

HOW IS YOUR HEARING?
LUKE 8:4-15

One of the phrases a parent uses most often is “listen to me...” Parents use that phrase with distracted three-year-olds and impatient 17-year-olds. They use it when they are teaching, when they are correcting, when they are encouraging, and when they are warning. It’s a useful, and well-used, phrase.

The Bible also uses similar language to teach, correct, encourage, and warn its readers:

- “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. *These words*, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart” (Dt. 6:4-6; my emphasis).
- “Now then, *my sons*, listen to me And do not depart from the words of my mouth” (Prov. 5:7; also 7:24; 8:6, 32, 34; 12:15; 13:1; 15:31-32; 17:4; 19:20, 27; 21:28; 23:19, 22; 25:12; 28:9).
- “...blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk. 11:28).

One of the remarkable blessings of our lives is that God has revealed Himself to us. God, who is infinite, transcendent, and beyond our knowing, has made Himself knowable to us and has revealed Himself to us (in creation, conscience, and Scripture). The question is, are we hearing? Are we listening?

We are in a section of Luke this morning that is *very* familiar to you — the parable of the soils (8:4-15). But it is also in the middle of a section in Luke where people had been coming to hear Jesus (5:1, 15; 6:18, 27, 49) and now Jesus is also asking whether they really are listening and exhorting them to listen to Him (8:8b, 18, 21). We can summarize the theme of this morning’s passage this way:

BEWARE OF THE OBSTACLES OF FOLLOWING JESUS; BE A FOLLOWER WHO HEEDS HIS WORD.

It seems in these verses that Jesus is still popular with Galileans; He is traveling widely (v. 1) and large crowds are coming to Him (v. 4). But this story is a test — do the crowds (and do we) really want to follow after Jesus? It seems that the story is just a story; but there is an important meaning behind the story — **how are we hearing** and how are we responding to Jesus and His Word?

1. **Jesus Tells a Story (vv. 4-8)**
2. **Why Jesus Told Stories (vv. 9-10)**
3. **Jesus Interprets His Story (vv. 11-15)**

1. Jesus Tells a Story (vv. 4-8)

- As Jesus was traveling throughout Galilee (v. 1), Luke tells us that a large crowd was coming to Him (4). They were coming from **various cities**; people were “different.” Luke is preparing us for various soils.
 - ✓ They were interested in hearing Him, but the various people had a variety of responses to Him. (Opposition to Jesus has already begun, but it will increase in chapters 9-13; cf. **9:5, 22**; 11:15)
 - ✓ The various responses to Jesus and various motives in hearing Him led to Him speaking **a parable**.

• What parables are

- ✓ Parables are figures of speech. In the simplest form they are similes, comparisons — “you are like concealed tombs” (11:44). In longer form they are stories (e.g., house built on a rock, 6:47ff).
- ✓ Sometimes the OT used them as prophetic messages (Num. 24:15) or for judgment (Mic. 2:4).
- ✓ The NT uses it for comparison (Jn. 10:7) and to communicate truth from something commonly known and understood (Mt. 13:33 — “the kingdom of Heaven is like...”).

• What this parable is

- ✓ **A sower went out to sow his seed** = an agrarian image that would have been common.
 - In Oct–Dec (rainy season), the farmer would **sow his seeds by hand** (without plowing).
 - Plowing would happen after the sowing, to push the seeds under the soil.
 - Because plowing happened after sowing the farmer wasn’t worried about sowing among thorns, because those would also be plowed under and wouldn’t typically be a problem.
 - Occasionally, the soil would only be a thin layer above the rocks (as described here).
- ✓ **Some fell beside the road** = pathways were both alongside and sometimes through the fields, so this would not have been unusual; foot traffic would harden the soil so it wasn’t “taken in.” The seed was good, but became useless because it was **trampled** or eaten by the **birds**.
- ✓ **Other seed fell on rocky soil** — this was ground that had soil to germinate the seeds, and they did. But there was **no moisture** because of the rock underneath (like Texas!) and it **withered** (dried out). It could have thrived, but it was in the wrong soil and didn’t receive nutrition.
- ✓ **Other seed fell among thorns** — these were not just thorns, but plants that could grow to six feet in height. The thorns didn’t just overwhelm the good seed by surrounding it, but also by taking the nourishment of the water from the soil. In all three of these soils, an outside factor prevented growth. The seed was viable and these settings provided *some* opportunity to grow; the seed failed because of the outside pressures (birds and hard ground, lack of water, and too many weeds).
- ✓ **Other seed fell into the good soil** (v. 8). Notice Luke’s prepositions — **beside** (v. 5), **on** (v. 6), **among** (v. 7), and **into** (v. 8). Only this seed penetrates the soil and grows and becomes fruitful. The prepositions emphasize the relationship of the seed and the soil. The seed must go *into* the soil.

