

How's Your Hearing?

Luke 8:1-21

Pastor John Miller

Hearing and how we are hearing is very important. I heard about a couple that was celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. The husband got up to speak to his wife and said, "After 50 years of marriage, I have found you tried and true."

His wife said, "What did you say?"

So he raised his voice and repeated, "After 50 years of marriage, I have found you tried and true."

Then she said, "Well listen here, buster, after 50 years of marriage I'm tired of you, too!" That was not the response he was hoping for. So take heed how you hear.

In Luke 8:8, Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" And in verse 18 He said, "Therefore take heed how you hear." And again in verse 21, He said, "Hear the word of God and do it." About seven times in our text, we find the word "hear." And it has more than just the idea of literally hearing; each time it appears it carries the idea of hearing receptively and responding obediently. So it's not just "in one ear and out the other." That means there's not a lot between the ears to keep it there or we're not really listening. We need to hear the Word of God, receive the Word of God, obey the Word of God and share the Word of God.

Now we'll be looking at the parable of the sower and the seed. It's not really about the sower or the seed; it's about the soil or the heart of man. It will be in the context of Jesus preaching the Gospel and people's receptivity or response to the Gospel of the kingdom. "Take heed how you hear." Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," or literally "by a sermon preached about Christ." The most important hearing we can have is hearing God's Word.

One of the reasons why we open the Bible and literally read the text and then expound the text is because God speaks through what He has spoken. The Bible is the living, powerful, active Word of God. It's like a seed that has life and power in it and brings forth fruit. So we want to hear the Word, receive the Word, obey the Word and share the Word.

There are three responses to the Word. First, there is hearing and receiving the Word, verses 1-15. We'll break this up into small pieces. Starting with verse 1 it says, "Now it came to pass, afterward...." "Afterward" is referring to Jesus' ministry in chapter 7 in the area of Galilee. All of this takes place in that area. Jesus had just been in the home of Simon the Pharisee and had spoken forgiveness to the woman who washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and perfumed them.

Continuing with verse 1, "He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the

glad tidings..." which is the good news "...of the kingdom of God. And the twelve..." which were the twelve chosen Apostles "...were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance."

These first three verses are many times read, and then you go right into the parable of the sower and the seed. You kind of miss these first three verses. These verses set the stage for why Jesus spoke the parable.

In verse 1, it says that Jesus, in His Galilean ministry, "went through every city and village, preaching." The word "preaching" is the Greek word "kerusso." It is the same word used in 2 Timothy 4:2, where Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word!" The word "preach" here means "proclaim." It was used of a herald who was given authority to announce for a king. So it meant to proclaim the Word.

So Jesus was a preacher. Someone said, "God only had one Son and He was a preacher." I like that. Jesus traveled around preaching. And He also gave parables to draw people into the things of the kingdom of God. In our text from verses 4-21, it is all about the receptivity to Jesus' preaching.

Have you ever wondered why, with all the Gospel preaching going on in the world today, more people don't believe in Jesus? Have you ever wondered why, with all the TV, internet, radio, all the means of broadcasting God's Word, the whole world hasn't come to Christ and believe the Gospel? We're going to read in the parable the four different responses that men have to this preaching that Jesus was giving, in verse 1, to the crowds and the throng in Judea. Jesus was preaching somewhere around the Sea of Galilee near Lake Gennesaret.

Luke mentions the women, in verses 2-3. His Gospel actually features women more than any of the other Gospels. It has been called "the Gospel of women." These women traveled with Jesus and His disciples and "provided for Him from their substance." That means that they probably fed them, took care of their clothing and housed them. So they supported the ministry materially, helping them do the Lord's ministry.

So Jesus and His disciples had these women to take care of them. "It's time to eat. No, you can't eat that. Eat this. Now you need to take a rest." They supported them and took care of them. What a blessing that was.

Now in verses 4-8, Jesus gives us the parable of the sower and the seed. This parable primarily conveys the lesson on why more people don't receive the Gospel. "And when a great multitude..." In verse 1, "He went through every city and village, preaching." So there are a lot of people, verse 4, who "had gathered together, and they had come to Him from every city. He spoke by a parable."

