# Ears To Hear — Delivery Transcript

**Matthew 13:11–17; survey of Revelation (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, August 7, 2022** · *Mystery Babylon*

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To Crystal and Tammy for leading us this morning and the band did a tremendous job. As always, we're so blessed with such talented musicians. If you have your Bible, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 13 this morning. We will also be in the book of the Revelation. So for those of you who are just so eager to get back in the book of Revelation, we'll be there. But we're actually looking at a passage in Matthew chapter 13 before we get there. And for those of you who are new, our church has been journeying through the last book of the Bible for over a year now.

Typically in our church we pick a book and we work through it line by line, chapter by chapter. But one of the dangers of doing preaching that way is you get so lost in the weeds you miss the forest. You get so caught up in the details, you miss the main things and the plain things that are really the gist. And the main reason Revelation, I think, was written was to give suffering Christians unshakable hope in a broken world. And the message that was given to them they needed in order to endure.

They were being pressured from all sides to compromise spiritually, to shipwreck their faith, to bow the knee to Caesar, or to, you know, accommodate the cultural religion of their day, or to just kind of buy in to the allure of the world and the sensual indulgences of the Greco-Roman emperor worship and the temple prostitutes and all kinds of stuff. It was like Las Vegas everywhere back in the day. So there were all those pressures. And it's not too far from what we have going on today, where we have all kinds of pressures as Christian people to compromise spiritually, to shipwreck our faith to just kind of deny Christ in exchange for something or someone else.

And we need the message of the book of the Revelation just as desperately as those first-century Christians needed to hear the message of the book of Revelation. But for us to

benefit from that message, what I want us to look at this morning is we have to have ears to hear. And in Matthew chapter 13, what we see is teaching from Jesus about what it means to have ears to hear. And for us to get the main thing out of the book of the Revelation, the big idea, for us to benefit from that, we got to have ears to hear.

And the book of the Revelation actually lays out what it looks like to be spiritually deaf, what it looks like to have ears to hear, and so after we learn what it means from Jesus, we will apply it to the book of the Revelation, and then we will get out of here. So Matthew chapter 13, starting in verse 11, Jesus often in his teaching and preaching would preach in parables. Often he would precede a lot of his teachings with the phrase, Let anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear.

It used to be, when I was young, I'd read that and I'd say, A bunch of earless people walking around in Palestine? Why is he saying that? No, it's not earless people. It's just a Semitic idiom that means what I'm about to say is going to be upsetting to some people. They're not going to be able to receive it because of who they are and where they're coming from. But for those who are able to hear what I'm about to say, listen closely because it's going to bless you, it's going to change your life.

And so he says that in this parable, and then his disciples come up to him and they say, Jesus, why are you preaching and teaching in parables? And he makes this fascinating, shocking statement in Matthew chapter 13, verse 11, when he says, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them." So two groups of people, those who know and those who don't. For the people who know, or those who have, Jesus says in verse 12, "more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

Shocking, right? "That is why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand." Then in verse 14 what he does is he quotes a prophecy from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 6 is where the prophet Isaiah is commissioned by God to go and preach the gospel. Here I am, Lord, send me. You remember that? Well, the Lord, in that commissioning service, he says, I'm going to send you to a people who are going to reject what you have to say.

They're going to hate you for saying it. No one's going to believe it. Good luck, you know. And Isaiah was like, Whoo, never been more excited to preach. And so he has a terrible ministry, but Jesus is here quoting that text, Isaiah chapter 6. To talk about the people he's preaching to. And he's saying, these people who are spiritually deaf are just like the people Isaiah's prophecy talked about, which says, "You will listen and listen, but never understand; you will look and look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown callous; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their

eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back—and I would heal them."

And then he goes to his disciples and he says, but you guys are blessed. "Blessed are your eyes because they do see," and blessed are "your ears because they do hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see the things you see but didn't"—and they longed "to hear the things you hear but didn't hear them." This is Jesus being completely unfair, right? This is not social-justice-warrior, socialist Jesus; everybody gets a cookie, everybody gets the same. This is totally unfair. My oldest son, Blaze, is really complaining now about things being unfair.

