

**“HEARTS THAT HEAR”:
THE REVEALED AND HIDDEN SECRETS OF THE
KINGDOM OF GOD
LUKE 8:1-21
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Introduction

Can you hear me?

“No, seriously, but do you HEAR me?”

Hearing in communication is not merely *auditory* (Meaning: “I can hear your voice; your voice is at a volume that I can hear audibly.”). *True hearing requires a response* to what we have heard (Meaning: “I hear your struggles, pain, and disappointment and I sympathize”; or “I hear your wisdom and will follow your guidance”; or I hear what you tell me to do and I will obey.”

You may remember the beloved Christmas song: **“Do you hear what I hear?”**

*Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy,
"Do you hear what I hear?
Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy,
Do you hear what I hear?
A song, a song high above the trees
With a voice as big as the the sea,
With a voice as big as the the sea."*

Apparently some did not hear what the little lamb or shepherd boy heard!

Think about hearing. We all know that communication can be a tricky thing for all of us to do! We think we have communicated well to others, and we try to listen, and then they tell us that we haven't truly “heard” what they are trying to say to us. Parents ask their children if they hear what they are saying (Meaning: “Do you hear and is there going to be obedience to what you heard?”); and the children respond: “I HEAR you”; but there is no response to the communication.

Hearing is hard for us because communication is hard.

This is not so with God. God is the Master Communicator. Romans 1:18-25 teaches us that God clearly reveals or communicates to all creatures his eternal power and divine nature in creation so that all men are without excuse. Psalm 19 teaches us that the very heavens of the created world *proclaim* or *preach* the glory of God –and this gracious communication is clear as a bell!

Unfortunately, even though God clearly reveals and communicates himself in creation, sinful man cannot find the True and Living God, and chooses rather to worship and serve the created idolatrously rather than the Creator who is forever praised (Rom. 1:22-25)!

In God's greatest act of revelation and communication, the Incarnation of the Word, when the very Word of God became flesh, men could not understand the clear communication. In the time of Jesus Christ, men and women were surrounded by clear communication in creation and the very person of Jesus Christ, and many could neither see nor hear!

The problem with sin is that it doesn't literally shut our eyes, and stuff our ears- -it taints our hearts so that we cannot see or hear- -we can only grope around in the dark idolatrously seeking after self at best, or at worst being a garden variety religious person with no knowledge of the True God or Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:3).

Sin in all of its idolatrous manifestations prevents us from hearing the Word of God! God must by his grace alone, give us all hearts to hear the proclamation of the Kingdom Gospel that is found in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!

In the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, God reveals the secrets or mysteries of the Kingdom to those with hearts that hear- -and those with hearts that hear are those God has shown his grace and mercy to by His Spirit.

Those with hearts that hear can see and hear the Kingdom of God revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!

God also veils and hides the Kingdom from those who do not believe, who are not recipients of his grace. As a judgment upon unbelief, Jesus speaks in parables; as an act of grace upon unbelief, Jesus speaks in parables. Two aspects of God's veiling the Kingdom: On the one hand God in judgment chooses not to change the sinful heart in order that some might see, hear, and believe; on the other hand God graciously spares the sinful person from a fuller accountability to his full revelation in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ by speaking parabolically.

Our sermon today is about hearing. ***Do we truly hear, or do we not hear the very voice of God revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ? In the voice of Jesus we find once again the grace of God held out for sinners in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.***

I. A Kingdom Picture- God's Proclaimed Word of Power

a. Preaching the Kingdom of God (v. 1b)

The Kingdom of God is expanding and extending through proclamation and preaching the Gospel! Never underestimate, or undermine the power of Christ's preaching- -or the preaching of Christ!

The main aim and focus of Jesus' preaching is the good news of the Kingdom of God. You may remember that the Kingdom of God is the revelation of the reign of God over heaven and earth, the dawn of the Messianic Kingdom in Jesus, and the hope of all men who trust in him. Jesus' preaching (as John the Baptist's before him) was a call to repent for the Kingdom of God was at hand in Him!

