

January 13, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2019 David J. Whitcomb

HEAR JESUS Luke 8:16-21

You may have noticed that I strain a bit to hear certain women's voices. Doctors tell me it is all part of the aging process in which my eardrums do not process higher pitches as well as they once did. I also know that some of you are dealing with similar issues.

As we age, we become like the older couple who had an ongoing semi-serious discussion about which one of them was losing their hearing. As time went on, this became quite a bone of contention between them. The husband decided he would settle the issue once and for all. While his wife was enjoying a book in the living room he said in a loud voice from the kitchen, "Dear, would you like a cup of tea?" Hearing no response he moved to the next closer room and said again in a firm voice, "Dear, would you like a cup of tea?" Still there was no reply from his wife. So, he went into the living room and stood directly behind the chair in which his wife was sitting. Again with a firm voice he asked, "Dear, would you like a cup of tea?" Slightly annoyed she turned to him with a expression on her face and replied, "For the third time ... yes."

In our study in Luke's Gospel last week, we learned that Jesus emphasized the importance of listening to His word. He announced, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." He also warned that it is possible to fail to hear His truth for so long that a person can reach the point where he cannot hear truth (8:10).

Now, as we move on in chapter eight, we discover that Luke arranged incidents of Jesus's teaching that emphasize this importance of hearing the truth. At some point in His ministry, Jesus gave the illustration of putting a lamp on a lamp stand in order to disseminate

light into the darkness. It is the picture of declaring truth about which Jesus warned, "Take care how you hear."

Then Luke recorded the situation when Jesus's family came to talk to Him. Jesus responded to His own question about who constitutes His intimate family by saying that His closest family members are those who hear the word of God and do it.

These two illustrations drive home the importance of hearing the truth of the Bible. Hearing God's truth is like good ground receiving the seed of the Bible. Hearing God's truth is like being enlightened by light. Hearing God's truth is like loving family members who hear Jesus and obey Him. How well are you hearing? Does what you hear cause change in your life to make you more like Christ?

Take Care How You Hear (vv.16-18).

Jesus taught an important principle about communicating truth through a simple illustration. "*No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light*" (v.16). Everyone experienced what Jesus illustrated. The picture was not new, radical, or unheard of. Everyone used the very simple terra cotta lamps that looked like saucers or crude vessels filled with olive oil (or similar), with a simple wick. Once lit, the lamp was placed on a corbel or shelf on a wall. Sometimes homeowners built recesses in the wall specifically for the placement of the lamp high in the room to shed its light.

This practice was characteristic of the excellent wife who is described in Proverbs 31. We read that *she perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night* (Proverbs 31:18). That does not mean that the woman stayed up all hours of the night making merchandise. Rather the second statement in the verse reveals that the wise woman prepares ahead of time by refilling the lamp's reservoir with oil, trimming the wick, and setting the lamp in a place where it will cast light for anyone who needs to get up during the night.

No one would light such a light and put it under a basket or under a bed. Jesus's conclusion is so obvious that He must have been trying to teach a hidden lesson here. There is indeed a spiritual

meaning behind the illustration about truth. Again, we cannot get hung up on the kind of light, the size of the basket, or what kind of stand. This was not a lecture about the best method for lighting a dark room. The entire context (8:5-21) is about hearing truth communicated and responding to that truth.

Light is often used in Scripture as a metaphor for truth. Reality is revealed by the light of truth (Ephesians 5:13). God calls His people out of the darkness of sin to live in His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). The same light metaphor is used to speak of righteousness. In that sense, we learn that light is the character of God. *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)*. In the same context, we learn that we have fellowship with God when we are characterized by His righteousness. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7)*.

Light is also used to refer to the entire work and person of Christ. John the Apostle began his account of the gospel by stating that John the Baptist alerted the world that “the true Light” was coming (John 1:9). And because He is that light, Jesus could declare, *“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5)*.

A most important use of the light metaphor is to use it to speak of the Word of God. The psalmist wrote, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105)*. In fact, throughout that psalm there are many statements that characterize or define God’s word, the Bible.

Jesus gave the simple illustration in order to teach the very important lesson that lay behind the illustration. The truth found in God’s Word, demonstrated by Christ, which is the character of the Triune God, is supposed to be displayed. Jesus taught His followers that truth every day for over three years. It is even possible that Jesus intended for this picture to be a balance to what He had just told the apostles. Last week we learned how Jesus taught the apostles that they were privileged to know and experience the secrets of the Kingdom of God (v.10).