And my favorite thing to say to him when he says that's not fair: Life's not fair, son. And Jesus isn't fair, son. And I start talking about all the ways Jesus isn't fair. It's probably traumatized him, but it's the truth. Jesus is not fair. This is not fair. You got two groups of people, those who hear and those who don't. And when asked the question, Jesus, why do you preach in parables? He says, I preach in parables so that the people who can hear will, and the people who won't hear can't.

There are serious, devastating spiritual consequences to spiritual deafness. That's what Jesus is saying. Now, Jesus isn't the reason people were spiritually deaf then. Jesus is not the reason people are spiritually deaf now, but what he's saying is that deafness has devastating consequences because they could hear the gospel, they could hear the truth until they're blue in the face. But they won't receive it. They won't be blessed by it. They won't be changed by it because they don't have ears to hear. You, however, do. And because you do, not only will you hear the truth, you will receive more and more and more.

The blessings will pile up in your life, whereas these, even what they think they have, it's going to be taken away from them. So how do we today become people who have ears to hear? It's obviously incredibly important from the lips of Jesus that we reject spiritual deafness and embrace what it means to have ears to hear. That's what I want us to look at in the book of Revelation, because Revelation spells that dynamic out in very powerful and compelling ways, and I think it is one of the main purposes of the book, that we would learn to have ears that hear.

Okay, so you ready? Now normally when I preach I pick a verse and we work through it slow, steady. This is not that sermon. We are going to go through the entire book of the Revelation. So if you have a Bible, pull your Bible out. If you like following along, there's Bibles under the chairs there. There'll be verses up on the screen. We are going to theologically take this idea and I want to show you how it manifests in the book of Revelation. Now when it comes to this concept, what does it mean to be spiritually deaf?

What does it look like to not have ears that hear? The way that the book of Revelation in particular describes those people is with a designation: earth dweller. It sounds like something you'd hear on Stranger Things, like a fire-breather. But this is an earth dweller. And in the CSB it doesn't translate it earth dweller, it translates it those who live on the earth. It's not nearly as compelling, but you get the basic idea, earth dwellers. And they show up over and over and over again, so much so that you know this is intentionally done to create a class of people on the earth.

And when he says earth dweller, he doesn't mean all of the people who live on the earth. He's talking about a particular type of person who lives on the earth that doesn't have ears to hear. You first meet them in Revelation chapter 3, verse 10, so if you want to turn there. You can, otherwise it'll be up on the screen. Jesus in chapter 3, verse 10, he's speaking to the church of Philadelphia. He's speaking to a group of faithful Christians. He's saying, because you have obeyed my commands, I'm going to keep you from the hour of tribulation that's about to come on the earth.

In other words, you kept my word, so I'm keeping you. But those who don't keep my word, those who live on the earth, in other words, are going to experience an hour of testing or great tribulation. So the first introduction of this group of people is that they disobey Christ's commands and therefore experience tribulation. We see them again in Revelation chapter 6, verse 10. In chapter 6, you see all of these seals broken, devastating consequences on the earth. We don't have time to go into all the details. But one of the seals in Revelation chapter 6 is the increase of persecution of Christians on the earth.

And you have these martyrs, these Christian martyrs in chapter 6, verse 10, that are crying out under the altar, How long, O Lord, until you come and avenge our blood? Who is God avenging on? This phrase right here: Those who live on the earth. How long until you come and judge these people and avenge our blood? So they disobey Christ's commands, but it's not just that they're disobedient to God, they're also complicit in Christian persecution. Maybe they themselves are not doing the persecuting, but they're turning a blind eye. They're saying, I don't want to stop it.

You see them again two chapters later, chapter 8, verse 13. Chapter 8 and 9 is when the trumpet judgments fall on the earth. You see these devastating judgments that burn up the earth and torment people with these demonic locusts. It's really quite interesting. We don't have time to go into it. But there's a woe pronounced on those who live on the earth in chapter 8 verse 13. It says, "I looked and heard an eagle flying high overhead, crying out in a loud voice, 'Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth'"—that's our phrase; woe to the earth dwellers—""because of the remaining trumpet blasts that the three angels are about to sound!'" It's interesting.