The presence of the Kingdom of God in the Person of Work of Jesus called all who had ears to hear to repentance and faith.

Dr. Luke has established Jesus' primary aim or goal of preaching in his Divine Messianic Mission in chapter 4, verse 43: ^{ESV} **Luke 4:43** but he said to them, *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."*

- i. **"Proclaiming"** (v. 1b): κηρύσσω kerusso {kay-roos'-so}- Proclaim openly- -announce as an official herald.
- ii. **"Bringing the good news (or gospel)"** (v. 1b): εὐαγγελίζω euaggelizo {yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo}- Gospel or good news announcement that the long-awaited and anticipated Messianic Kingdom has arrived in the Person and Work of Christ. This message of good news, gospel or "glad tidings" had been the announcement from heaven since the birth of Jesus Christ!

^{ESV} **Luke 2:10** *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.*

- iii. Jesus is not only the Consummate Preacher of eschatological kingdom-glad tidings; he is the content of these glad tidings of great joy ("Joy to the world, the Lord is come!")! In Jesus all who have ears to hear find the Kingdom blessing of eternal life and redemption. In Jesus, Israel and the world will find the long-anticipated Messiah and King who would bring peace and comfort to Jerusalem, through the forgiveness of sins (Isaiah 40).

^{ESV} **Isaiah 40:1-5:** *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

b. Men and Women walking with God (v. 1c-2)

- i. Those who believe in Jesus are Healed and Redeemed from the Fall (Jesus has come to “Make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found...” as the hymn declares so joyfully!). The LORD incarnate is dwelling in the midst of his people as the Prophet Zechariah had declared would come to pass - v. 2a

^{ESV} **Zechariah 2:10** Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.

Verse 2 tells us that women were with Jesus, along with the twelve apostles. These women had also experienced the healing power and authority of Jesus’ Kingdom miracles; they had been set free from bondage to sin and Satan (In the larger context, their response to Jesus’ Kingdom proclamation has borne fruit already, and the devil has not snatched away the word as we learn in the later parable, cf. Luke 8:12ff).

- ii. Both men and women are mentioned by Dr. Luke in this passage as being healed and reconciled to God in Jesus through repentance and a reception of His Kingdom proclamation. Men are disciples of Jesus, but so are the women who have received from Jesus the full benefits of God’s redemption found in the Kingdom of God.

Three women are named (but there are “many others”- v. 3): Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. These women will follow Jesus to the end of his earthly ministry (Luke 23:49, 55; cf. Matt. 27:55-56), and will witness his death and resurrection, and continue to follow him even after his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:14). These women are also providing for and supporting the gospel mission of making Jesus known out of their own means (8:3).

In our larger context of the *Parable of the Sower of Seed* referring to the Prophet Isaiah’s ministry, we might be reminded of the eschatological portrait of the redeemed “Daughters of Zion” that Dr. Luke gives to us here:

Isaiah 1:26b-27: Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.

Isaiah 4:2-4: In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. ³ And he who is left in Zion

and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ *when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning...*

^{ESV} **Zephaniah 3:14** Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!

- iii. The Meaning of these first few verses of chapter 8 is that **The Kingdom has dawned in Jesus Christ as the prophets have foretold years before**. In the proclamation-preaching of the Kingdom, as well as the responses to this Word by faith and repentance and Christ, we see a glimpse of the restoration-renewal-regeneration of all things. This is also an early portrait of not only the early church made up of elect men and women that will be fleshed out in Dr. Luke's second volume *The Book of Acts*, but also a reunification of the tribes of Israel or lost sheep of Israel being gathered together by faith in Jesus Christ to restore Zion as the prophets foretold (Psalms 9:11-14; Isaiah 1:26b-7; Micah 4:2, 7; Zephaniah 3:14).

Dr. Luke paints a narrative portrait of the "already-not yet" of the Kingdom of God that will be revealed at the restoration or regeneration of all things: men and women walking with God fully redeemed and healed from the curse of the fall (Isaiah 65-66; Revelation 21-22).