In contrast to that privileged condition, Jesus also taught that some people reach a point in rebellion against God and rejection of

His Word that God, in His infinite wisdom, sovereignly makes it impossible for the rebels to hear and understand. But we who are given the responsibility to tell the good news, to scatter the seed, need to be careful not to presume that we have that same prerogative of determining who should hear and who should not hear. We are not God and do not know an individual’s heart. We don’t know the future circumstances or if any given person will believe.

At the same time, there are situations, rare cases, when it is right to walk away with the Gospel truth that has been rejected. Jesus taught that truth when He instructed the apostles, *“And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them” (Luke 9:5)*. We know from Luke’s history of the early church that Paul practiced this principle in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14), and with the doubting, disputing Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:6). But we need to practice such rejection carefully and rarely. Our Lord intends for us to display the truth of the gospel, the whole of God’s Word.

The lamp is to be placed where it can spread its benefit to everyone in the room. But everyone in the room needs to be careful to respect the benefit they receive. To that end, Jesus offered a serious warning about truth communicated after submitting the simple illustration of the lamp (vv.17-18). Like light exposing darkness, so the truth will be known. *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light” (v.17)*.

This brief statement establishes the important principle that time is always on the side of truth. The warning points back to the various kinds of soil. The stony soil and the thorn-infested soil made one kind of response to the gospel, the good seed sown. However, the truth was this: those people were not regenerated. It is impossible that once the Holy Spirit does the miracle of regeneration, the person or anyone else can undo it. The whole gist of the sower and the seed story is that people in whom the truth of the gospel takes root will produce fruit – lasting fruit – fruit that characterizes the vine to which the branch is attached. For a season it appeared that the stony soil people and thorn infested people are born again Christians. But in time the truth was revealed.

That is exactly what Jesus meant by this statement, *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light”* (v.17). In many cases, given enough time in this life, it becomes obvious that some professing Christians are not truly born again. They do not walk in the light. John referred to people like that when he wrote, *“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1 John 1:6). In time, the truth is revealed and they go out from the fellowship of the Church and Christians, so that John also wrote, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us* (1 John 2:19).

Some people will be able to conceal the reality that they are not born again all the way to the judgment seat of Christ in the last day. Jesus warned, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’”* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Therefore, the principle Jesus laid down in our text means that ultimately, whether in this life or on the cusp of eternity, time is on the side of truth. That is why we must be very careful how we respond to the Bible message! That is why Jesus tells you to take care how you hear. *“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”* (v.18).

The principle here is that we must make good use of the truth because we can lose what we neglect. In spiritual life, there are those who “have.” Who are they? They are the people upon whom the good seed was scattered. They are those in whom the Holy Spirit was preparing their soil. They were convicted by the truth about their sin. They pressed on into the light of the truth. And the Holy Spirit continues to draw them into salvation. And the more we pursue the truth of the light, the more we will understand and the more fruit we bear which affirms all the more that we “have.”

This is what Jesus meant when according to Mark’s account He taught in this same context: *Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you* (Mark 4:24). Spiritual growth, sanctification, depends on our **appropriation** of God’s grace. God pours out grace through opportunity, conviction, teaching, but we are responsible to work at it. We have and we need to respond with thankful efforts to receive and build on what we have.

Then there are those who do not have. They think they have. Notice how Jesus expressed this condition with the words, *“even what he thinks that he has.”* These people are indeed aware that the truth has been sowed on them. They really did experience Holy Spirit conviction and received the truth, sometimes with joy. But their lives prove that they really did not come to salvation, which is why they produce no fruit characteristic of Christ. Eventually, their joy about receiving the truth will be gone, and they will be found living life for all the passing stuff just like the rest of the unsaved people.

There are spiritual “haves” and “have nots” in every age. Therefore, Jesus’s command to hear well is ageless. God commanded the same kind of careful response to His truth repeatedly in the Old Testament. He called on His prophets to hear His truth well. Then through those prophets God commanded His people Israel to hear His words (2 Kings 20:16, Isaiah 1:10, Jeremiah 2:4, Ezekiel 18:25). They didn’t. They reaped the consequences of their dereliction.

God especially instructs us to listen to Jesus. To three of the privileged disciples God made it very clear that they would do well to listen to the truth Jesus taught. When Jesus’s glory was revealed to Peter, James, and John, *a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him”* (Mark 9:7). That command is really no greater than the command God gives all people in this age regarding the need to hear Jesus. The writer to the Hebrew Christians recorded, *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* (Hebrews 1:2). This led to the statement later in the letter, *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness”* (Hebrews 3:7-8a).

