

May 30, 2021

“Listening to the News”
Psalm 29

FCF: An imbalanced view of the news

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The gospel has implications for how we listen
(magnet) to the news.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Where is the best place to find wisdom, the sages of today? Where would we look to find the best judges, counselors, teachers, and coaches? Would it be a place where people are soaking in a mass of facts and data? If so, it would have to be a news room. If exposure to information is the criteria, journalists would have to be the wisest people in the land. But we know that’s not necessarily the case. That’s not a dig on anyone in particular. But there have been far too many situations in which a journalist has been exposed as being anything but a paragon of wisdom.

Why is this? Apparently, knowing the news is not as vital as we think. Which means we need to take a step back and rethink all of this and the place of the news in our lives. This is the second installment in this series on “listening”. What does it mean to listen to the news?

SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 29**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

The Bible does speak of news. Not in terms of quotes from *The Jerusalem Times* but by frequent mention. Consider just the number of times our English translations use the word “news”. In the ESV, there are 65 instances. These come in a variety of contexts. There is good and bad news. There are wrong and right responses to news. And then there are still accounts worth considering in which, though the word is absent, the concept is still present. Case in point, when Jesus got the report of the brutal death of His cousin, John the Baptist. That was news.

But the Bible also gives us a framework as to how to hear, read, and absorb the news. Put another way, the gospel has implications for how we listen. Last week, we looked at the implications for how we listen to criticism. This week, we’re going to consider how the gospel impacts the way we listen to the news. This is an important topic, all the more so in our day.

The gospel has implications for how we listen to the news. There are three points that are worth making here. First, what is our actual problem. Second, the foolish assumption that lies beneath that problem. And, third, the only solution that will actually go deep enough to help.

I. THE ACTUAL PROBLEM

First, our actual problem. What is the problem with news? It’s not bias but the amount.

A) Not the Quality of News

It’s not the quality of the news, how well the stories are done or how far things are spun.

1. A legitimate concern

Now that is a legitimate concern. Truth does get twisted in the reporting, sometimes without any intent but often very much so. Which can make us unsure and cynical as to what to believe.

2. But not the ultimate concern

So it is a legitimate concern. But it is not the ultimate concern. For everyone has a bias, even if it's not malicious. Think of witnesses to a car accident. The reports depend upon which car you were in, when you arrived at the scene, how you were positioned. We're not going to escape this - not if you are on the left or the right, not if you call yourself progressive or conservative.

B) But the Quantity of News

The problem is not the quality of the news but its quantity, the overwhelming amount.

1. Much is irrelevant

C. John Sommerville made this point years ago in his book, *How the News Makes Us Dumb*. We are made to believe each day that some new story is the most important thing. And not just each day but each hour. It's incessant - "Breaking News" and "This just in." It has a flattening effect. We're left with no ability to discern what is truly important, what is actually significant.

2. Much is inactionable

So much of what is reported then becomes irrelevant. And inactionable. Many stories are from places we've never been involving situations we can't grasp. They're often bad. But we can't do anything about it. What happens after a steady diet of this? We become increasingly anxious, powerless, frustrated, often welling up with anger. Which then spills out into our relationships with the people we actually know. The news can be not only flattening but spiritually crippling.

Again, the actual problem is not the quality but the quantity of the news we take in.

Application:

Run this thought experiment. Reflect on these questions for a moment. Are you actually wiser for this steady diet of news, your binge watching and constant feeding? Are you wiser?

Are you any kinder, more patient and caring towards those around you after having been immersed in the latest round of breaking news and special reports? Are you more loving?

If not, why not? The gospel has implications for how we listen to the news.

II. THE FOOLISH ASSUMPTION

Which takes us to our second point, a foolish assumption underlying our problem. After all, why are we so drawn to this? What is the source of our addiction, this compulsion to tune in and click on? That's worth reflecting upon. And the reasons go as deep as they are ancient.

A) Our Desire for Control

1. A sense of powerlessness

We have a desire to control that grows out of our sense of powerlessness. We see these events, these major movements on the stage, and wonder if we are just extras, just pawns on the board.

2. A need for security

We have this sense of powerlessness and feel a need for security. We instinctively look about and reach out, like a drowning man adrift at sea grabbing hold of whatever happens to float by.

B) Our Desire for Knowledge

And that often sets in motion a desire for knowledge as something that will save us.