- iv. In the context of the larger passage, it is important to also interpret Luke 8:19-21 here. The Bible teaches us that from creation the most basic and important social unit is the family. Yet Jesus teaches here that the family found in union with Christ is greater in importance, that is, of eternal significance, because it is a union not merely of blood and ethnicity (like the family), but of a Holy-Spiritual-covenantal bond and union with Jesus Christ by faith (this may have implications for Israel claiming merely ethnic connections to Abraham (Luke 3:7-8), and yet they do not do what Abraham did in believing (cf. John 8:38-44).

^{ESV} **Luke 8:20-21:** And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." ²¹ But he answered them, "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

Jesus is not being disrespectful to his own family, or blood relations; he is making the important point that the redeemed of the Kingdom of God are a family; this family is united to Jesus Christ,

healed, delivered, redeemed and with knowledge of the Kingdom, and those who obediently by God's grace live kingdom lives showing that they are his true Kingdom mother and brothers (as Luke began this passage with Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters in verses 2-3, the disciples and Mary, Joanna, and Susanna (and apparently it is important for Dr. Luke to tell us that perhaps Joanna was married to Chuza and that she left all to follow Jesus).

Application: We often think of ourselves as a bit unimportant in the eyes of others in the world, and even in our imagination of God himself. Yet this passage should greatly encourage those united to Jesus Christ! If we are united to Jesus by his Spirit we are closer in our relation to him than his own flesh and blood relatives!

As the Prophet Jeremiah had prophesied many years before:

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 3:14** Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; *I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.*

As the Apostle Paul teaches us in Galatians 3:26-29- -whether man or woman, slave or free, we are children of God in Christ:

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:26-29:** ... For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Important theological point against Roman Catholicism is that Jesus truly had brothers and sisters. His brothers were James and Jude who wrote two New Testament Epistles, and Joseph and Simon (Mark 6:3). Jesus also had two sisters (Mark 6:3). Jesus was the eldest of a big family, and by this time it seems that their father Joseph had died. Roman Catholics deny that Jesus truly had brothers and sisters and interpret this scripture through the lens of the Romish doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, and say that what Luke means here is that these were step brothers or step sisters of Jesus by Joseph through another wife; this is patently foolish and false (see also Mark 6:1ff).

II. A Kingdom Parable- God's Power and Word

a. The Larger Context of this Parable in Scripture and Luke's Gospel and Acts

In our overall context of this section of Luke's Gospel, we should be reminded that Jesus begins to speak in parables now as he preaches the Kingdom of God (cf. Luke 8:1-2). The reason for the parables in Dr. Luke's Gospel is because Jesus' ministry (and implicitly the Kingdom of God) is being opposed by unbelieving Israelites- - just like as in Isaiah the Prophet's time (Isaiah 6:9-10; cf. Luke 5:21; 6:11; 7:44-49).

^{ESV} **Luke 5:21** And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "*Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?*"

^{ESV} **Luke 6:11** But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another *what they might do to Jesus*.

^{ESV} **Luke 7:29-30:** (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ *but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves*, not having been baptized by him.)

In our parable, Jesus purposely hides the kingdom as he reveals it to those who have ears to hear! Many had refused to learn from him and wanted merely outward manifestations of the Kingdom through miracles, signs, etc, so Jesus will only give them the outward meaning of the Kingdom, hiding the Kingdom to those who oppose him, yet at the same time revealing the Kingdom to those who believe.

^{ESV} **Matthew 13:13** *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

For those who believe as his disciples, Jesus reveals the Gospel of the Kingdom through explaining the parables to them. For those who oppose him, he begins to hide the Kingdom from them by speaking in parables. As their hearts begin to be hardened against God's purposes in Christ, so God graciously hides the Kingdom from them so as not to compound their judgment and accountability to the truth of God's Word.

