

The Gospel According to Luke

February 10, 2019

Reading: Luke 8:4-18

(Matthew 13:1-23 and Mark 4:1-25)

Sermon #32

Luke 8:4-18

Hearing – Part I

In last week's passage at the beginning of Luke chapter 8, we learned that Jesus left soon after the dinner at Simon's house and began traveling through the northern province of Galilee. Jesus preached the kingdom of God in the countryside, villages and cities. He had one message given to him by God the Father and that message had power to bring dead souls to life. The message is the same today and it continues to have God's power to bring dead souls to life. We saw the importance of keeping the Word of God and the gospel pure – the gospel is God's and not man's. God's Word does not change and it speaks to people of all cultures and times with eternal truth. This is why preaching has such an important role in Christ's church. Preaching the unchanged Word of God is being faithful. However, changing and manipulating God's Word to meet the needs of society or some manmade goal is wrong, it is sinful, it is unfaithful and in fact aids the prince of this world and damages people's souls.

Today and next Lord's Day we will investigate how we are to prepare to hear and respond to the preaching of God's Word. Our passage in Luke is about hearing and not hearing the Word of God when preached. This passage is a sobering one for me, as a pastor, because it makes clear that the prospect of great success from preaching, in terms of the large numbers of people responding to God's Word with lasting affect - is limited. The percentage who responded and were fruitful for the kingdom of God here in Luke chapter 8 is 25%. Jesus does not say it will always be 25% but it does warn a pastor that people do not change easily and that the number responding to Christ will be a remnant and the way to

salvation is narrow and the path to destruction is broad. On the other hand, it is also encouraging, in that, God's success is not based on large numbers – but on those who hear, are born again spiritually, live God's Word and spend their lives sharing the gospel, disciple others and by these lives God's kingdom is multiplied. This is the lasting change and the lack of change Jesus deals with in this passage.

Is Preaching Effective?

Churches are having difficulty maintaining full congregations. Some say the time of preaching has come to an end because it is not effective. The truth is it has never been effective if judged by converting a majority of the world's population into believers. Media has become a powerful tool because it appeals to the carnality of mankind and it is designed for the masses. We need to be careful of media for the vast majority is controlled by the world. The breath of Scripture does not teach the majority of the world comes to salvation but that the world is impacted and changed by the remnant of faithful believers. Manmade religions and churches are designed to appeal to the many but this has never been God's design for his true church. Jesus said, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** (Matthew 7:13-14) Jesus often said those who have ears need to hear – hear, for it is a hearing of the soul, the quickening of the heart and mind together by the power of the Holy Spirit that energizes and gives the strength to, as Jesus said, **“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”** (Luke 13:24) When the Word of God is preached and the way to eternal life is shown and those who respond must strive to enter God's narrow door for the world wants to keep people for itself. A life of faith is one of spiritual battle as warriors of Christ living against the influence of the evil one. This is what Jesus is teaching in this parable, found in Luke chapter 8.

Jesus is teaching about hearing and not hearing. This parable is about hearing and yet not hearing. This passage is about seeing and yet not seeing. It is about people who think they have heard but have not heard. It is about preparing to preach and about preparing to hear and respond to the preaching. Coming to church on Sundays is a good thing, but is not the totality of being Christian. God made humans in his image and he gives some the ability to see the world he has created it and ears to hear the Word of Life as he has given it and minds to process and understand and the heart to bring together the intellectual and the emotion together enabling them to live as his children. What you and I are doing now, what we do on Sunday mornings is important and of great importance and it is what you decide to do with what you hear that has eternal consequences. What you do with what you hear has deep eternal implications.

A Parable On Hearing

I begin in verse 4, “when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, ⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.” In verse 11 we are given the interpretation, “The seed is the word of God.” This makes clear that what Jesus is telling in this parable is about the preaching and hearing the Word of God. The sower is the one who preaches. The parable gives 4 responses to the preaching of the Word – they are the 4 kinds of soil. Jesus interprets each of these soils very clearly as 4 ways of hearing the Word of God. So even though the sower is sowing seed or preaching, this parable is really all about hearing God’s Word.

Verse 5 gives the first type of soil, the first example of hearers of God’s Word. “As he sowed, (*seed or the preaching of God’s Word*) some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.” Then Jesus

interprets in verse 12, “**The ones (hearers of God’s Word) along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.**” This is the first type of hearer who does not hear and take the Word of God into their hearts.

