ESSAY · JANUARY 15, 2015

The Danger of Selective Listening

Written by Bill Perkins

"What is a dog?"

What Is a Dog?

That's the title to a funny little description which begins like this: "Dogs lie around all day, sprawled on the most comfortable piece of furniture in the house. They constantly scratch themselves. They can hear a package of food being opened half-a-block away but don't hear you when you're in the same room."

After several more lines it concludes: "Dogs are tiny men in fur coats." Like dogs, most of us practice the art of selective listening.

Most of the time it doesn't matter. Like when my wife reminds me to take out the trash, or pick up my socks. But I can think of an instance where it makes a big difference because failing to hear this word changes our view of life.

The Word Peter Missed

This truth jumped into my mind while I was reading the biblical story where Jesus told his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

Peter immediately took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. "'Never Lord,' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'" (Matthew 15:22).

Do you see what happened? When Peter said, "This shall never happen to you!" what was he referring to?

He Stopped Listening

As I mentioned last week, I've been reading through the Gospels monthly for 33 months. That means I had read these passages 32 times before noticing, not that Peter was referring to the Lord's death, but that he wasn't referring to his resurrection. After hearing the Lord say he would be killed, Peter stopped listening. The word "killed," like a fist to the temple, dazed Peter and kept the fisherman from hearing what followed.

Peter heard the word, "death." But not the word, "resurrection." Could you imagine him telling Jesus, "Never Lord! You shall never rise from the dead!"?

We All Do That

I think we all tend to do that. We hear the word, “death" and we miss the word “resurrection.” When we think of a loss we fear death—of a job, a relationship, our health or even our life. I know I do this. Yet, how different would life be if instead of hearing what stokes our fears, we hear what inflates our hopes?

Try it this week. When something goes wrong, or threatens to go wrong, after hearing about the loss, keep listening. Hear the Lord’s promise of resurrection.