

January 6, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2019 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 8:4-15.

1. How do we explain the statement that Jesus referred to in Isaiah 6 about people not hearing lest they repent?
2. If a person is truly born again, can thorns choke out the fruit of the gospel?
3. How does soil get prepared to receive the good seed?
4. What is the good seed and who sows it?
5. How much work does the evangelist do in preparing the soil?
6. If a person does not produce works that characterize God, what can he or she assume about having received the Word?

DIFFERENT SOIL – DIFFERENT RESPONSE

Luke 8:4-15

Chapter eight began with the simple rehearsal of the names of people who accompanied Jesus as He traveled through the cities and the villages of the countryside *proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God*. Why did Jesus do that over and over, day after day for over three years of public ministry? Why is that also the responsibility Jesus left for the disciples, for us who still follow Him two thousand years later? Why is the preaching and telling of the gospel so important?

The gospel, the wonderfully good news that God has provided the Savior from sin, is the only eternal hope for every person. Therefore, where the telling of the Bible is commanded, the hearing of Bible truth is expected. But that isn't always the case. That people are hearing the good news we tell is not always the case in our day, and it certainly was not the case in Jesus's day.

Therefore, in the first twenty-one verses of chapter eight, Luke recorded how Jesus taught the importance of hearing the truth by the telling of this parable. Then Luke recorded a simple illustration of how we hold forth the truth like a light with the desire that others will hear it. And finally we read that Jesus taught that His most intimate family is made up of people who hear what He teaches. We will not have time to look at all three statements about hearing truth today. We will take up the last two challenges next week.

The heavenly story with an earthly meaning in 8:4-15 reveals that the truth of the gospel is scattered everywhere far and near. That truth falls on many ears. However, not all people are prepared to respond to the truth. Many hear the truths of the Bible and are wholly unaffected. Others hear the truth and respond immediately. But eventually they conclude that the Christian life just isn't for them. Likewise, some people hear the Bible, determine that Bible truth is what they need to do, but then the pleasures of life lure them away from the truth into ordinary, mundane, perishing life. Conversely, some people hear the truth of the Bible, respond to it, begin to grow spiritually and throughout life continue to produce good works that are characterized by Christ-likeness.

What is the difference? The difference is the condition of the individual's heart. Jesus illustrated the differences with the common story about different kinds of soils on which good seed fell as the farmer scattered it. Responsive soil is like hearts that are conditioned to hear. Rejection of God's Word is spiritually deadly. But hearing God's Word insincerely is just as deadly. The great challenge is for you to hear God's truth rightly. When you hear as you should, the works of your life will prove it.

A Cryptic Story (vv.4-8).

Jesus told this story *when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him (v.4)*. By this point in the study of Jesus's ministry, we should not be surprised to see great crowds gathered to hear Him teach. By now word of Jesus the miracle worker and amazing teacher had spread. Wherever He went virtually the whole population of towns and cities gathered around Him. I picture the crowds like concentric circles. In the center nearest to Jesus would be the select twelve who for the most part had a grasp about who Jesus was and clung to His words. Then a little further out might have been the women who traveled with the apostles and Jesus who also believed Him and gave their lives to following Him (vv.1-3). The next circle might be characterized by the large group of people called disciples who generally followed Jesus for a mixed number of reasons. Then there was typically the Pharisees, scribes, lawyers who often showed up to critique or look for inconsistencies in Jesus's teaching. And finally there were the masses who were needy or just curious.

What a tremendous opportunity for God the Son to declare the truth. Given a similar opportunity, what would we do? I would probably prepare the most sound, convincing, theological arguments I could. Jesus told stories.

Luke recorded this particular parable. In fact, there are a total of forty-six parables recorded by the three writers of the synoptic Gospels. Because these writers often repeated the same situations, some of those parables are duplicates. For example, Luke recorded the most parables at twenty-four. Six of those stories are shared by Mark and Matthew while eighteen are unique to Luke's record.

Most people are familiar with the explanation that these parables were "earthly stories with a heavenly meaning." They were stories about common, every day situations that the people experienced and understood. But behind the story Jesus was teaching eternal truths. We need to be careful not to confuse the common circumstances with the truth being taught because sometimes the common circumstances do not affirm eternal truth. For example, there might be other extenuating circumstances for actual seed not germinating or producing fruit. Getting stuck on that argument (which people like to do) is to miss the point.

Now to the story about the Sower and the Seed (vv.5-8a). Jesus said, "*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. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold*" (vv.5-8a).

