service primarily to evaluate and appreciate good talent? We would go and then after say "I really appreciated the skill of the piano player." Or "I enjoyed the speaker and what they had to say." Then we forgot about it and go on with our lives.

Is there a problem with coming to a church service as a concert goer instead of a congregant? Well today, we're going to look at a very short passage in the book of Ezekiel that raises this question. We will learn what God thinks of this and the potential impact of a concert going mindset on our spiritual lives.

So please find Ezekiel 33 in your Bibles if you have one. Or you can follow along in the Bibles we have for you. It's on page 614 near the bottom of the second column. I will be reading verses 30-33.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 (ESV)

³⁰ “As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, ‘Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.’ ³¹ And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. ³² And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. ³³ When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

Last week, we looked at verses 21-29. In 21-22, a straggler comes to deliver news to Ezekiel. Jerusalem, the capital city of the Israelites, had been struck down. The Babylonians laid siege to it. They breached the walls. Then they took captive all the leading and wealthy citizens. They burned down all the major buildings including the temple.

This news was significant for those already living in exile in Babylon. But it was even more significant for the prophet Ezekiel because he had predicted the fall of Jerusalem. Few, if any, believed him. But now, the messenger's word confirmed Ezekiel's prophecy. Suddenly, his reputation skyrockets among the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

Then in verses 23-29, we saw the Lord reveal the talk of those living in Jerusalem ruins. Those remaining in the devastated ruins of Jerusalem and Israel concluded that they would now inherit all the land. But the Lord reveals their mistreatment of one another and disobedience to Him. So, He would continue to bring judgment upon them. This message must have pleased the exiles because it was their land that others tried to steal.

Now we come to our passage. The Lord again reveals to Ezekiel people's thoughts. But this time, it's the thoughts of his fellow exiles. The Lord notes in verse 30 that everyone is talking about Ezekiel. They talk by the walls and the doors to their houses. Ezekiel's name is on everyone's lips. They are amazed at his predictive ability. But they not only talk about him. They want to hear more from him.

So, they say to one another, “Come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.” Well, this is tremendous. The messenger’s news triggered a hunger to hear from the Lord.

And they don’t just say they want to hear a word from the Lord. They go to Ezekiel to receive it. So, in verse 31 they come to him. They sit before him. They hear what he says. Doesn’t this look like a dream situation for the prophet? Everyone talks about him. They now respect his word. They desire to hear more words from the Lord. They pack out his house to listen. From the outside, Ezekiel finally experiences success in his ministry.

But then comes the middle of verse 31. “They hear what you say but they will not do it.” Oh. Well, is this really that big of a deal? At least they came and heard the word, right? End of verse 31. “For with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain.” Now that’s kind of weird. Where does this lustful talk come from? Then in verse 32, the Lord says, “And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument.”

If you’re looking at a different Bible translation than the ESV which I’m reading from you may get a different sense of the verse. The NIV, for example, says, With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.”

What’s going on here? Well the ESV translation shows us that the same word is used to describe the talk of the people and the songs Ezekiel sings – lustful talk and lustful songs. It’s not that they were talking about sex and Ezekiel was singing about it which is what we think of when we hear the word “lust.” They come to Ezekiel to have a desire satisfied. That desire is an assurance that they will now be okay and safe to go on living their lives as they wish. Their lives include greed or unjust gain. They want to accumulate stuff for themselves and disregard the needs of others. They don’t seek to change their lives to align with the Lord’s word.

So, the Lord reveals that the Israelites come before Ezekiel to satisfy their lust for undisturbed lives. They want to hear the good news Ezekiel brings. But they don’t want to do anything with it. They don’t

want to alter their lifestyle. They want a concert experience. So, they treat Ezekiel more like a pop star than a prophet. **The exiles hear the Lord's words (through Ezekiel) but they do not do what they say.**

Look at how the Lord responds in verse 33. "When this comes – and come it will – then they will know that a prophet has been among them." God does not approve of those who only hear His Word and do not act on it.

But we might say, "So what? Who cares if a crowd treats a prophet like a pop star? At least they're hearing God's Word, right?" Yet, we see several warnings in the Bible against this. Here's one of Jesus' sayings. Matthew 7:26-27. "And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Jesus has just completed the Sermon on the Mount, a huge collection of Jesus' teaching for everyday life. Many people heard it. But that doesn't mean they did anything with it. Jesus warns that if we don't put His Words into practice, our lives rest on a flimsy foundation. Then when the storms of life come, our lives can collapse or crumble. The ultimate storm will be the final judgment when we give account of our lives before God.

Or consider James 1:22 – "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." If we only hear the word and don't act on it, we can deceive ourselves. "Oh, I went to hear God's Word today. I'm good with God. I got a little inspiration and I laughed at the joke." But if we don't act on what it says, we can deceive ourselves into thinking we're okay with God.

The exiles were self-deceived into thinking that just hearing God's Word was enough to keep them right with God. But instead, it confirmed and fed their lustful desires driving them away from God. **Those who hear God's word and don't act on it, risk life devastation and self-deception.**

But listen to the promises that come with hearing and doing God's Word. Jesus said this in Matthew 7:24-25 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house,

but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” Acting on Jesus’ Word provides a solid foundation for life

Deuteronomy 4:1 - “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.” Doing God’s Word brings God’s blessings.