Only earth dwellers receive the judgment of God, the trumpet judgments in Revelation chapter 8 and 9. That's a unique class of people. They disobey Christ's commands. They are complicit in Christian persecution, and they are deserving of the judgment. The next time they show up is in Revelation chapter 11, chapter 11, verse 10. Chapter 11 is all about the two witnesses, which are representative of God's witness on the earth during the days leading up to the end. They are preaching the gospel, teaching the gospel. They are experiencing opposition from this antichrist figure called the beast.

The beast is ultimately successful in silencing the witness of those two witnesses. He kills them, he triumphs over them, and those who live on the earth gloat when they die. They will gloat over them and celebrate and send gifts to one another because those two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. So if you're taking notes, here's your little list to start working on. These earth dwellers, a profile of an earth dweller, someone who's living more for this world than they are for the lamb, they disobey Christ's commands.

They are complicit in Christian persecution. Maybe they themselves are not active, but they're turning a blind eye. I don't want to be associated with those crazy people. They are deserving of God's judgment and they celebrate the censorship of truth. In particular, gospel truth. Let's shut those people up. Let's keep that stuff off the airwaves. You would think from this list, maybe these are people who are atheistic, secular humanists. They are kind of non-religious people. But what you find, in fact, if you keep reading in chapter 13, is that they are pretty religious.

But their religiosity is not submitted to the true God and his Christ, Jesus, but it's actually a satanic religion, and maybe they don't even know it's satanic, maybe they don't even know it's demonic. But they are worshiping this counterfeit Christ who we'll meet later known as the beast or this anti-Christ. He's mentioned in chapter 13, verse 8. Let me show you this, that they worship him. Some people say, Is everybody on the earth really going to worship the antichrist? I don't know. This word worship doesn't mean worship as in raise your hands and do what we do on Sunday mornings, it means to bow down.

So it could just be, these are people who say, I don't want to make any trouble. I'll do whatever this guy says. Go along to get along. It could be as simple as that. Or maybe they actually worship him, but the point is that they give their allegiance to this beast. "Everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life." So you've got those who hear. And those who don't hear. Those who don't hear are called earth dwellers. They deserve God's judgment. They're complicit in persecution.

They disobey Christ. And they worship a counterfeit God. The last two things I'll say about them is they persist in their unbelief. This is in chapter 14, verse 6. You would think that these people maybe are the way that they are because they've never heard the gospel, they've never had a chance, they're just hardened in their unbelief because they live on some island,

never heard the name Jesus. But that's not what you see in chapter 14. They get the gospel over and over again, but every time they hear it, they harden their heart harder and harder, and it's more callous and more callous.

So they persist in their unbelief. And then maybe the most tragic statement about this class of people is in chapter 17, verse 2, and it is that they are blind to the truth about their spiritual condition. They do not even understand the depths of their own spiritual deafness. Chapter 17 is the chapter with Mystery Babylon. Babylon, of course, represents the counter culture of the kingdom of heaven. Everything God promotes, they demote; everything God celebrates, they denigrate; and those who live in Babylon kind of get drunk on the spirit of the age.

And that's what he describes in chapter 17, verse 2. "Those who live on the earth"—there's our phrase, this class of people, these spiritually deaf people—"became drunk on the wine of her sexual immorality." And we said when we studied chapter 17 that sexual immorality isn't just talking about unholy sex, sexual intercourse. It's talking about spiritual idolatry, any kind of worship that is not true worship of the true God and his Christ. And so the picture is these people are drunk. They don't know where they are, they don't know what's going on, they're not aware of the dangers around them.

Here, hold my beer; watch me do something I think is totally innocent, but it's actually inviting my destruction. That's the picture from heaven of those who live on the earth, and those who live on the earth are those who are spiritually deaf. That's the profile. Now you may look at this profile and say to yourself, Whew, thank God I'm not one of those guys. You know. I mean, I disobey Christ's commands a little bit, but I'm not celebrating the persecution of Christians. And I'm not, you know, one of those woe, woe, woe kind of people.