Ironically, the unbelieving Israelites are aligning themselves with the Pharaoh of Egypt rather than believing Moses and the Prophets, in that they too harden their hearts against the purposes of God, and God allows them to continue to be hardened by denying them the grace that would change their hearts and give them ears to hear.

As the teachers of Israel have "rejected the purpose of God for themselves" (Luke 7:30), they are being stiff-necked, hard-hearted and becoming deaf like the idols they worship and serve as Israel has done

many times in history. It is important at this point to focus on the broader biblical context of quotation from Isaiah the Prophet in Luke 8:10:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 6:9-10:** And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "' Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

This passage from Isaiah is in the larger context of Isaiah chapters 1-5 on Israel's continued adultery to God through idolatry. Primarily it is Israel's leaders and teachers who were to be blamed for mass unbelief and idolatry:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 3:12-16:** *My people- infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.*¹³ The LORD has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples.¹⁴ The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: "It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses.¹⁵ What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" declares the Lord GOD of hosts.¹⁶ The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet... (compare this also with the opening of chapter 8 with women humbly following Jesus; the "Daughters of Zion" being redeemed and restored by Messiah).

The reason the unbelieving Israelites are not going to hear the proclamation of Isaiah is that they have become like the dumb and mute idols they worship and serve through the judgment of God (cf. Romans 1:25ff- "God handed them over...):

^{ESV} **Psalms 135:16-17:** They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see;¹⁷ they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths.

Later in redemptive-history, at the end of Dr. Luke's second volume *The Book of Acts*, the Israelites are still largely rejecting the gospel:

^{ESV} **Acts 28:23-28:** When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.²⁴ And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.²⁵ And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after

Paul had made one statement: *"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ 'Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. ²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'"²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."*

We should not try to soften this “hard saying” of Jesus by trying to avoid the sovereignty of God’s grace in this veiling of the Kingdom from some. The sovereignty of God and how he reveals his grace should not prevent us from still being faithful to proclaim and preach the fact that the Kingdom has come in Jesus Christ. The hope of the world is found in Jesus! We still call both Jew and Gentile to repentance in Christ, as Jesus has shown to us in the gospels.

We should be reminded of Jesus’ preaching in Matthew 11:25-29 where Jesus teaches about God’s sovereign grace in preaching:

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:25-29:** At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

b. The Parable of the Sower and the Seeds

Jesus tells a parable about a sower and his seed-sowing (this parable is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke with different authorial purposes concerning placement of the parables); there are four results of the seed sowing: 1) Some fell on path but did not have time to take root; 2) Some fell on rock and it withered because it did not have deep roots; 3) Some fell on thorns and was choked; 4) Some fell on good soil and yielded a great crop.

Jesus closes this parable by using the Kingdom phrase in his preaching: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Jesus is parabolically alluding to Isaiah 55 concerning God’s thoughts and ways being higher than man’s thoughts and ways, and that as the God’s Word goes forth it will accomplish what he sends it to accomplish.

Isaiah 55:10-11: For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

c. What is a parable?

Parables Defined- *parabole* (Grk)- “a placing beside”. It is a comparison or illustration drawn from nature or human life. The main point of each parable is to reveal the King and the Kingdom to those to whom it has been given, while veiling it to those who do not believe. It comes from the Hebrew word *Mashal* which means *a saying intended to stimulate thought*.

What is a Parable? New Testament scholar K. R. Snodgrass defines a parable as a short narrative with two levels of meaning... “Jesus’ parables are both works of art and the weapons he used in the conflict with his opponents. They were the teaching method he chose most frequently to explain the kingdom of God and to show the character of God and the expectations God has for people...The primary focus of the parables is the coming of the Kingdom of God and the resulting discipleship that is required.” (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, “Parables”, pg. 591, 599).

What is the purpose of parables? Again, Professor Snodgrass says correctly that the parables are not merely stories to enjoy. They hold up one reality to serve as a mirror of another, the kingdom of God. They are avenues to understanding, handles by which one can grasp the kingdom. Jesus told parables to confront people with the character of God’s kingdom and to invite them to participate in it and to live in accordance with it (DJG, “Parables”, pg. 596).