Mark 4:20 – “But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” Following God’s Word enables us to be fruitful in our lives.

Romans 2:13 - “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” Those who act on God’s Word receive an assurance of their salvation.

1st John 3:18 – Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. Those who hear God’s Word and act on it receive life foundation and blessing. **Since Gods’ Word brings life and hope, we must move from just hearing it to acting on it.** I certainly need this reminder in my own life. I remember times when I memorized verses from the Bible. But I didn’t live them out. I was more focused on winning a memorizing competition than actually doing the verse. I know that sometimes I feel inspired, stimulated, and excited about some life changing advice or counsel in a message I’ve heard, a class attended, something I’ve read. But then I don’t do anything with it.

So, how can we move from just hearing to doing God’s Word?

First, we need to **establish a daily 15 minutes alone with God.**

Everyone can find 15 minutes.

- **Pause before the Lord and calm your heart.**
- **Thank the Lord for His presence and ask Him to speak to you.**
- **Read a Bible passage. 10-15 verses max.**
- **Write down or note something from the passage.**
 - What does this say about God? About Life? About my life?

- **Pray in response to what you read or heard.**

So that involves you and me doing something. We're not waiting for a concert date to get inspiration. We're connecting with God in our daily, every day lives.

Then say you hear God's Word and realize you're called to act on it. Say you hear a message, or you read a Bible passage. Something sticks out to you. You realize "I need to act on that". I need to address that. So, you've heard the word. How do you act on it? Some character issue, some change in behaviour.

- **Focus on one area for 90 days.**

- **Pray and ask the Lord to change you in this one area.**
- **Write some verses or key points about it on an index card or on your phone.**
- **Set a reminder to review the card or note every two days.**
- **Ask/tell others about this focus so they can pray and hold to account.**
- **At the end of 90 days – then evaluate.**

Say I sense the need to exercise greater care over my speech. Go to online Bible and do a search on "words," "mouth," "speech." Collect a few verses on speech.

- Psalm 19:14 – Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight O Lord my rock and my redeemer.
- Psalm 141:3 – Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips."
- Proverbs 12:18 – Reckless words pierce like a sword but the words of the wise bring healing.
- Proverbs 16:24 – Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
- Matthew 12:36-37 – Jesus said, "I tell you on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

Set a reminder to review these verses every two days. Renew your commitment to join God in His work in this area. Tell one or 2 others to pray about your words and speech. After 90 days, evaluate. How have I grown in showing greater care with my words? You have not only heard the Word but you have acted on it.

Another way to act on the word of the Lord is to **make an appointment to do what it says**. Make the appointment to reconcile with your friend. Own up to some dishonesty. End the subscription to that streaming service that causes you to stumble. Join a baptism class. Recognize that the moment of action involves a great spiritual battle. The enemy wants you to stay inactive. The enemy wants us to remain as people who hear God's Word but never do anything with it. So, we must fight the thoughts that come into our minds at that moment like; "This won't work. It's not that bad. It's not that serious. He's overstating it." In those moments, we ask for the Lord's strength to persevere and act before the enemy comes and steals away the seeds of God's word in our heart.

Since God's Word brings life and hope, we must move from just hearing it to acting on it. This applies especially when we go through tough situations. Some of you here today are not looking to hear about ways to strengthen your spiritual walk. You're just trying to survive a storm. But **even in the storm, we need to not only hear God's Word but act on it**. "Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea." Even if there are world shaking events, God is still our refuge and strength. He is a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear because He is with us.

Psalm 23:1 – "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Or "I have all I need." No matter the situation, the Lord provides all we need in it.

Psalm 23:6 – "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." So, every day, the goodness and mercy of God pursues us. Do you want God to change you from being miserable and complaining to joyful and grateful? Stop and think about the ways God showed goodness and mercy to you today – then thank him for that.

Do you struggle with anxiety? Philippians 4:5-7 – “The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Since the Lord is at hand, we do not need to be anxious about anything. We need to bring everything in prayer and requests before God with thanksgiving. Then we will receive the peace of God which transcends all understanding. This peace will stand guard over our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

There might be some here today, who have never heard God’s Word before or you’ve heard God’s Word but have not acted on it. Jesus said – For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16. So that’s a word of good news. But it requires action to bring that good news into our lives. “Whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.” So you might need to believe in Christ. Belief does not just mean agree to something in our minds. It involves whole life commitment. It involves reorienting life to Christ and living under His Lordship and shepherd care. It involves turning away from life apart from Christ and turning to life with Him. So, you can receive eternal life and move your life to a solid foundation by trusting your life to Christ. If you want to act on that today, I want to invite you to do that in prayer in a moment or talk with me or another Christian you know about this.

So we started today by asking “Is there are problem with just hearing God’s Word?” The answer is yes. Such an approach can lead to life devastation and self-deception. Instead, we need to act on it; do it; take the next step. What might God be calling you to do in response to His Word today?