



Hearing OR Hearing?

Understanding the words is one thing, but understanding the meaning can be a different story entirely! Candidate Mike reflects on this in light of Jesus' parables.

I stared at the elderly Malaysian gentleman in front of me, unsure of what to do next. He looked back at me eagerly, as if expecting me to respond. His name was Uncle Lai and over the past few months we had developed quite a solid friendship. Since moving into a house a few doors up from Uncle Lai's, I would often drop in unannounced and we would share in coffee and conversation. Usually we would chat about his family (his children now lived in New Zealand), his hobbies (he had recently taken up cycling) or his church involvement (Uncle Lai loved visiting remote jungle churches and encouraging their members). On this visit, however, Uncle Lai had told me a story about an unfortunate circumstance that happened to him many years ago. Now this story didn't directly involve me, and yet as we sat at his kitchen table in a sustained silence, I couldn't help feeling like I was expected to do something with this story he had just told me.

Uncle Lai's story was designed to function in a similar way to the parables that Jesus told in the Bible. For the sake of clarity, I am defining biblical parables as stories with specific meanings that are designed to elicit a certain response from those who hear them. Hearers of parables haven't truly 'heard' until they have responded in the way that the teller of the parable intended. This is what Jesus was alluding to when He said, "... seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear." (Matt. 13:13) Jesus had just finished telling a parable about a person sowing seeds. (Matt. 13:3-9) In the parable, some seeds were sown in poor soil and died off. Others, however, were sown in good soil and bore much fruit.

If someone had truly 'heard' this parable, there would be evidence of this by Christ-like fruit being produced in their lives. For someone to claim that they had heard and yet remain unchanged would reveal a spiritual deafness. Jesus told parables to everyone who would listen, He wasn't hiding His message from anyone. And yet there were those for whom the Gospel seemed a mystery because they weren't ready to truly hear Jesus' message in a way that would lead to a transformed life.

I recently visited one of the locations in which Global Interaction teams are seeking to share the Good News in ways that are culturally understandable. One of the big takeaways from my visit was this: people are wanting to hear. There are many who are religiously praying, fasting and reading their holy scriptures in an attempt to know God. But are they truly hearing? When they hear the Good News of Jesus ushering in the Kingdom of God will they respond by receiving Jesus as their true Saviour? Or will they look on blankly like I did with Uncle Lai?

I want to encourage you to pray. Global Interaction teams around the world are seeking to share stories about Jesus in ways that people will truly hear and understand. And yet our telling is not enough. Pray that the ears of seekers will be ready to truly hear and respond to the Good News by receiving Jesus as their Saviour.

Jesus used the language of his audience. He spoke of fields, seeds, the harvest, fishing nets, sheep and servants... all culturally understandable parts of life for the people He was speaking to. What will make sense to people in your context?