I mean, I don't deserve those kind of judgments and I certainly don't celebrate when Christian martyrs are put to death. And I'm glad that's the case. I'm glad that you're not one of those people. But the crazy thing is, in the book of the Revelation there is no mushy middle where you can say, Well, I disobey Christ's commands and I kind of disassociate from the super weird Christians and I kind of disassociate from people who believe the Bible is completely true and Jesus should be submitted to no matter what. I'm not real radical.

That kind of mushy middle that sometimes we can drift into when we're a little bit uncomfortable with what God's calling us to do because it's a little bit too difficult and I'd have to change the way I live and I'd have to stop doing these things that are actually quite pleasurable to me. That mushy middle, it does not exist in the book of the Revelation. So what you see is this either-or mindset, black and white. You're either a follower of the lamb or you are an earth dweller. You can't be in between.

And so it really does, I think, invite the question for us this morning. If someone was to judge me, if someone was to evaluate the way that I live, the words that I say, the attitudes that I carry, would they find me guilty more of being an earth dweller or a lamb follower? Because the mushy middle is really not an option. And the answer to that question, I think, is ultimately found not just in the behaviors of your life, but in who has authority over what you believe is right and wrong and who has the affections of your heart?

It's a question of authority and affection. Who bends your ear and who has your heart? If you find yourself not just living in this world, but more living for this world— I have my Sunday box, I have my God box, but really I'm all about making money, having the American dream, being seen in a certain kind of light. I'll compromise spiritually, I'll compromise ethically, if that's what I've got to do to get my goal. But that goal has nothing to do with the kingdom of God, it has everything to do with the kingdom of this world, then you're an earth dweller.

And you may not identify with some of the more gross demonstrations of what it means to be an earth dweller, but that's the path you're on. And you're becoming spiritually deaf. And the consequences of that spiritual deafness are devastating. So are you an earth dweller or a lamb follower? If your answer to that question is, I'm not sure, or, I can't say— or maybe you'd be honest and say, I'm actually more on the track of earth dwelling than I am lamb following. I think the best way for you to resist that pull, and maybe become someone who becomes spiritually able to hear again, is to be aware of the noise makers in our culture that are trying to deafen your ears.

I use that language because in the book of the Revelation, what you see happen is you get introduced to these characters over and over again, and these characters are used by Satan to create spiritual deafness. Now one of the things that people get all messed up on in the book of the Revelation is that the book of Revelation presents these characters in apocalyptic imagery. And all that means is they use vivid metaphors and picturesque language, things like beasts and dragons and lions and tigers and bears, oh my, and all this stuff, you just kind of get lost because of the imagery of it.

But I want to encourage you, don't get lost in the imagery. Just listen to the description of these noisemakers and notice how they silenced, notice how they deafened spiritual ears then. Because the way it happened then is the way Revelation says it will be in the future and the way it is today. All of us are looking to worship something or someone. There is really no such thing as a secular humanist atheist; we're all worshiping. We're looking for something to adore and to treasure. Satan knows that about us and so instead of getting us to reject God outright and saying there is no God and I don't want anything to do with God, what he does is he creates a system of theological counterfeits.

He creates a system of false gods and idolatry and false messiahs and says these are who will deliver you, these are who will satisfy you, not the true God, not the biblical Jesus. That's

who I'm about to introduce you to, the deceivers, the noise makers. And I think the best way to think about it is as an unholy trinity. I'm not the first to come up with this concept in the book of Revelation. You have the biblical trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. God sends his son into the world to die on the cross for our sins.

He's raised from the dead. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit into the world to advance and continue the kingdom of God until Jesus comes again. In the unholy trinity, you don't have God the Father, you have Satan the dragon. You don't have Christ the Son, you have this beast that Satan gives power to, called the antichrist, a replacement savior. That antichrist is bolstered by a Holy Spirit of sorts. He's called the false prophet. He points people to the antichrist. He compels people to put the mark of the antichrist on their forehead.