- ✓ Because it was in the soil, it grew and became disproportionately profitable to the size of the seed.
- ✓ A normal crop would produce 7-15x the amount of produce; Luke notes that the increase is 100x! (Matthew and Mark also include 30x or 60x indicating various kinds of increase among these seeds.)
- **What is notable** about the story is that it's not just a story — so Jesus says, ***He who has ears to hear...***
 - ✓ In other words, there is more to the story than just the story. “Listen up” (cf. **v. 18; 14:34-35**)
 - ✓ And He also means that there is more to listening than just auditory reception. He intends the hearers to do something about what they hear (to act on it — 9:44; **ln. 17:8**).
 - ✓ And notice that Jesus’ statement is repeated — ***He would call out...*** a repeated exhortation. There is a sense of urgency and importance in the repetition.
 - ✓ Jesus is asking, “Are you listening to what I’m saying?” Many were coming to hear Jesus; He is asking if they are objectors, merely curious, or genuine hearers. That’s always the question.

2. Why Jesus Told Stories (vv. 9-10)

- Having heard the story and the admonition to ***hear*** (v. 8b), the ***disciples*** (the Twelve, v. 1) ***began questioning Him***. I.e., they repeatedly were asking, or perhaps several of them were asking.
 - ✓ The parable was given to the large crowd (v. 4), but only a select few heard the interpretation.
 - ✓ The crowd was undoubtedly made up of all the various soils; only a few actually heard and believed.
 - ✓ When the disciples asked ***what is this parable?*** They not only were asking for the interpretation, but they were also asking why Jesus was teaching in this new way.
- **Jesus told parables to reveal truth**
 - ✓ Simply, Jesus says, ***to you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom***.
 - ✓ God is acting on behalf of the Twelve and others who will hear and understand.
 - ✓ They can hear and understand because God has given them the grace to comprehend (1 Cor. 2:14ff).
 - ✓ They hear the ***mysteries*** — things that had been hidden that are now being revealed.
 - ✓ Specifically, it is the revelation of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the salvation plan through the church (**Eph. 3:3, 6**). God is revealing the secret of His full salvation plan that had been partially hidden.
 - ✓ The relationship to the ***Kingdom*** is that Jesus came to offer the MK to Israel (**Mt 4:17**). But Israel emphatically rejected Christ (**Mt. 12:24**). So instead of emphasizing the MK for the nation (Jesus would no longer say “the Kingdom is at hand”), He begins emphasizing individual salvation from God’s wrath. While waiting for the future MK, individuals (incl. Gentiles and the church) would enjoy freedom from God’s wrath and from the sin that bound them.
 - ✓ This parable and the other parables of Jesus are given by Jesus to reveal that truth. And...

- **Jesus told parables to hide truth**

- ✓ Because the nation rejected Christ as Messiah (and attributed His work to Satan, Mt. 12:24), they lost the privilege of knowing and receiving the truth — **to the rest** are the non-disciples.
- ✓ Jesus quotes from **Isaiah 6:9** to explain why He is hiding the truth from them: **seeing, they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.**
 - Isaiah 6:9 follows the grand vision given to Isaiah in which he sees God's glory (Is. 6:1-8).
 - Isaiah responds to God's question, "whom shall I send?" with "Send me!"
 - God says He will send Isaiah, but that Isaiah's ministry would be fruitless (**vv. 9-12**), though there would be a remnant that would believe (**v. 13**). So it would be in Jesus' day. The masses rejected Christ while a remnant believed.
 - Because these have rejected Christ, they are prohibited from receiving further revelation of Christ; God is judging them for their unbelief by removing His revelation from them.
 - They could "look again," but they would never understand and discern the message of Christ.
- ✓ Because they rejected Christ, their ability to believe was removed and revelation was removed.
- ✓ This is a warning for us; don't presume that you can repent and believe later. It is possible to become hardened in your unbelief so that God will remove revelation and you will not again want to believe.
- ✓ Unbelief is dangerous for many reasons, including the danger of waiting to believe. Trust Him now.
- That's the story Jesus tells and that's why He tells the story. Now what does it mean?

