

You Cannot Be Serious!

- "You cannot be serious!!!"
- Can you remember who used to say that? And when? And in what accent?
 - sports fans, tennis fans especially, should have no problem in identifying the culprit!
- **John MacEnroe**
- Especially at Wimbledon in the early 1980's - questioning the calls made by line judges.
 - when things went against him, he couldn't believe his ears: "You cannot be serious!!!"
- Sometimes it can be hard to hear what someone is saying, because we simply don't want to hear:
 - maybe its bad news about our health;
 - maybe its someone questioning the way we've done something;
 - maybe its our parents giving us advice!
- We don't want to hear, so we shut it out - by not listening, by ignoring, by arguing...
 - listening is very often not one of our strongest skills!!
- And often we are worst of all at listening for God's Word.
 - hard to hear since confronts us with reality, of our own sinfulness and our need to speak forth and live out His gospel to the world around us
 - and just because we are in a good evangelical congregation, where God's Word is preached faithfully week by week - (have you heard the oft repeated phrases yet?) - doesn't mean we are in any better a situation!
 - have we heard God's word to us?

Blocked Ears

- That's exactly the kind of situation we read about earlier:
- Individuals and a whole nation with blocked up ears: not wanting to hear God's word, and so blocking themselves off from his wisdom, direction and challenge.

Blocked Ears - Then

- Let's remind ourselves of some of the background:
 - Eli's sons, Hophni & Phinehas, rum pair!
 - served as priests, successors to their father.
 - sleeping with Temple servants, extorting money and food from worshippers...!
 - and they were meant to be the example!!!
- But they did not listen to their father's pleas (2:22-25)
 - (and that in a culture where parents had a much more directly controlling role!)
 - they blocked their ears - chose not to listen, to hear and respond
 - even when a stark warning came through an unnamed prophet, of death and destruction for the whole family because of their sin, they remained unrepentant (2:27-36)
 - (Eli was party to their sin, enjoying the benefits of their theft, honouring his sons above God - 2:29.)
- Not just Eli's family, the priesthood, but whole people of Israel had stopped listening to God: 3:1 "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions."
- Even Samuel himself, who would later be a great leader, the one who anointed kings Saul and David - he had not yet learned to hear God's word.
- **The Land of the Deaf! Deaf to God's Word**

Blocked Ears - Now

- Today - the nation doesn't listen to God's word - his standards, his models for family, for community, for national life...
 - it could equally easily be said, looking at our national life: "In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions."
 - today even God's people can sometimes seem strangely uncertain of who they are, of what they believe, of how God might be leading or directing them - witness Tuesday at the General Assembly!

Opened Doors

- In Samuel's day, something happened to change the situation:

Opened Doors - Then

- God stepped in.
 - when God steered Samuel away from mere superficial, conventional religious tradition into vital personal experience
 - if you like, when God tapped Samuel on the shoulder and said "Are you listening?"
 - when Samuel, taking Eli's advice (note how long it takes for the penny to drop for Eli - obviously unused to God speaking!) listened to God's voice
 - I suppose, when Samuel stopped doing long enough to listen
- Then God was able to open doors - to open stopped ears - to restore his relationship with his people
 - and even Eli, when he heard the word of the Lord, learned a new ability to submit to God's ways

Opened Doors - Now

- That unstopping of our ears is something we too need to learn.
- Not just in the "big" decisions of life:
 - what to do study and career wise
 - who or whether to marry
 - what areas of practical Christian service to be involved in
- But also the areas where we have shut our ears to something we really know to be true, something we need to sort out:
 - a relationship...
 - a habit that needs breaking
 - a breaking of God's Law that no one else knows about...
 - an omission in our giving to God... whatever...
- Those can often be hard things for us to hear, for they challenge us with the need to change:
 - they confront us with our own imperfection
 - they hold a clear mirror up before us - and we don't like the way we look!!
- But we need to listen - for if God has something to say to us, we'd better listen!
- And so we need to work at listening to God:
 - get into routine of reading God's word - perhaps daily, perhaps with Bible reading notes such as those from SU
 - prayer, listening, here too
 - listen to what God has to say to you week by week at church - Sunday services, other opportunities to hear God's word here...
 - listen to advice of mature Christians
 - maybe read good Christian books
- Ultimately only the Master, only the Lord has the key to open the door of our hearts, of our understanding - so ask him for his Spirit's help

New Hearts

- What were the long term results of this new openness to hearing God's word?

New Hearts - Then

- Samuel's ministry found growing recognition: people could see the reality of his encounter with God in everything he said and did.
- He had the ring of God's truth about him.
- Features:
 - **God's presence felt** - at Shiloh especially, v.21
 - the preacher's words were convincing - v.19 literally "God let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground" - not dirty and soiled like rest - they came true
 - **faith gained widespread acceptance** - all Israel were convinced, v.20
 - **public worship became vital and meaningful** - God was revealed at his sanctuary, v.21
- All this through one young man determining to listen to God, and obey the hard word that he heard
 - *(and there will be more as we follow the story through!)*

New Hearts - Now?

- There were blocked ears - and hearts and lives
 - but God opened those doors as Samuel listened to his Word
- And new hearts were born, a new vitality to a nation's faith and worship, and a turning point in that nation's history (kingship) had its main guide.
- All the way through there has been a stark contrast between Eli and Samuel:
 - **Eli** was of the establishment, his was a "safe" position, he would have been acknowledged as upright in society, but he was an opportunist and he resisted God, disobeying himself and failing to bring his sons under control.
 - **Samuel** was young, with no position, a serving lad, **but he was attentive to God's voice, he was willing to obey** - even when hard - and his faith was a living vital one, not a dead, conventional one.
- Especially as our Church nationally appears in danger of closing its ears to God's word:
 - ...are we going to be Samuel's or Eli's?
 - **those who listen and obey, or those who stop up our ears?**
- Let's determine to listen to God - to hear his voice, directing, comforting, challenging, disturbing complacency
 - **and not just hear, but obey, put into practise, follow-through**
- Rather than saying to God:
 - "You cannot be serious!"
 - saying "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."
- *And all the while looking to God for his strength and enabling, his unblocking our stuffed up ears and hearts!*