He does signs and wonders just like the Holy Spirit does in the book of Acts. It is a counterfeit trinity. It's a false trinity. And the whole reason Satan develops it is so that he could deceive and destroy, to create a counterfeit system of worship that deceives and destroys and creates spiritual deafness for those who live on the earth. So just real quick, let's look at the three characters. Actually I'm going to introduce a fourth one as well. But the first one is the beast. We've talked about this guy in past sermons.

Sometimes he's referred to as the antichrist— 2 Thessalonians,[1] 1 John. He is the chief enemy of the people of God. He comes from the abyss in Revelation chapter 11, meaning he is satanically inspired. He is from the pit of hell. He is evil through and through. In chapter 13, he is king over an antichrist kingdom. And so this isn't just like a spirit in the world that's not physically expressed. There's a physical expression of this evil in a government a kingdom of some sort, an empire, and that's spelled out very clearly in chapter 13.

We don't have time to get into the details. But chapter 13 is looking back to Daniel 7. Daniel 7's about these historical empires that oppressed the people of God, that tried to thwart God's plan. Essentially Revelation is saying this final evil, this final antichrist will have a kingdom that is geared at crushing the people of God and threatening with political violence anybody who does not submit. And that's how he deceives. You ask the question, how does this beast deafen people's ears spiritually? He deceives people or he deafens ears through the potential of political power.

That's how it's always worked. That's how it worked with Egypt. That's how it worked with the Assyrians. That's how it worked with Babylon in Daniel chapter 7. That's how it worked with Rome in the New Testament. Satan uses political power and forces those who live on the earth to say, I'd rather go with those guys than Jesus. Because if I go with Jesus, I'm signing my death warrant, that's persecution, that's suffering, that's political ostracism. I don't want none of that, so I'm just going with these guys. You see this in Revelation in chapters 2 and 3.

Those who would not bow the knee to the emperor, those who wouldn't bow the knee to Caesar, they got pressure. They were crushed. They were persecuted. And you'll see this at the end, and you see it today. You see Christians today who under the threat of political power, the potential of political power, they say no thanks. Thanks, but no thanks, no Jesus for me. You see it in Islamic authoritarian governments. You see it in the communist Chinese Communist Party, the CCP; you see this in Stalin's Russia back in the day.

You can go throughout history; it's the fear of the potential power of government that causes many Christians to just shrink back. I don't want violence. The other side of that coin though is the allure of political power. Some Christians are tempted by the power of the state to say, well, maybe I compromised my Christian convictions, but if I could just get in political power, then I could legislate the kingdom of God. Then I could force people to do right. We could legislate morality and that is a trap. Every time the church has ever done that, it has not worked out well.

You're trying to use the methods of the world to inaugurate the kingdom of God, and you can't inaugurate the kingdom of God with the weapons of the world. You've got to use the weapons of the king, and the weapons of the king were humility and sacrifice and love. That's what you see on the cross. You don't see political gamesmanship. None of that. We live in a democracy. We should elect Christian leaders. I'm not saying we should not do that. But have a proper perspective. The state's not the Messiah. That's the promise of the antichrist: I'll be the Messiah.

The state will do the winning, and Christians should always put their trust in the only politician who can inaugurate the kingdom of God, and that's Jesus Christ himself. So the antichrist, the beast, deceives through the potential of political power, the false prophet deceives through the pressure of false religion. The false prophet's mentioned in Revelation chapter 13. It says he has horns like a lamb; so in other words, he looks like Jesus. But it spoke like a dragon. So his message is satanic. Isn't that interesting? It looks gospel, looks like Jesus, looks like that Christian stuff, but it's actually satanic and demonic underneath.

This mark of the beast— or this, I'm sorry, this false prophet forces people to take the mark of the beast, those who live on the earth. Unlike the Holy Spirit who invites and woos, this Holy Spirit is coercive and authoritarian. He doesn't act in love, he acts through force. He combines false religion and authoritarian politics to coerce and to compel. There is no separation of church and state. It's the imperial cult. You see this in religions like Islam. It is literally turn or burn. Believe, or off with your head. That's the pressure of a false religion.

Notice in chapter 13, verse 14, it says that this false prophet "deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived." And you find out later that those who would not worship the beast or take the

mark of the beast, they end up having a death threat, persecuted, they can't participate in the economic system. All of this you could go into details and get all lost in the weeds.