We need to hear carefully. But our relationship with truth does not end with hearing.

Hear and Do (vv.19-21).

We are challenged to hear and do the truth in a picture of Jesus's relationship with His earthly relatives. *Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you" (vv.19-20).*

It might be a bit uncomfortable for us to stop and consider that Jesus had real family relatives. On one hand, Jesus was the only son of Mary by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the Bible references to Jesus's family members are accurate. Though Jesus was born uniquely, still He had siblings. The people in the area around Nazareth knew Jesus's earthly siblings. One day they wondered, *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things? (Matthew 13:55-56).*

In light of these relationships, let's not forget that He was tempted in every way like we are but without sin. This means that Jesus experienced and understood sibling rivalries. How did He handle the snipping, pestering, and jealousy? We know from Scripture that there were times when Jesus's real family relationships were strained. Early on, by the age of twelve, Jesus caused Mary and Joseph stress because God the Son's ministry conflicted with the expectations of Jesus, Son of Mary. Listen to Jesus's response to Mary at the wedding feast in Cana. *And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4).* Did those words sting? Jesus's reply to His mother was not disrespectful, but another reminder that Jesus was uniquely human and divine. Jesus could never dishonor His earthly parents and still be guiltless concerning the law, the 5th Command in particular.

It might have been in the setting of our text that Mary and Jesus's brothers came to rescue Him from the crowds which sometimes prevented Him from eating (Mark 6:31). Did they think He was losing sensibility and needed their rescuing? Hear His

brothers chide Him because they did not comprehend Jesus's ministry. At the outset of the Feast of Booths Jesus's brothers goaded Him about going up to the feast to demonstrate His power. *So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."* For not even his brothers believed in him (John 7:3-5). Jesus understood family relationships and we can be sure that He always responded the right way even when there was stress.

But the point of this simple statement is not just to remind us that Jesus had earthly relatives. The point is Jesus's statement about who constitutes His most intimate relatives. Jesus pointed out the importance of being His spiritual relatives. *But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (v.21).*

In fact, Jesus preceded this statement with the question, *"Who is my mother?"* In reference to this same setting Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, *"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matthew 12:48).* This was not a derogatory question. Jesus did not put His immediate family down. Rather, at this point, Jesus taught the priority of the spiritual family. By the way, the good news is that after Jesus ascended to heaven, His brothers believed and became part of Jesus's spiritual family. Luke tells us that at Pentecost, *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (Acts 1:14).*

Jesus emphasized that people who hear and do the Bible are His nearest relatives. In light of that statement, hear this very important truth carefully. "Doing" the Bible cannot make a person a member of Christ's family. First, it is impossible for any of us to "do" the Bible consistently. If being in right fellowship with Christ is founded solely on our obedience to Him, no human can enjoy that intimacy. Rather, Jesus taught that doing the Bible is the manifestation or demonstration that a person already is a member of Christ's family.

Jesus always laid down the standard for righteous living. However, in doing so He was not teaching that by living right people could become "Christians." Rather, the reason for the teaching, the challenges, the warnings about keeping His commands is because

“keeping His commands” is the measurement that proves family membership. We strive to live righteously because we are in Christ’s family.

And when we live righteously because we are in Christ’s family, our immediate family will not always understand. They may think of us as religious fanatics. Jesus warned the apostles, *“You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death” (Luke 21:16)*. Even religious family members will not always understand our commitment. Even Christian parents or siblings may not agree with your confident assurance about how to obey what Christ compels you to do.

The important question that needs answering at this point is, “How then do I become part of Christ’s family?” Here is the simple explanation. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, reveals that you offend God because you were born a sinner like all the rest of us, admit it. Say the same thing about your sin that God says. At that point you should experience sorrow for your offense against your loving Creator. Ask God to dismiss the penalty for your sin through the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross, the acceptable price to pay for sin. Accept God’s forgiveness. Rejoice to be adopted into the family of Christ.

The difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation is why it is so important to hear well. No one ever became a member of Christ’s family by keeping His commands. But those who ARE members of Christ’s family through the grace of adoption are characterized by desiring to and attempting to keep His commands. How people listen to Jesus reveals their relationship with Jesus. When we hear the Bible and are compelled to do it, it is a good sign that the soil of our heart has received the Good Seed of the gospel. That is what spiritual fruit looks like.