

Luke 8:4-21

The Fruit and Family of Saving Faith

It is an honor to share the pulpit in a place where the Word of God has been honored for decades. Luke 1:2 mentions those who are “servants of the Word.” My past experience at TRB is that the preaching and teaching ministry reflects that. The pastors truly want to serve the Word that exalts Jesus and his gospel. I hope, by God’s grace, to continue on in that Word-centered ministry, alongside my fellow pastors.

Intro: There is an R.C. Sproul book with the title, *Saved from What?*

Sproul answers that question by teaching on God’s absolute holiness, and the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrificial work on the cross in order to show that what we are saved *from* is really the outpouring of God’s Wrath.

Our text answers a different question; not saved *from* what, rather, saved *for* what?

- The last time Pastor Rob taught, he covered the story of Jesus extending grace to the sinful woman (7:41-50). Christ’s final words to her were, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace” (7:50).
- The woman is a picture of what it looks like to receive the pardon and peace of Christ. But now what? What does life look like after that?
- The answer is here (main point): *We are saved for a life of fruit bearing & living with a family of other like-minded listeners.*

1. Salvation produces a receptive, fruit-bearing heart (4-18)

- In order to understand this text accurately, we need to understand how a parable works.

—Parables are *not* just sermon illustrations. Preachers illustrate to help people see the truth better and make it stick. But parables are more than just illustration. *Parables are used to pack a repentant punch.* If we are listening, they can hit us in the gut.

- For example, in 2 Sam 12:1-7. The context is the sad story of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah. How do you get a guy’s attention after that?
- God gets David’s attention by sending a prophet who tells a *parable*.
- The parable (1-4) is about a rich man who steals his poor neighbor’s only lamb to feed a guest. Note David’s response, starting in vs 5.

(2 Sam 12:5-7)

⁵ Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷ Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

- Did you see how the parable works? David gets to the point where he is smoking mad. He feels the injustice; he considers this a heartless act, and now he is ready to act. Then David is hit in the gut when Nathan delivers the prophetic punch (v7).

Parables pack a prophetic punch that call us to repent.
To understand parables, we must be ready to respond.

The Parable of the Sower:

- Jesus tells the parable in v4-8, then explains it in vs9-15, then adds a short proverb to stress the application (16-18).

—The parable is pretty straightforward: A farmer is broadcasting his seed.

—The seed is received 4 various ways.

—The seed represents God's Word (v11)

—The 4 different soils show 4 different responses to Jesus's teaching. Because Jesus stresses hearing (v8), the soils represent 4 different types of listeners.

- 1) The Refusing Ear (v5,12)—Here the Word is sown, but there is instant rejection. Jesus stressed the activity of the devil. The seed is trampled on (v5). Perhaps in mind is the violent rejection of Christ and his followers—we step on things we want to kill, like Palmetto bugs in SC.
- 2) The Selective Ear (v6,13)—This group hears the word and initially it looks promising. But the seed is in shallow soil. It can't bear difficulty. Like a superficial dating relationship built on infatuation, *it is not equipped for difficulty*.

I once lead a group of students to a youth conference in Pittsburgh that had thousands of others attending. At some point, a group on one side of the auditorium got all emotionally cranked up and began yelling:

"I love Jesus, yes I do, I love Jesus, how 'bout you?" Then another other side would try to yell it louder.

Is Jesus impressed with all that?

1 Peter 1:6-8 reminds us that at the end of the day, our love for Jesus will be clear when we have to endure trials.

If not, then all we have is a soft-prosperity gospel, thinking that Jesus exists to make my life convenient and comfortable. The selective ear is shallow soil.

- 3) The Divided Ear (v7,14)

- The divided ear hears, but there is *no maturity*. Why?
- Competing voices: cares, riches, and pleasures of life (v14).
- Jesus probably draws from Jer 4:3: “sow not among the thorns”
- In the context of Jeremiah, the thorns refer to idols, especially idols of the heart.
- Thorns are things that have taken root in our hearts and have taken *first place*.

Thorns come in many forms. Whatever fits in the category of cares, riches, pleasures of life... and holds your heart in first place is your thorn.

Often it is the constant nibbling at the table of triviality that chokes out the Word.

If we nibble on junk food all day, we won't have the appetite to feast on a delicious steak and potato dinner.