What's that going to look like in the future? I have no idea. But it existed not just in the future. It existed in the past. It existed in the first century and it still exists today. In culture, there's a spirit of the age. There is a false religion in our culture. You don't have to point to any one particular false religion. You just get the spirit of the age that has a sense in which it's kind of a pressure cooker on us. It's forcing us to conform or be ostracized, toe the line, say the words, do what you're told, bow the knee, go along to get along, or you'll be canceled or you'll be shut down.

That pressure is active in the world today, and that pressure is silencing the Christian witness and it is deafening ears spiritually for those who live on the earth, but even for Christians who are trying to hear, God's voice gets turned down because of the pressure of that false religion. And it comes in many, many forms, but the effect is always the same. It's deafening our ears. It's deafening our ability to hear the voice of the Spirit. The beast and the false prophet combine to make— harlot Babylon. That's the person you're introduced to in chapters 17 and 18.

Babylon represents the centralization of spiritual idolatry and sensual indulgence. If the church exists to glorify Christ and advance his kingdom, Babylon exists to do the opposite. It exalts the self, it dishonors God. It's an age-old temptation that will grow in the days leading up to the end. And the way that Babylon deceives earth dwellers is through the pleasure of sensual indulgence. The beast uses the potential of political power to draw people in. The false prophet uses the pressure of false religion to deafen spiritual ears. But this lady, this ooh-so-beautiful lady, draws people in through the pleasure of sensual indulgence.

It's almost like they're two totally different systems: one is using religion to coerce and compel, but this is using the opposite of religion. It's kind of licentiousness. It's live how I want to live, it's indulgence, it's excess, it's pleasures forevermore, it's sex, drugs, and rock and roll, it's sexual freedom, do what I want to do, be who I want to be. Babylon looks good on the outside, it looks attractive. She says, if you'll follow me, I'll make you rich, I'll make you happy. You'll have everything you've ever wanted. But ultimately it results in destruction because Babylon is destroyed.

And so, you know, there's a spirit at work in the world that's using Babylon to deafen your ears. It's using the beast. It's using the false prophet to deaden your sensitivity to what the Spirit of God is saying to you right now, even maybe in this room, about what Christ has to say to you for your life. And all of these are animated by the third member of the unholy trinity and that's Satan himself, Satan the dragon. He's mentioned as the dragon more than any other term in the book of the Revelation.

He shows up in chapter 12. He tries to devour the Christ. He tries to crush the woman who is the bride of Christ. He tries to persecute Christians throughout all generations through godless government and godless false religion and he's a dragon I think because he preys on souls that are in search of salvation. The dragon was the deceiver, the serpent, just like the serpent in Genesis 3. Did God really say? I know you're looking for salvation. I know you're looking for glory, but is this really what you think will deliver?

Is it really the cross that gives salvation? Is it really the kingdom of God that will give you true prosperity and satisfaction in life? Or what about this? What about the kingdoms of this world? What about being liked, and a who's who in the culture? What about every indulgence you've ever had satisfied in ways that you can't imagine? Did God really say, or would this be better? That's the dragon. That's the voice of the dragon. And listen, many people hear that voice and they say, I'd much rather have that than this.

I'd much rather have the world than the creator of this world. I'd much rather indulge in the creation than submit to the creator. He preys on our soul's search for salvation. He knows. Satan knows there's only one way of salvation. It's through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so He takes that one way and He conceals it, and then He fills your mind with all sorts of counterfeits. And if he can do that, he can deafen your ears spiritually. You know what's so crazy? I'll say this and then we'll wrap it up.

The number of the kingdom of Satan mentioned in the book of Revelation is the number— does anybody remember it? 666, right? 666. A lot of people take the 666 and they try to use — I think it's called gematria— to try to figure out was it Nero or is it Obama or is it Trump? And all that's kind of a fool's errand in my opinion. But the number six is one away from the number seven. And the number seven in the book of Revelation, that's the number of God. It's the number of completion.