New Testament Scholar Greydanus wrote: “Through word imagery one can represent something that is more difficult to explain by reasoning. The image addresses itself to the imagination and sets going the power of forming conceptions. By means of His parables the Lord has revealed the mysteries of God’s kingdom more fully, more deeply and more gloriously to those who accept His Person and His message in faith” (Quoted in Geldenhuys, pg. 245).

d. God’s Word with Power and Authority

i. Jesus is the Sower of the Seed: Proclamation of the Word means the Kingdom of God is present in Jesus (v. 5a).

1. Jesus uses an example from everyday life in Palestine: seed-sowing as an example of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. Many would have understood the frustration of some seed not growing, as well as the rejoicing of some of the seed becoming a great harvest.
2. The imagery of seeding stresses the importance of the **covenant growing and nurture** throughout the Christian life. God has not taught us to get our children “ready to make a decision for him”, but to get them living in the covenant, believing what we believe, and teaching and nurturing them deeply in the faith by the Word of God (This also reminds us of the importance of confessions and catechisms for instruction in the word).
3. Electing element in seeding: the soil’s fertility is what makes some seed produce a great harvest, and causes some seed to become bird food or choked and withered plants. The soil must be prepared by God!
4. Four soils summarized by Jesus (vv. 11-15):

Note: There are only two kinds of people: those who hear, and those who do not. But Jesus gives us four kinds of hearts that are revealed using the agricultural metaphor of soils and the planting of seeds.

1) **Seed is stolen by the devil**: These are those who have an outward hearing of the Word, but the power of darkness takes away any thought of it after one has heard it.

The path [No chance for growth]- birds came and ate it up (the Pharisees and scribes in the historical context where they are described as “having rejected the purpose of God for themselves”- Luke 7:30).

Jesus explains: The Evil One snatches away what was sown in the heart.

Illustration- the Devil striving against the coming of the Kingdom. Apathy and disinterestedness is a tool of Satan in building his Kingdom.

2) **No deep rootedness in the Gospel**: There is an initial enthusiasm and excitement of finding hope in the Gospel, but the word doesn’t penetrate deeply into the heart, it is only surface, and so because they are not truly regenerate, they allow the problems and frustrations of life to get the best of

them, and they no longer endure patiently and with perseverance in the Church.

The rocky places [Temporal Growth]- not much soil, sprang up quickly, but when the sun came out it scorched the plants and they withered because they had no root (some “disciples” who followed Jesus off and on during his earthly ministry in the historical context).

Jesus explains: Word received with joy, but since there is *no root*, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

A “cross-less” Christianity!

Illustration- Evangelical-over-realized-eschatological-“Praise the LORD”-Christianity. Those who are not told that the Christian life is about pain, persecution, and picking up one’s cross.

This is a *rootless, mere outward* Christianity that will cause some to fall away when persecution or pain comes into their lives.

Example of suffering in some people’s lives, and how unexpected it can be, thus causing some to fall away!

Apostasy: I John 2:18-19; 3 John 9

3) **Thorns grow along with the seed**: These receive the gospel as one of many important things in their life, but not THE MOST IMPORTANT THING in their life. These kinds of people think the gospel will be a nice addition to their present lives and lifestyle, but the importance of the gospel wanes in light of their present worldly riches. This is where one loses their “first-love” as Jesus warns in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:4).

The thorns [Choked Growth]- grew up and choked the plants (Judas Iscariot in the historical context).

Jesus explains: Hears the Word, but worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful – and it dies.

Illustration- American Christianity- Rich people compared to the rest of the world. In many ways,

“Blessed (still) are the poor...for they shall be filled.”

There is a real tension in Scripture between knowing our calling and election in Christ, and making this fully assured (2 Peter 1:1-10), and the reality of persevering by God’s grace to the finish line (2 Tim. 4:1-8; Hebrews 3:7-4:13).