Again, this is simply a story about typical life. A farmer went out during planting season and scattered seed from a bag attached to his waist. As he would throw the seed in a sweeping motion, the seeds would land in various places. Some landed on the pathway that bordered the farmer's little plot of land. Some was carried by the wind and ended up in stony soil, weed-infested soil, or on the ground prepared before hand.

The point of the story is that the different kinds of soils produced different responses to the seed sown. For example, Jesus taught that seed that falls on the pathway is trampled and picked up by the birds of the air. Seed that falls among the rocks will germinate, but cannot last and produce fruit because it lacks moisture. Seed that falls among thorns will be choked out by the thorns. Seed that falls on well-prepared ground will germinate, take root, and produce far more than was sown.

Having spoken that very simple and earthy story, Jesus then laid down a challenge to the great crowd that was gathered. *As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (v.8b). Everyone heard what Jesus had just said on the surface. Okay there might have been some deaf people present seeking for healing. And there might have been a handful of folks who were hard of hearing. But Jesus wasn't challenging people like that to hear better.

Jesus challenged all the people to listen with purpose, to listen carefully to what He said. The need to hear the lesson was true in the context of Jesus's teaching as it is today in the context of any teaching. We all know from experience that students sitting in a classroom may or may not hear what the teacher says. Oh sure, they hear the sound the teacher makes as he or she continues to teach the subject. But is the student listening on purpose, trying to learn, trying to apply the truth? Probably the looming exam will reveal the truth of the matter. Or we could apply the same principle to any given sermon

to which some people listen intently, some hear the words but make no application, and others hear nothing.

When Jesus said, “Let him who has ears hear,” He called for a deeper understanding of the story He just told. Jesus challenged the people to hear from their hearts. To hear merely with the head generally leads to quick forgetfulness. It is as James warned: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like (James 1:22-24).*

Jesus desires for us to hear His truth with the goal of putting it into practice. Forgetfulness seldom has positive results. Contrary to what Grandpa said when he claimed that his absentmindedness was not all bad because at least he could hide his own Easter eggs.

Explanation of the Story (vv.9-15).

Where there is a difference in hearing, there will be a difference in understanding (vv.9-10). At first the disciples failed to understand. Apparently the story didn’t seem to have application in their minds. *And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant (v.9).* Probably the reference to *disciples* in this case is a reference to the twelve apostles. They wanted to know the details of Jesus’s teaching. More than that, they needed to know. They had a hunger that the larger mass of people did not share. Mere human wisdom was sufficient to conclude that Jesus wasn’t giving a lecture on effective planting methods.

The disciples’ question is a good indicator of the disciples’ relationship with Christ. If you never question what you read in the Bible, it is probably not an indication that you are very wise or spiritually perfect. It is more likely an indication that you don’t really care what the Bible teaches. In fact, if you do not read your Bible, you would be rightly compared to the people of the towns and cities who never even went out to hear Jesus teach when He came through. Read God’s words to us and then ask Him what He means.

Jesus assured His followers that they will understand. *He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God” (v.10a).* The issue, the truth behind this story was a *secret of the*

kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the whole spectrum of salvation drawn up by the Triune God in eternity. The expression of the kingdom of God at this time is the reign of Christ the king in the hearts of His people. That is not like the reign of God over an actual, particular nation like Israel. This kind of reign was a mystery to people steeped in Old Testament teaching and practice.

That Christ reigns in the hearts of real people is still a mystery to most of the human race. How does He do that? Why does He do that? How can it come to pass? What is the result? True Christians, true followers of Christ should know how to answer those questions. We have come to know by experience this miracle of the new birth. Not only does forgiveness of sins, being released from bondage to sin and Satan, and being brought into the kingdom of God, make sense to us—it is life! Christ reigning in our hearts is the reason, purpose, explanation for all that we think or do, right?

The will of God is for us, His people, to know and experience this righteousness. He has granted for us to know it. But that is just Jesus’s point. Because God grants the knowledge, some people will never understand. Jesus assured the apostles that they would know the truth. Just as certain is that the truths He spoke *“for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand’” (v.10b).*

Matthew explained this statement more fully when he recorded Jesus’s reference to the message God gave to Isaiah. Seven hundred years earlier God told Isaiah the prophet, *“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. 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. 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. 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’” (Matthew 13:12-15).*

God gave this astonishing warning to Isaiah when He called Isaiah to preach His pending judgment against Israel’s sin. The warning was that the people were so sunk in sin that they could not

hear God, it was impossible for them to listen to God. Because the people repeatedly rejected God's messengers who delivered God's message, they came to the point that God would not allow them to hear.