1. A modern myth

The modern myth says that if we can just understand a thing, we can master and control it. That was the deceit of designers of the *Titanic*. It was embedded in their grand plans and sketches.

2. An ancient lie

It's the same impulse of the magician with his scrolls and spells. It was the what lay behind the ancient heresy of Gnosticism in the early centuries of the church, trusting not in Jesus' finished work but in special knowledge and mystical insight. Just as in the Garden when Satan implied that we could be like God, knowing more than we were meant to. How does it play out now? "Listen to us. Follow us. We'll give you the real scoop so you won't be like that ignorant mob."

This addiction and assumption is tied to a desire for control and a quest for knowledge.

Application:

Let's run another thought experiment. Ask yourself, "What's at the root of my needing to know? What's feeding my need for constant news feeds? How much of my immersion in the news is because of fear? How much of my obsession with the news is because of pride? How much of my tuning in and on is because of a striving for a godlike control and knowledge?"

The gospel has implications for how we listen to everything, including the news.

III. THE ONLY SOLUTION

Which then takes us to our third point. The struggle is deeply rooted. So the solution has to go even deeper. Which finally brings us to our text. A biblical lens is the one true cure.

A) A Survey of the Psalm

Let's start with a survey of this psalm, a quick overview of what we find in the text.

1. The themes

This is a hymn from David the king to God the King. It uses themes that were current in the religions of the surrounding nations - the power behind the storms and the victor over the floods.

2. The climax

The climax is profound. This God, this One of towering majesty, is both with us and for us.

B) Tracing the Flow

With that overview, let's take a moment to trace the flow of thought here.

1. Worship in heaven

(**READ Psalm 29:1-2**) This is a summons from God's people on earth to the angels in heaven to worship the LORD in love and wonder. It is a call for them to see and to proclaim His glory.

2. Storm tracking

From there, we move into storm tracking (**READ Psalm 29:3-9**). A storm upon the sea sweeps in upon the land. It is a manifestation of the glory, strength, holiness spoken of in vv.1-2. God's

voice is in the thunder, His power earth-shaking. And, as this storm sweeps towards Jerusalem, the people are awestruck and cry out, “Glory!” His glory is spoken of later ([READ John 1:14](#)).

3. The LORD enthroned

Keep that in mind as we read the conclusion ([READ Psalm 29:10-11](#)). The LORD is enthroned over the flood. And this prayer has a sense of certainty, of having already been fulfilled. The strength and peace of God is forever seen in Jesus and comes to us now through Jesus. To us.

This is the lens through which to read, the filter to use as we hear the news. It is the cure.

Illustration:

Which, again, has to go deep. Some of you may know that the Leaning Tower of Pisa isn’t leaning like it used to. It’s lost 1.5 inches of its southern tilt over the last 17 years. How? By removing sand and clay on the north side, shifting its weight. The solution had to go deep.

Application:

The gospel has the same effect upon us as we listen to the news. It allows us to actually pray the news. What might that look like? To focus on a few areas, to specialize and pray over them. To pray for the authorities. To pray for those in news media. To pray for social media. To flip the script. That is, no longer spending minutes reading our Bibles and hours watching the news but letting what is truly lasting and significant be reflected in the allotment of our time.

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CONCLUSION:

William Shatner has had quite a career as an actor, author, producer, director, and screenwriter. He has starred in multiple TV shows but, of course, what Shatner is best known for is *Star Trek* and his role as the heroic Captain James T. Kirk of the *USS Enterprise*. He starred as that character on TV from 1966 to 1969 and then from there in seven major theatrical films.

Shatner just celebrated his 90th birthday. In an interview, he was asked what he wishes he had known at 20 he knows now at 90. Here was his answer ([READ](#)), “I’m glad I didn’t know because what you know at 90 is: take it easy, nothing matters in the end.” Now let that sink in.

However cheery Shatner sounds when he says this, pushed to the wall, this is a counsel of despair. It’s an invitation to indulgence, a license for cruelty, a path to self-destruction. And many feel like this. So their approach to the news is “This is all there is, the present now. So whatever is going on is all there is. So if there’s anything of any weight, it’s got to be the news.”

The Christian perspective is utterly different. “Take it easy, everything matters.” It all matters to the God of Psalm 29. Nothing escapes His notice. Nothing is outside of His control. Nothing will prevent His purposes from coming to pass. What if we engaged with the news from that perspective? What if we had our conversations with our neighbors with that assurance?

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