As professing Christians, who are part of the visible church, we must be careful that we are not unfruitful in the Christian life because of the ‘creaturely comforts’ that God gives to us. We are to be reminded of the example of Judas, and how he stayed with Christ as long as the other disciples visibly, but that his heart was taken by greed and the love of this world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17), and he rejected Christ (even though we know it was because Christ did not pray for him, etc. it is still a lesson to learn that mere profession of faith, does not mean real faith).

We might focus so much on the blessings of God and forget altogether that there is a growth that needs to occur by the grace of God and his Spirit.

Calvin Quote on Thorns in our lives (from his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels)-

Each of us ought to endeavor to tear the thorns out of his heart, if we do not choose that, the Word of God could be choked; for there is not one of us whose heart is not filled with a vast quantity, and, as I may say, a thick forest, of thorns. And indeed, we perceive how few there are that reach true maturity [in Christ]; for there is scarcely one individual out of ten who labors, I do not say to root out, but even to cut down the thorns...[and] the very number of thorns, which is so prodigious that it ought to shake off our sloth, is the reason why most people give themselves no trouble about them.

[Meaning, the thorns should cause us to realize our sloth and laziness, but they are choking us so that we cannot see our sloth and laziness].

4) **Good soil, abundant fruit!** Those who hear the gospel and receive it, and come what may, they preserve patiently by faith, keeping their eyes on Christ, the Author and Perfector of their faith (cf. Heb. 12:1-5). Permanent and lasting fruit is produced although in differing measure we learn from Matthew 13:8:

^{ESV} **Matthew 13:8** ...other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

5. The Kingdom of God is present in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ now as well then in the proclamation and preaching of the Gospel! Be reminded of the importance of taking care of how you hear! This is one of the important reasons why the elders and I desire that every family *prepare themselves for public worship together*.

Jesus says:

^{ESV} **Luke 8:18** **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."

As the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 160 teaches:

WLC 160 What is required of those that hear the word preached? A. It is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence,(1) preparation,(2) and prayer;(3) examine what they hear by the scriptures;(4) receive the truth with faith,(5) love,(6) meekness,(7) and readiness of mind,(8) as the word of God;(9) meditate,(10) and confer of it;(11) hide it in their hearts,(12) and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.(13) (1)Prov. 8:34 (2)1 Pet. 2:1,2; Luke 8:18 (3)Ps. 119:18; Eph. 6:18,19 (4)Acts 17:11 (5)Heb. 4:2 (6)2 Thess. 2:10 (7)James 1:21 (8)Acts 17:11 (9)1 Thess. 2:13 (10)Luke 9:44; Heb. 2:1 (11)Luke 24:14; Deut. 6:6,7 (12)Prov. 2:1; Ps. 119:11 (13)Luke 8:15; James 1:25

Listening is hard! It is an active exercise; I am reminded of Eutychus in Acts 20 who fell asleep during the Apostle Paul's preaching!

- ii. Kingdom people are those who hear the word and respond by faith in Jesus (vv. 9-11).
1. Jesus said: "To you it has been given to know the secrets ("mysteries") of the Kingdom of God [τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ], but for others they are in parables."

Jesus explains to the disciples that their understanding of the secrets of the Kingdom depends upon their submission to his teaching and instruction. Verse 10 says "to you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God..."

The secrets of the Kingdom are the full revelation and concluding story of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus Christ, God chooses to reveal himself fully and specially to his people so that they would not have speculative thoughts or misunderstandings of the Kingdom, but might have true and special revelation from him.