The same principle came to bear in Jesus's day. He was speaking to people who chose not to believe Him. That was their choice. But in hardening their hearts against Jesus's teaching, they condemned themselves to spiritual ignorance and the eternal condemnation that results from such rebellion.

This is a serious matter in every age, including ours. People will not hear, will not hear, will not hear the gospel until they cannot hear. People who hear the Word of truth and harden their hearts against it do themselves the same damage Pharaoh did to himself and his nation. It is more deadly to sit in a church service week after week without hearing God speak, than it is to never attend the preaching service. That reality makes the warning from Hebrews 3:7-10 very important. *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, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years" (Hebrews 3:7-10).* And so Jesus's warning is still pertinent. Listen very carefully to the truth behind this story!

The lesson is that different kinds of ground produces different kinds of results (vv.11-15). By way of explanation to us His followers, Jesus said that the seed is the Bible. *"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God" (v.11).* The good seed the farmer sowed pictures the Bible. Therefore, the farmer is the preacher, teacher, evangelist, and everyone who speaks the truth of the Bible. The various kinds of ground represent the various conditions of peoples' hearts. This story explains why certain people respond to Bible teaching the way they do. Your friends and relatives will generally fit into one of these categories. You will generally fit into one of these categories.

There are three kinds of non-productive soils or hearts. The problem is that the non-productive soil is unprepared. For example, hard-packed hearts do not receive the truth. *"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"*

(v.12). These people hear the gospel. They don't understand it (Matthew 13:19). Frankly, people who are born in sin, live in sin, are spiritually dead and cannot grasp the truth of the gospel. So the good seed of the Bible is pointless to them and Satan quickly snatches away the seed. The result is that it is impossible for people like that to believe and be saved. These people are destined for eternal destruction.

Stoney-foundation hearts cannot appropriate the truth. *"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" (v.13).* Again, like the hard-packed hearted people, these people hear Bible truth. But this time, because God the Holy Spirit stirs their hearts, they receive it with joy. They understand they are sinners and confess their sins. They understand that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins. For the most part they believe the gospel – for a while.

But when testing comes, the test reveals there was no miracle of regeneration. Testing is part of being associated with the gospel. Sometimes they are tests leveled by sinners who mock the professing believer. Sometimes they are just general tests that come from living in a sinful world. Ultimately, God sends the tests to prove the genuineness of faith – or not! That is God's warning through Paul. *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister (Colossians 1:21-23).* The professing Christian who falls away under the test was never regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Then there is the thorn-infested hearts who cannot endure the truth. *"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" (v.14).* This person also hears the truth. There is no indication here or in Matthew that the person receives the word with joy like the stony heart person did. But the implication is that there was some kind

response at the outset. However, in time, the common issues of life choke out any hunger for truth, any desire for the Bible.

What I refer to as the common issues of life, Jesus more specifically called *the cares and riches and pleasures of life*. In the American culture that might be the practice of buying things we don't need, to impress people we don't like, with money we don't have. In America, many people make a religious decision, some kind of choice to add Jesus to their lives. Then they fall in with the majority of all Americans and embrace the fun and joys that passing life can offer all the time claiming to be born again. But there is no spiritual fruit in their lives. It does not mature because they are not a branch connected to the Vine Jesus Christ.

These three categories (hard packed, stony, and thorny hearts) make up the vast majority of all humanity. That is why Jesus warned, *“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. 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).

At the end of the story, Jesus pictured a fourth kind of heart. The Holy Spirit prepared hearts respond to truth. *“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”* (v.15). Matthew added a bit more to the picture when he wrote, *“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty”* (Matthew 13:23).

In this person's heart, the this soil was ready for the good seed because the Holy Spirit tilled the soil. He convicted of sin (John 16:8). He imparted spiritual life (John 6:63). He performs the miracle of regeneration. Or as we read in Paul's letter to Titus, *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5). The miracle of regeneration is reception of the good seed. The result is fruit. People who truly receive the truth of the Bible produce fruit that characterizes the Holy Spirit. It looks like *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23) and such. It is fruit that

originates in and displays the character of the Vine to which we are attached.

Jesus still desires for everyone to hear Him speak. Do not harden your heart against His Word. Rather listen with the intent of obeying Him, of doing what you hear in His Word. It is not good enough to be familiar with the Bible or even to know the Bible well. The seed of Bible truth growing in Holy Spirit tilled soil will produce fruit of obedience. Does your “doing” indicate that you have heard and are doing the truth or simply that you are familiar with it?