It's the number of fullness and peace, perfection. So what you see in the kingdom of Satan is one away from what's real. It's just shy of what only God can do. And that's how the devil operates. He paints a beautiful picture, a compelling picture, but ultimately it's always just shy of what you really needed. It's always just shy of what only God can do. Can material possessions deliver you from the hells of this world? Yes, quite a few of them. Can false religion provide a sense of security and safety? Yes, but it's not a real safety.

It's an artificial safety. It's just shy of the real safety you need. It's 666. It's the number of a man. It's not the true thing. It's a counterfeit. And so you got to know that. If you want to have ears to hear, you got to wake up, realize you're at war. This world is not our home. This world is full of counterfeits that are always attempting to deceive and destroy. And if you don't live like you're at war, you'll be deceived. You'll be sucked right in. That's not to say we should hate the world or kind of go into our holy huddles.

I don't believe in that whatsoever, but it is to say be alert, be awake. The only way you'll have ears to hear is if you turn down the volume of these noisemakers and turn up the volume of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's where we'll end. The way to have ears to hear in the book of the Revelation is by hearing God's word, but not just hearing it— but when you hear it, keeping it and putting it into practice. There's a connection between hearing ears and a happy heart. Let me show you this in Revelation chapter 1 very quickly.

Revelation chapter 1, verse 3 has a beatitude, or a blessing, to "those who hear the words of this prophecy"—but don't just hear it—"and keep what is written in it, because the time is near." So you see a connection between hearing ears and a blessed life, a happy life. Happiness is connected with hearing. But also you see a connection between hearing and keeping. Those who hear God's word keep it. You see the same thing in Revelation chapter 22 verse 7. This is at the very end of the book of the Revelation.

Jesus says, "Look, I am coming soon!" Happy, "blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." So if you're taking notes, in the book of the Revelation, there's a connection between hearing ears and a happy life, but there's also, for those who hear, an inextricable relationship between hearing and keeping. Those who hear God's word keep it. Those who keep God's word do so because of their hope in his faithfulness. Hearing, keeping, and hoping. I don't have time to develop this, but if you go through every beatitude in the book of the Revelation— there's seven of them— Every single beatitude, you'll see a connection between those who hear God's word and those who keep God's word.

Did I put the references on your notes? If I didn't— chapter 14, verse 13. A voice pronounces a blessing on those who die in the Lord. Why? Because their works follow after them. Hearing keeping. Chapter 16, verse 15, gives a blessing to those who remain alert and clothed. That means they've embraced a godly lifestyle, so they won't be shamed when Jesus comes again. Hearing keeping, keeping, hoping. Chapter 19, verse 9 pronounces a blessing on those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb, future glory, hoping in God's faithfulness.

Living a godly life because of that hope. Chapter 20, verse 6, blessing on those who share in the first resurrection because they escape the power of the second death. Chapter 22, verse 7, we just read. Chapter 22, verse 14. "Blessed are those who wash their robes"—in other words, live righteous lives, obey the words of the king, who put faith in Jesus. Why? Because they'll have a right to the tree of life, rewards, faithfulness, God's promise. So we don't have time to go into all of them, but if you go back in your own time, you will see a necessary connection between those who hear and those who keep.

Those who hear God's word keep God's word, and those who keep God's word keep it because of hope in his faithfulness. The proof of the pudding you've heard is in the tasting. Well, the proof of the hearing is in the keeping. I'm not saying everybody who disobeys God's

word is not a Christian. I don't believe that. You're not saved by your works. But one of the ways you can have confidence that you're saved is through the keeping. It's through obedience to God's word. And if you, as many of us may be in this room, are living a life of habitual sin, constant obedience, have no remorse whatsoever.

I just prayed a prayer, got baptized so I could go to heaven when I die. You are not genuinely a Christian. A genuine Christian hears God's word and keeps it. And if you're not keeping it, it's keeping you up at night. It's bothering you because the Spirit of God living in you, that's grieving his spirit. So those who hear, keep, and those who keep hope in God's faithfulness. You see it in the blessing statements. The craziest thing, if you go back in chapter two and chapter three, Jesus writes a letter to seven different churches.

