

## **Introduction**

How many of you remember E.F. Hutton's television commercials back in the late 1970's. They depicted people conversing about the stock market, when one said to the other: **"My broker is E.F. Hutton. And E.F. Hutton says . . . ."** Those words had the effect of an incantation. Once uttered, everyone in hearing distance suddenly fell silent, stopped whatever it was they're doing, and listened to what E.H. Hutton said. The commercials then ended with the same tag line, **"When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen."** Why? E. F. Hutton knows investments.

Those commercials are instructive. They imply a vital insight into human life. I'm calling it the E.F. Hutton principle. When people in the know speak, we should listen. Our text teaches us just that.

## **The Text**

Verse 10 reveals what prompted the words of Jesus in verses 11-17. It was a question the disciples asked, **"Why do you speak to them in parables?"** The purpose of parables is to increase understanding, which was why Jesus used them so frequently in His preaching and teaching. But according to verse 15, the hearts of the masses were **"dull"** and they **"closed their eyes."** They refused to internalize and activate what Jesus said and did. So, He began using different parables that required greater insight to understand, which those masses didn't have. He pinpointed the result in verses 13-15. They **"keep on hearing but will not understand"** and **"keep on seeing, but will not perceive."** They heard the words He spoke and saw the deeds He did, in other words, but didn't grasp the meaning of either.

The disciples though stood in sharp contrast to the masses. Notice what Jesus observed about them in verses 16-17. They were blessed because their eyes saw and their ears heard. They internalized and activated what He said and did. Verses 11-12 record their blessing as a result. Jesus revealed to them the meaning of the difficult parables so

that they knew what the masses didn't.

That's our text and it's filled with insight about two subjects that matter to us if we're disciples and friends of Jesus – speaking and listening. Let's examine what it teaches about both.

We start with speaking. All disciples of Jesus are spokespersons for Him, especially pastors. I say "**especially**" because their ministry in His church involves speaking in a way that other ministries don't. They preach, teach, and counsel. So, I'm going to discuss them particularly, noting that what I say about them applies to all non-pastor disciples.

### **Pastors Must Know**

Look at verse 11. It reveals what God has granted to disciples generally and pastors particularly. It's to "**know.**" That implies who pastors are or at least should be. It's people who know. To know means to think about something as it actually is and that's what we should expect from pastors. They must believe what they speak but it isn't sufficient for them only to believe it. They must know it as well.

We certainly expect that from other leaders don't we? I asked a neighbor with a bad back why he was going all the way to Cleveland Clinic for orthopedic care. "**The doctors there know as much about backs as anyone**" he answered. Note that he didn't say "**believe.**" Suppose an orthopedic surgeon holds himself out as one who believes a lot about backs. Or suppose a mechanic holds himself out as one who believes a lot about cars. We wouldn't go to either. It's imperative to us that the professionals, service people, and leaders upon who we rely "**know**" not just "**believe.**" We expect them to be right about things, not by guessing or "**luck**" but by knowing.

Well, those leaders include our pastors. We should expect and even demand that they be ones who not only believe but know as well. They don't have the authority they need to speak and to lead if they don't. Some years ago, television host Larry King asked his guest, a prominent televangelist, if there is life after death. "**I as a Christian hope and**

**believe there is,”** the televangelist answered. That isn't the most confidence inducing answer in the world is it? Hoping and believing don't give him nearly the authority on the subject that knowing does. I would have answered, **“Larry, I know that there is life after death with more certainty than I know the Roman Senate killed Julius Caesar.”** Pastors must have knowledge in order to speak and to lead.

But knowledge of what? I know that rats can last longer without water than camels, that there are no words that rhyme with orange, purple, and silver, that it's impossible to lick your elbow, and that 75% of people who hear that it's impossible to lick it, try. Those aren't the things pastors must know. Verse 11 discloses the things that are, **“the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”** Their field of knowledge must be real life under God. They must know the answers to the questions that concern people the most. What is prime reality? Why are we the way they are? How can we change for the better? How do we attain the condition of life functional people seek – pervasive and habitual love, joy, and peace? What happens to us after death? How do we overcome evil? How do we influence people for good? Pastors must know the answers to those vital questions and countless more.

### **Pastors Must Tell What they know**

But it isn't enough for them to know about real life under God. They're spokespersons for Jesus. They must also tell what they know. They do so, as I've already mentioned, primarily by preaching and teaching and secondarily by counseling.

Now, many pastors think that preaching, teaching, and counseling have three objectives. It's getting people to believe, commit to, and profess things. The problem is achieving those objectives requires manipulating their feelings and actions. So that's what pastors do. One televangelist, for instance, has an organist playing background music as he's preaching. The music varies according to the emotions trying to be generated, just as it does in the movies. Or a successful pastor I know

has lengthy highly charged altar calls. Those pastors manipulate people's feelings and actions so they'll believe, commit, or profess.