Verse 6 says, “**Some (seed or words of God) fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.**” The interpretation is in verse 13, “**the ones (hearers of the Word of God) on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.**” Here is the second type of hearing. They take God’s Word but do not let it penetrate and change who they are.

Verse 7 continues, “**And some (the Word of God) fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.**” Verse 14 interprets, “**And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.**” This is the third type of hearing. They hear but the sound of the world drowns out the Word of God.

The fourth type of hearing is given in verse 8, “**And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.**” Jesus gives the interpretation in verse 15, “**As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.**” These hearers take God’s Word into their hearts, it changes them and they bear fruit for the kingdom.

How To Hear

At the end of the parable Jesus closes by calling out, “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**” Jesus is saying it is not enough to have physical ears on each side of your head. Everyone has a set of these. There is a different type of ear that

only some people possess. It is the ear of the soul; the spiritual ear and the ear that brings together the heart and mind. It is the ear of the soul and heart that hears more than the verbal words but it is the ear that hears the truth and love and power to be something different – the words of God give spiritual life to become a child of the living God. It is this hearing that requires one to change and creates a desire to change. This is the type of hearing Jesus is teaching about. This is what this parable is about. Those who spiritually hear and those who do not.

Even the disciples did not hear with their ear of their soul, heart and mind. Remember they had not been indwelt with the Holy Spirit yet, this is the time of Jesus teaching them. Jesus then takes time to address his disciples who asked him what the parable meant – unlike you and I, they were not able to read ahead to verses 11 to 15 for the answer, so they ask Jesus and he tells them in verse 10, **“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”** Here in verse 10, Jesus quotes Isaiah chapter 6, this is what God told Isaiah to tell the people of Israel, **“Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.”** (v.9) You see they had hardened their hearts against God and they heard but did not hear. Then God tells Isaiah that if the people will hear with their hearts, they can turn back to Him and be healed.

Jesus is saying that, to those he has chosen, the mysteries of God’s kingdom will be opened and they will receive the gift to understand. Understanding the mysteries or secrets of God is a gift given to those God chooses. Here Jesus has chosen to reveal these secrets to his disciples. Reading the first half of verse 10 it says, **“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.”** God through Jesus is teaching the disciples life changing secrets of the kingdom.

However, there is also a 2nd half of verse 10, “**but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’**” The issue continues to be one of hearing – “**hearing they may not understand.**” So, there are 2 types of hearing; hearing with the spiritual ear that reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of God and hearing with one’s physical ears in which they do not understand spiritual things. This parable has 2 purposes. First, it reveals the mysteries of the kingdom to those God has chosen and secondly, it hardens and conceals the mysteries of the kingdom of God to those who are **not** chosen.

Word of Salvation – Word of Hardening

Jesus quotes what God told Isaiah and from this we learn that their ministries are to call some to salvation and to harden the hearts of others. God was telling Isaiah that the time had run out for Israel. The people of Israel saw but did not see, they heard but no longer hear. Their hearts and minds and ears had grown insensitive to the Word of God and because of this it would no longer save them. At the time of Jesus, the religious leaders had moved away from God and no longer heard with spiritual ears. Reading Isaiah and Jesus’ teaching in this parable of the sower these teach a sobering truth about preaching.

When the Word of God is preached and the truths of the kingdom of God are proclaimed and there is not a hearing of the ear of the soul that brings salvation and healing and a spiritual heart of flesh it does not mean the preaching is automatically unproductive. There are times and there are people for whom the preaching of the Word of God is doing God’s grave work of judgment. God’s Word is being heard with spiritually dead ears and it can harden some to not want to hear the gospel of good news – in fact they cannot hear or see it as the gospel of good news, because for them it is something offensive. This means there is also a judgment in this world and not just the world to come. Paul made this judgement

plain when he wrote that those who worship the things of this world receive judgment, ²⁴ “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:24-25) This is just one reason, of many, that as believers we must not be unequally yoked with those who belong to this world. But, there is also another warning and it is do not take for granted the hearing of the Word of God preached to you week after week, do not think you will change and seek the things of God soon, in the future, but not right now, I am too busy with family or career or getting through each day – this attitude does not soften the heart to the things of God or heal the brokenness of the world in you or enable you to bear fruit for the kingdom – it is far more likely this attitude is hardening your heart and dulling the hearing of your spiritual ear and blinding you from seeing God’s truth. The preaching of God’s Word and the living among godly saints, as Paul taught, is “the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