Same lesson is here spiritually.

Application:

Here is the acid test for the divided ear: What is going to occupy my mind, attention, and heart when I leave here today?

What will keep us up at night, cause us stress, anxiety?

Those are the thorns that have taken root and hold *first place* in our heart, and will gradually choke out spiritual fruit.

- This is a good time to insert vs 9&10.
- In vss9-10, Jesus explains the nature of parables. For the disciples, parables give understanding of how the kingdom works.
- Yet on the flip side, parables proclaim judgment.
- V10 is a reference to Is 6:9.

“Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.”
- Just like Isaiah, Jesus preaches judgment on the first 3 responses.

****Note:** *Jesus does not put his stamp of approval on minimal, or half-hearted commitment.*

He only approves of one response:

4) The Listening Ear—(v8,15).

- Of all the responses, this is the only one that is good. What makes the difference?
- 1) The heart—the word falls on an honest and good heart. (A product of God's grace)

2) Hearing & holding Fast. (Our responsibility).

**Here is a beautiful blend of how God's sovereignty and our responsibility work together. God's Spirit, by his grace, does the heart work. Yet I am personally held accountable for how I listen.

That is the main point of the proverb in v18 "Take care then, how you hear."

Application:

This listening ear reminds me of Is 66:2 -

"All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

But this is the one to whom I will look:

he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word."

***We need to approach God's Word not merely for information, but transformation.*

Application: Christian Friends, have you been listening to God's Word this way? Is your heart in the place where you want to humbly respond to what Jesus says today?

True saving faith and discipleship is rooted and bears fruit.

Saving faith not only professes, but perseveres. It has patient endurance (v15).

—There is a second lesson for those who sow the Word (i.e. those with evangelistic drive): *continue broadcasting the Word.*

Don't get discouraged with the refusing, selective, and divided ears.

I remember the first time I invested a lot of time—years actually— in a guy who probably ended up with a divided ear. I wanted to call it quits. Here is a reminder: don't. This is how the kingdom works.

The Word will either bring judgment, or the gospel will bear fruit.
(Is 55:11) "God's Word does not return empty."

2. Salvation provides a family of like-minded listeners (19-21)

- Let's admit that it is very easy for us to turn inward.
- There is a strong pull toward the island of self.

But one of the great gifts of our salvation is our local church family.
The TRB family is a gift from God for us.

- Jesus redefines family in vss19-21.
- His relatives were trying to get to him, but could not because of the pressing crowd.
- The Lord never misses an opportunity to teach on the Kingdom, so he takes this one.

- (v21) Who is part of Jesus's family? "Those who hear the word of God and do it."
***In other words, it is not ancestry, but application of God's Word that places us in Christ's family.*

- Out of all of the images that Jesus could have used, he uses *family*.

What does this teach us?

- First, this gives stability to the displaced. Very true in the 1st century. Disciples were often displaced from, or disowned by, their physical families for faith in Christ. This also applies to singles, widows, and orphans in the church. In Christ you have a family. You don't have to live out your faith in individual isolation.

- Second, in a family we learn by example and imitation.

There is a rule of thumb that is true in any household. Whatever language is spoken by the parents, the children learn it as their native tongue.

English speaking parents don't wake up one morning to find out their kids suddenly speak Russian.

No, Children imitate parents.

They learn language, values, mannerisms, habits, get sports team favorites, typically by imitation.

***The church family is the main context where we learn to follow Christ by imitation.*

****When we intentionally spend time week after week with people who respond positively to Jesus, it shapes us.*

Conclusion:

That was my story of spending several years in this church when I was a CIU student. I learned by imitation what it looks like to believe in Jesus, love Jesus, and follow him.

No one ever quoted 1 Cor 11:1 "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

But I saw it lived out. And it was transformative for this young twenty something wondering what God wanted from me.

Maybe that is you today, or in this season. Wondering what God wants from you. Maybe you are asking that question: Saved for What?

Or, maybe you are asking another question: will Jesus save me? The answer is yes! Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10); he loves rescuing sinners and restoring prodigals as we will see more of in Luke. Jesus has a special outpouring of grace for the outcast.

Sum:

Christ saves us to bear fruit, and bring us into his family, where we have a life-long commitment of growing in loving obedience to Jesus together.