For others who do not have Jesus as the interpreter of the parables, the parables are to keep hidden the Kingdom from unbelief, as Jesus aligns himself with the Isaianic mission of preaching that had been Isaiah's plight: they would be seeing and hearing, but not seeing and understanding. We should recall the call and commission of Isaiah the Prophet. Jesus is called the same mission as the Prophet Greater Than Isaiah:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 6:8-13:** And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." ⁹ ***And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "' Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*** ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." ***The holy seed is its stump.***

The Word of God is a two-edged sword: When the Word is proclaimed there is one side of the blade that is grace and mercy; the other side of the blade is judgment- -depending upon how one responds to the preaching-proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 4:12-13:** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

2. **What are the "secrets or mysteries" of the Kingdom of God?**

Greydanus explained that these are the secret riches and glories only to be known through divine revelation, which are not to remain secret but have been revealed, made known, however, only to those to whom such experience is granted by God (Quoted in Geldenhuys, pg. 246).

3. An example of these secrets or mysteries that have been hidden, yet at the same time revealed are summarized in Romans 16:25-27:

^{ESV} **Romans 16:25-27:** ²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, *according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages* ²⁶ *but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith-* ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

- iii. Kingdom people are those who learn from Jesus and grow in knowledge and the fruit that they produce by faith in Jesus (vv. 8, 15).

1. Good soil is equivalent to good fertilized hearts by God's Spirit (that is, those believing hearts that give people ears to hear the gospel message and respond in faith, bearing fruit).
2. The seed that fell on good soil produces fruit as we wait for it patiently (v. 15). The hearing of the Gospel of the Kingdom requires an ongoing seeking after God's grace found in Jesus Christ so that we might with patience continue to bear fruit that will last!

^{ESV} **John 15:1-5:** "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

3. Good soil, or hearts penetrated by God's grace are those who not only hear Jesus' words- -but those who hear and show this in their obedient action to the Word of Jesus. Jesus says that "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

- iv. Kingdom people are those who Jesus has "turned on the light for"; that is, those who as the Parable of the Lamp teaches, have seen clearly the Kingdom of God in the Person and Work of Christ, and must make this clearly known to others in their proclamation and life:

^{ESV} **Luke 8:16-18:** "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. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not

be known and come to light. 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."

- a. Although Jesus may be pleased to hide the Kingdom of God through parables, according to His Sovereign prerogative and will, those who have ears to hear are to make it as clear as possible.
- b. The mysteries that are made known to believing disciples, but not be hidden, but made known.
- c. Jesus particularly is referring here to the clear gospel preaching of the Kingdom once he is crucified, risen, and ascended. When Jesus pours out his Holy Spirit on the disciples, it is with the purpose of making known the present reality of the Kingdom in the completed work of Jesus Christ.
- d. Jesus leaves his disciples with the promise in verse 18 that those who seek God's grace in hearing will also grow deeper in their knowledge of his grace found in Jesus. As we learn from the prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:15-23:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:15-23:** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, *may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰* that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Let us pray expectantly to understand more of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and the gospel of grace revealed in Christ's Person and Work, by seeking God with the Apostle Paul in this way:

...So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Are you one who has ears to hear? The proclamation-preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom found in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ is still being preached! Because this true gospel of the Kingdom is still being preached, Christ is still speaking to those who have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (cf. Rev. 2-3).

In the Book of Revelation, we see the Resurrected-Ascended Christ as the One who still speaks, the One who still proclaims and preaches to “those who have ears to hear what the Spirit says” in the Church through the Word of God (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

The Book of Hebrews tell us that Jesus is more than the mere content of the glad tidings, or gospel, he is the Speaker of the Gospel –the One who still speaks who we must listen to and follow:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:6-12:** ...but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. ⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹ where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works ¹⁰ for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'* ¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" ¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Even when Jesus had accomplished his Divine Messianic Mission in living, dying, and being resurrected and ascended to God's right hand, and the Apostles were called and sent to proclaim and preach the Kingdom of God found in Jesus, there were many within Israel who still refused to listen- -to believe and hear:

^{ESV} **Acts 7:51-54:** "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." ⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

May we never forget the power of God's Word, and may we continually as those who are united to Jesus Christ by faith, seek to have hearts that hear! May you be encouraged to prayerfully prepare daily, and especially for worship to hear the Christ of Scripture speak to your heart- -and as a close and intimate member of his Kingdom family- -may you respond in obedience by his grace. Remember:

"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

"Do you hear what I hear?"