Hearing That Hears

Hearing with one’s spiritual ear is essential. The last mention of hearing found in our text does not come right after the parable of the sower but in verse 18. The NASB begins verse 18 with “So” and the King James with, “Therefore” meaning here is the conclusion and the important point to take away. Since I am using the ESV translation, I will read from it, even though it does not give this important emphasis as clearly, “**Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.**” This is the main point of the whole text. Be very careful how you hear! Preaching is important and is crucial to the life of believers, but,

but hearing with your soul's ear is just as crucial. There is nothing in Jesus' teaching here about the effectiveness of preaching – wow that takes a little pressure off of me. His teaching here in Luke is all about the effectiveness of how well one hears. Now the pressure is back on for I spend hours each week listening to God, hearing about what he wants you to hear spiritually each Sunday. Listen – for those who have ears to hear – hear – it is important to hear God's Word with the ear of your soul and heart and mind.

Verse 18 begins with the importance of how one hears and then finishes with why it is so very important, “for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.” What does this mean, what is this referring to?

First, there is the positive “for to the one who has, more will be given” and then comes the negative “from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.” Let examine the positive and negative.

The positive - “for to the one who has, more will be given.” This refers back to verse 8 at the end of the parable of the soils. Jesus taught the parable and then calls out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” He says this because whomever has, to him more will be given. If you have spiritual ears then you will be given understanding of the secrets of the kingdom of God. It is also a reference to the soil that is spoken of in verse 15, “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience” or *perseverance*. To those who have a “honest and good heart” or a spiritual heart of flesh and not a worldly heart of stone – they will bear fruit for the kingdom. They bear fruit by patience and perseverance – they do not let the world take their focus off of Christ, they never surrender, they never give up. It is critically important that one hears the Word of God with spiritual ears not just their

physical ears. Spiritual ears hear with the soul and that results in an honest and good heart.

The negative of the 2nd half of verse 18 – “**from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.**” This is referring to the first 3 soils of the parable. The seed or the word of God was heard by dull ears and was unproductive. In each of these first 3 soils the people heard the Word of God preached but in each they, in truth, did not hear spiritually and the Word was taken away.

In verse 12, the 1st soil is the hearers who think they have the Word, but the devil snatches it away. In verse 13, the 2nd soil, the hearers think they have the Word and true spiritual faith and peace, but they have no root, no depth to sustain them in times of trial. Their faith was superficial and lasts for a period when life is easy but cannot deal with the trials of life. I have seen people who I thought were believers and they walk away from God and I wondered how and why – here is the answer. The 3rd soil is found in verse 14, these hearers think they have the Word of God, but when the worries of the world and the desire for the riches of the world and the carnal pleasures of the world comes - they overtake these people and the world becomes more important than the Word of God and the world chokes out the Word and it dies.

In verse 18 Jesus plainly tells what happens to the 4 soils. Three times what is true is, “**from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.**” The one time, for the 4th soil, the truth is the opposite, “**for to the one who has, more will be given.**” As verse 15 says, if you hear with your spiritual ear, this will result in a “**honest and good heart, and *this results in one bearing fruit with patience***” *and perseverance*. And this faith results in more being given to the faithful believer.

Next Lord's Day I will seek to explain why the Jesus wedges the verses about the lamp and the lampstand between the parable of the soils and verse 18, "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Let me close with the main point and what you need to take away with you this morning to think over, to consider and to change you. My beloved, "Take care then how you hear!" Are you listening with your spiritual ear? Is the Word of God producing in you an "honest and good heart?" Take time this week to consider this. Next week I will spend time on how we are to prepare to hear with spiritual ears. How one hears is key. I am called to preach and teach, but many of you are called to teach in a variety of ways and settings and you need to be faithful in this calling. But this morning and next week the focus is on hearing. This is critical for if one does not hear they will teach error and that is a grave thing. We need to ask God to open our spiritual ears to his eternal truth.

Let me close in prayer from Psalm 40, I pray to God as David prayed.

Oh, God my Father, I call out from the depths of my heart to you, may these words be true for each of us here this morning and that we will hear you with spiritual ears.

The psalm of David, ¹"I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ... ³He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD."

⁴"Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust ... ⁵You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told."

⁸“I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

⁹“I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. ¹⁰I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.”

¹¹“As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!

¹³“Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!

¹⁶“But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, ‘Great is the LORD!’ ... You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!” Great are you Lord, you are my deliverer let me submit my life to you and you alone. Amen!