3. Jesus Interprets His Story (vv. 11-15)

- Jesus begins to explain the parable by revealing that **the seed is the word of God.**
 - ✓ The seed represents the revelation of God, and that it is thrown on so many soils indicates that it is made available to a great many people (Jesus emphasizes that all four types of soil have **heard**). And having heard, they all have responsibility for how they respond.
 - ✓ As Jesus explains these different soils, He is not talking about how people respond to the Word at various times in their lives. He is talking about the totality of one's life — everyone is in one of these categories; we are meant to contemplate, "what kind of soil am I? How do I respond to the Word?"
 - ✓ This parable is usually called the parable of the sower and soils. The sower is secondary (his identity is never revealed) and even the seed is secondary in that Jesus focuses on the different kinds of soil. It is a parable about the soils. It is an examination of *our* soil. It's a warning.

- **Beware of being a hearer who doesn't hear (vv. 11-12)**

- ✓ **Having heard, the devil comes and takes it away...**
 - He does not take it away by inhabiting them and mysteriously snatching it from their minds.
 - He removes it from them by keeping them blind to the truth of God's gift (**2 Cor. 4:4**).
 - He removes it from them when they are uninterested, calloused, and refuse faith (**Heb. 3:12-13**).
 - He removes it from them when they are self-satisfied and haters of God (**Rom. 1:18ff**).

- ✓ Notice Satan's motive in taking away the message of the Word — ***so that they will not believe...***
 - Notice first that this is a choice of the individual, "so they *will not* [choice] believe." They don't believe because they don't *want* to believe. They reject God from a hard heart (Eph. 4:18).
 - Satan hates for people to believe and is opposed to people believing. When people disbelieve, they are following the will of Satan, who wants them to oppose God (and receive His wrath).
 - This is exactly opposite of the purpose of God's revelation; He wants us to believe and be spared from His wrath (**Rom. 10:9**). Satan desires unbelief so he blinds to take the Word away from the hearers; God desires belief so He implants the Word into His hearers.
- ✓ Are you disinterested in the Bible and gospel? Do you love your sin and love planning for it? Are you calloused to conviction and self-examination? If so, that is not freedom, it is blindness. Satan has deluded you to keep you from seeing Christ's glory.

- Beware of being a hearer who "hears" trials (v. 13)

- ✓ The person who is like ***rocky soil*** hears and responds initially to the message of faith — they ***receive the word with joy***. They are not opposed to God and the gospel (initially).
- ✓ In fact, ***they believe for a while*** (for a time); but over time, they do not persist and endure (no faith).
- ✓ What happens? ***In a time of temptation*** (testing or temptation), they ***fall away*** (apostatize).
- ✓ They are not rebellious against God; they just are more worried about their difficulties and trials and they don't believe that God is adequate for them, so they give up.
 - Their desire to be free of problems overwhelms their desire to obey Christ so they jettison Jesus.
 - This was the problem addressed by Hebrews (3:12). Rather than suffer for Christ, they left Christ.
 - There will be suffering in this world (**Js. 1:2-4**), but those trials are given to us to make us cling to Christ as our great hope.
- ✓ I know life is hard. I know you are suffering. To live in this world is to suffer. The world is broken. But God uses the brokenness of the world to help us see and hold onto the wholeness of Christ.
- ✓ Beware of being the kind of person that hears trial and trouble and then rejects Christ.

- Beware of being a hearer who hears the world (v. 14)

- ✓ With the third soil (thorny), Jesus referred to the ones ***who have heard...and are choked with worries and riches and pleasures...*** Like the other soils, they heard the truth, but...
- ✓ They are ***choked*** — overwhelmed, strangled so that their faith "dies." (We know it is not genuine faith because every believer will have some measure of fruit [Gal. 5] and these have ***no fruit*** — there is no evidence of change, transformation, or growth).
- ✓ The ***worried, riches, and pleasures*** are all subcategories of the world system. They find something in the world that they want and they pursue instead of Christ.
- ✓ It's just plain old worldliness — it is the problem of Lot, Judas, Simon (Acts 8), Demas, and a host of others have desired. They are attracted by the glitter of the world not knowing it is fool's gold.