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Exegetical Notes

^{ESV} **Luke 8:1** Soon afterward he [**Jesus**] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. [**The main aim and focus of Jesus' preaching is the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the revelation of the reign of God over heaven and earth, the dawn of the Messianic Kingdom in Jesus, and the hope of all men who trust in him. Dr. Luke has established this in chapter 4, verse 43:** ^{ESV} **Luke 4:43** but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."]

And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. [**Verse 2 tells us that women were with Jesus, along with the twelve apostles. These women had also experienced the healing power and authority of Jesus' Kingdom miracles; they had been set free from bondage to sin and Satan (Jesus is redeeming "as far as the curse is found"). Three women are named: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. These women will follow Jesus to the end of his earthly ministry (Luke 23:49, 55; cf. Matt. 27:55-56), and will witness his death and resurrection, and continue to follow him even after his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:14). Dr. Luke paints a narrative portrait of the "already-not yet" of the Kingdom of God that will be revealed at the restoration or regeneration of all things: men and women walking with God fully redeemed and healed from the curse of the fall.]**

⁴ And 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. ⁶ And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." [**Jesus tells a parable about a sower and his seed sowing; there are four results: 1) Some fell on path but did not have time to take root; 2) Some fell on rock and it withered because it did not have deep roots; 3) Some fell on thorns and was choked; 4) Some fell on good soil and yielded a great crop. Jesus closes this parable by using the Kingdom phrase in his preaching: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus is parabolically eluding to Isaiah 58 concerning God's thoughts and ways being higher than man's thoughts and ways, and that as the God's Word goes forth it will accomplish what he sends it to accomplish.]**

⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "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.' [**Jesus explains to the disciples that their understanding of the secrets of the Kingdom depends upon their submission to his teaching and instruction. Verse 10 says "to you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God..." The secrets of the Kingdom are the full revelation and concluding story of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, God chooses to reveal himself fully and specially to his people so that they would**

not have speculative thoughts or misunderstandings of the Kingdom, but might have true and special revelation from him. For others who do not have Jesus as the interpreter of the parables, the parables are to keep hidden the Kingdom from unbelief, as Jesus aligns himself with the Isaianic mission of preaching that had been Isaiah's plight: they would be seeing and hearing, but not seeing and understanding.]

¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones 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. ¹³ And the ones 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. ¹⁴ 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. 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. [Jesus explains the parable of the Sower; he is the Sower of the seed.]

¹⁶, "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. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. [There seems to be double meaning here. On the one hand all those who bear fruit with patience who are part of the Kingdom as verse 15 says, will be like a light for all to see on a stand that gives light to others and makes manifest and known that the Kingdom has come; on the other hand, Jesus is saying that his ministry is this light on a stand, and that he is here to make known the Kingdom of God and all of this one day will be fully revealed to all the world.]

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." [Jesus is saying that if you are able to understand him and his parables, you will learn more; if one does not understand, even though they think they do, even that little knowledge will be taken away.]

¹⁹ Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." ²¹ But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." [Jesus is not being disrespectful to his family, or blood relations; he is making the important point that the redeemed of the Kingdom of God are a family; this family is united to Jesus Christ, healed, delivered, redeemed and with knowledge of the Kingdom, and those who obediently by God's grace live kingdom lives showing that they are his true Kingdom mother and brothers (as Luke began this passage with Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters in verses 2-3, the disciples and Mary, Joanna, and Susanna (and apparently it is important for Dr. Luke to tell us that perhaps Joanna was married to Chuza and that she left all to follow Jesus).]

Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Isaiah 55:8-12:** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹² "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:25-29:** At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

^{ESV} **Matthew 13:1-15:** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "' You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 2:6-10:** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"- ¹⁰ these

things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

^{ESV} **Romans 16:24-27:** ²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith- ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

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