But doing that is more harmful than helpful. It results in parishioners believing, committing to, and professing things for which they have no serious vision or motivation. Their **"faith"** becomes rooted in feeling and will-power alone, which in turn makes it a drag on their lives – something that frustrates and/or exhausts them.

Two words in verse 14, **"understand"** and **"perceive,"** make clear what the job of pastors is. It isn't getting people to believe, commit to, and profess. It's getting them to know. Vision and motivation come from knowing reality. Grasping that, pastors define reality so people will know it. They then rely on the Holy Spirit to create belief, commitment, and profession on the basis of that.

Pastors define reality in a specific way. They present what they know for what it is – knowledge that is testable and available to anyone who truly wants it. You may have noticed I sometimes preface what I'm going to say with **"in my view"** or **"in my opinion."** That means what I'm going to say is something I believe. Otherwise, what I say is something I know. So, I've said to you, **"We should fast at least once a week,"** with the preface, **"in my view."** I believe that. I've also said to you, **"Friendship with Jesus is quietly transforming"** without a preface. I know that. And you can too by considering and testing it.

That then is the job of pastors. It's to present what they know about real life under God as knowledge that people can test and come to know. Knowing then enables them, with the Holy Spirit's help, to believe, commit to, and profess with vision and motivation.

### **People Must Listen**

Our text is filled with insight about a second subject – listening. Verse 16 says about the disciples that their eyes saw and their ears heard. They listened in other words and so should we. When pastors or anyone in the know speaks, we should listen. Listening requires three

things of us, and here they are.

First, we must want to know. Maybe you remember the slang phrase from the 1990's, "**Talk to the hand.**" People sometimes don't listen to what is said because they don't want to know it. It's called avoidance. They avoid knowledge by not listening. That way they don't have to deal with the responsibility or upset that what is said often brings.

Several years ago, I talked with a Christian high school football coach. I told him that the Bible's ethic of love applies on the playing field just as it does off it. He rejected my claim though and when I began to explain it, stopped me, and said, "**You believe what you want. I'll believe what I want.**" He could know that the Bible's ethic of love applies to sports and how. But he doesn't want to know because it'd disturb his coaching if he did. So, he doesn't listen.

We need to be objective pursuers of knowledge and truth. We listen because we want to know even if knowing hurts or disturbs.

Listening requires a second thing. We must recognize that it's essential to know. I mean by that, essential to our faith.

Many people view knowledge as separate from faith and inessential to it, something we don't need. Faith to them is a kind of spiritual struggle. The struggle is to maintain beliefs about God and His kingdom with no support from knowledge, or even against it. A woman once commented to me how heroic a certain biology teacher is to maintain his Christian beliefs in the face of evolutionary "**facts.**" Some people say, "**Just put your hands over your eyes and believe.**" She apparently thinks that's what the biology teacher is doing. But there isn't anything heroic about that if he is. It's foolish and detrimental instead.

The truth is that knowledge is essential to faith as a support to it. Forty years ago, for instance, I believed that to die is gain with this much knowledge about it (small circle). Today, I believe to die is gain with this much knowledge about it (big circle). And I'm far more at ease in the face of death as result. Death, in fact, is now a non-factor to me. Knowledge is essential to faith. It supports and strengthens it.

Recognizing that is a strong incentive to listening. When an oncologist speaks to us about our cancer, we recognize it's essential to our life to know what he says. And we're "**all ears**" because we do. We listen to what he says. In the same way, when a pastor or other person in the know speaks to us about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, we recognize that it's essential to our life to know what he says. And we're "**all ears**" because we do. We listen to what he says.

There's a third thing listening requires. We act to know. We act by thinking carefully and deeply about what is said. We do three things. First, interpret what is said. Construe its meaning. Second, verify what is said. Stack it up against facts and logic to determine if it's true or not. And third, apply what is said. Figure out how we should think, feel and act in light of it.

A Christian professor, for instance, said "**Anything that can be done with anger can be better done without it.**" First, I interpreted what he said. Anger is always more detrimental than it is beneficial. Second, I verified what he said. I stacked it up against verses like Proverbs 14:29 and James 1:20 and my own life experience and determined that it's true. And third, I applied it. I try and train in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to eliminate anger as a way of dealing with the people and circumstances of day-to-day life.

You can see what I did here. I acted to know.

## **Conclusion**

Those then are three things listening requires. I'd sum them up with an E.F. Hutton commercial I saw. A teacher asks a little girl, Ann, to recite the alphabet and she does, partially at least, "**A, B, C, D, E, F . . . E, F . . . E.F. Hutton.**" The entire class immediately gathers around her, after which another little girl declares, "**When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.**" That, by way of analogy, is what we as disciples and friends of Jesus should do. It's the E.F. Hutton principle. When people who know the mysteries of God's kingdom speak, listen.