It is so crazy. To every single church, they all have different things going on, but one thing is the same. His command is the same to every church. And this phrase to those who overcome, it's the same to every single church. It's so weird. It's hearing, keeping, doing. To every single church, Jesus says, to anyone who has ears to hear. Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. He says it to Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira, Laodicea, everyone, same exact words. Anyone who has ears to hear, listen. So then you see hearing, and that hearing is followed by keeping.

He says to every single church, to the one who overcomes. To the one who overcomes— in other words, to the one who hears what I'm saying, puts it into practice, perseveres in obedience, no matter what. That's an overcomer. To the one who overcomes I will give. It's always different. I'll give a new name. I'll give you a white stone. I'll give you manna from heaven. I'll give you a right to sit and rule and reign with Jesus. The reward's always different, but the gist is the same. It's a promise. It's God's faithfulness to those who keep.

So those who hear keep. Those who keep hope. That's the profile of a person who has ears to hear. So if you ask yourself the question this morning, am I an earth dweller or a lamb follower? The proof of the pudding is in the tasting and the proof of the hearing is in the keeping. And so I would plead with you this morning. If you're a Christian person and you're here this morning and the Spirit of God is saying to you, X, Y, Z, whatever the case is, I think for a lot of us he's probably saying, trust me and obey.

There's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey. And some of you are scared out of your mind because if I do what Jesus is wanting me to do, I may lose this person that I love. I may lose this job that I need. I may be mocked and ostracized. And listen, you're not the first one to have to go through that calculus. But he's worth it. He's so much better. And it's the proof of the pudding. Those who hear God's word, you know you're hearing it if you're keeping it.

You're putting it into practice. There are probably a couple of us this morning who the Spirit of God is saying to you to repent and be saved. You've grown up in this world, you can't help it, you grew up in this world and you've kind of put your faith in the counterfeit. And maybe you know, politically, I don't know what your politics are, but you kind of got lost in that world. That's what's going to save us, is politics. Or maybe it's the culture. You know, it's a semi, somewhat sick Christian culture in America, but it's quickly eroding into something totally opposite.

But that's your religion. That's just kind of what you've absorbed, but it can't deliver. It can't save. In fact, every time you violate the culture's religion, it condemns you and says you cannot be forgiven. You're forever canceled. That's not the gospel. The gospel speaks a better word. It's a word of grace. It's a word of removing your shame. Experience forgiveness. Experiencing a cleansing of unrighteousness. But it's only available through Jesus Christ. And so this morning, if the Spirit of God is drawing you to faith in Jesus Christ and you've never publicly given your life to Him, you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, this morning is an opportunity for you to do that.

Cheryl's going to play quietly. There's going to be a QR code put up on the screen and you can scan that QR code and say I'm surrendering my life to Jesus Christ. I'm tired of playing on the fence. I'm tired of wondering if I'm saved or not. I'm tired of always questioning. I want to surrender, Jesus. I want to surrender to you today. All that I am— it's yours completely and fully. I'll be happy to receive you if you want to talk about that decision or we can talk after the service.

But if the Lord's calling you, if the Spirit is speaking, then listen to what the Spirit is saying. And then finally those of you— or those of us, I put myself in the same boat— who, the words that Jesus is speaking create fear and uncertainty, and you just want someone to pray with you or to listen, the altar is open. I'll be happy to pray with anybody. Maybe you just want to grab your spouse or grab a friend and say, hey, come down to the altar. I need to pray; I need to hear from the voice of Jesus.

I need help to turn down the noise of the culture so I can hear the voice of my Savior. However you need to respond, you do that now. Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for the book of Revelation. We thank you that you didn't leave us without a witness. You've given us a word. You've given us direction. All we need to do is have the courage and the faith to put it into practice. And so would you help us, Holy Spirit, to have that supernatural faith and that supernatural courage to do what you're calling us to do.

We give you this time. We pray your will be done. In Jesus' name, amen.

1. Transcript note: spoken as "1 Thessalonians"; the Thessalonian passage about the "man of lawlessness" is 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 (the word "antichrist" itself appears in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). Source: 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4; 1 John 2:18 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