- ✓ One writer rightly warned: “Most of us recognize the danger of exposing ourselves to sinful content, so we tend to set arbitrary limits based on how much we think we can ‘handle.’ ...We act as if we each have a ‘sin threshold’ beyond which we dare not go. We might as well ask how much of a poison pill we can swallow before it kills us.” The warning is not to play with the world. Don’t listen to the call of the world. So said Josh Harris, who later rejected his faith in Christ in favor of the enticements of the world. *That’s a warning.* You can’t play in the world and be in Christ.
- ✓ Notice — “Other ‘stuff’ takes over. Maybe it was only meant to be temporary. But Christ just gets squeezed out. The scary item here is a Greek participle, *poreuomenoi*, ‘as they go along.’ The worries, riches, and pleasures don’t make a sudden assault; rather over a period of time they simply ooze their way in—the ‘choking’ is only the last, fatal step. Gradual danger is hard to notice.” [Davis]
- ✓ This was the nature of the Pharisees: the mocked and rejected Christ because they loved their high position and their wealth (11:43; 16:14). They would not give up their position or possessions for Christ.
- ✓ When you listen to the world it will drown out the voice of Christ. Listen to Richard Baxter — “Thorns will not prick of themselves, but when they are grasped in a man’s hands, they prick deep. So this world and the things thereof are all good, and were all made of God for the benefit of His creatures, [until] our immoderate affection [made] them hurtful.”
 - “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).
 - “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14).
 - Beware of the world system; it has an agenda (from the evil one) that is against you.

- Be a hearer who hears the Word of God (v. 15)

- ✓ There is one last category of soil — **good soil**. Here is the intent of the Word of God — that it be heard and heeded (obeyed). There are three factors that make the soil good —
 - *Transformation* — they are new creatures; the old man is gone. They have been given a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone — they have **an honest and good heart**. There is integrity in the inner man. They want to be changed; they don’t want to be the way they were. They want a new way to live.
 - *Endurance* — **they hold it fast**. They keep returning to the Word. They aren’t apathetic and don’t reject the Word (12), they aren’t overwhelmed by trials (13) or enticed by the world (14). They are glued to the Word of God. It is their standard.
 - *Fruitfulness* — they **bear fruit**. Not only are they fruitful, but unlike the rocky soil, they persevere in it; they **persevere** (endure under heavy loads) and do not apostatize (13). They don’t just start the race of the Christian faith; they finish it. They keep moving forward.
- ✓ Only listening to the Word will do this. But listening to the Word *will* do this. And testimonies abound. I have been an eyewitness to many stories I can’t tell. But this one I can: 1 Thess. 2:9-13.
- ✓ Be the kind of hearer of the Word who lets it do its transforming work in you.

CONCLUSION:

How is your hearing? **When you hear the Word of God** and Christ's demands, do you hear...

- ✓ **Silence?** Have you been blinded to the truth by Satan? Have your heart been hardened to truth? Have you grown deaf to the voice of Christ? This is the work of the *devil*.
- ✓ **Burdens?** Is the weight and authority of the Bible overwhelmed by your fears and anxieties? Do you believe you are more responsible and able to meet the needs of your day? This is the *flesh*.
- ✓ **Allurements?** Are you more excited and drawn to the enticements offered by the world? Like Demas, do you love this present world, and have you given up on Christ and His Word in favor of something more "exciting?" This is the world. Do you hear it? The rejection of the Word fits into familiar categories of falling under the influence of the world, the flesh and the devil.
- ✓ **Christ?** Or do you pursue Christ in His Word? Do you delight to hear His commands because you know they are for your good? Are you growing in faithfulness and fruitfulness?

Owning a Bible and attending worship services doesn't mean you are a hearer of Christ. Hearing means heeding — obeying, growing in faithfulness, and persevering in your faith (not quitting on Jesus).

Thomas Watson summarized the importance of hearing the Word of God with this simple sentence: "When we come to the Word preached, we come to a matter of the highest importance; therefore we should stir up ourselves and hear with the greatest devotion."

How is your hearing? What do you hear?

BENEDICTION: **Jude 24-25**