Notice the people, a huge crowd, the place is Galilee and now the parable. This parable was

also given in other Gospels; it is also recorded in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. That means that all three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—record this parable of the sower and the seed. But as much as I like Luke, I would prefer to preach it from Matthew or Mark, because they are more complete; there's a lot more information in the other synoptic Gospels.

And one of the things is the setting. It's at the Sea of Galilee. It says that the crowds were pressing Jesus, so He had to step into a boat—probably Peter's boat or James and John's boat—go out on the lake a short distance from shore, sit down and preach back to the crowd on the shore. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful setting, and like many lakes, the land around the lake slopes down to the water. This setting would form a natural amphitheater, and the water would serve acoustic purposes to magnify the sound of His voice toward the crowd.

And in those days, the teacher sat and the people stood. I think that's a good idea. I think perhaps we should institute that policy here today: I sit and the people stand.

So Jesus is sitting in the boat, there probably were some disciples in waist-high water holding onto the boat and He's preaching to the multitude. What a beautiful picture. And He begins to speak this parable.

The word “parable,” in verse 4, is taken from the Greek word “parabole.” It is made up of two words: “para” and “bole.” It means “to place alongside” or “to put beside.” A parable is an earthly story alongside spiritual truth. It is an extended analogy, and it is always taken from reality. Jesus tells a story that is common to the people of the time. And many feel that as Jesus was preaching from the boat, He might have said, “Behold,” and there was someone in the field sowing or broadcasting the seed, so He used it as an analogy to get the people's attention.

The parable begins in verse 5. “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.” So you have the hard soil, the rocky soil and the thorny soil. “But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

When they would sow seed, they didn't have hand-held, rotary spreaders or spreaders that would roll like we have today. They would throw the seed. They would use a basket or put a piece of cloth around their neck and have a bag in front, and they would walk in the field and throw or broadcast the seed.

And you wouldn't know exactly where the seed would land. Many times I've tried to reseed my lawn, but it never worked. And some of the seed would land on the sidewalk. And you don't water the seed on the sidewalk expecting it to grow grass. It has to land in good soil. So there are different ways the seed will respond, depending on where it lands.

The first seed fell on the beaten path, verse 5. What was that? Through their fields, they didn't

have asphalt or concrete paths. They were dirt about three feet wide. And the more they walked on the dirt paths, the harder they got; they became like concrete. So when the seed landed there, the birds would see the seed and swoop down and pick it up. And after they sowed the seed in the field, they would plow it over to cover it and push it into the ground. But this first seed was sown on the beaten path, the birds got it so it produced no fruit.

In the second category, some seed fell on rock. The other Gospels tell us that this is actually a thin layer of dirt on top of rock. So the ground was rocky, but it means a shallow layer of dirt with limestone bedrock under it. The seed could not get depth of root and moisture, so when the sun beat on it—the other Gospels tell us this—it withered and died. So, again, there was no fruit produced.

The third category, the seed “fell among thorns,” verse 7. This seed takes root into the ground, but the weeds choke out the seed so it doesn’t bear fruit.

Any time I’ve tried to reseed a yard or plant grass, all I get is weeds and thorns, so it chokes out the good grass.

The last category is the good ground, verse 8. “But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” The other Gospels say it yielded “some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:23). So there are different degrees of fruitfulness, but all the seed is fruitful in this good-ground category.

Then, in verse 8, it says, “When He had said these things He cried, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’” So check to make sure you have ears and that your ears are open and listening to what Jesus has to say.

Now in verses 9-10, before Jesus explains the parable, He gives us the purpose of His parabolic teaching. And Matthew 13 has more extensive depth and fullness of Jesus’ quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 in our text of why Jesus spoke in parables. “Then His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘What does this parable mean?’”

If you just read the parable and stopped there, what does it mean? You’ve got the hard soil, the shallow soil, the thorny soil and the good soil. A lot of preachers have a field day making the parable say what they want it to say. That’s not the way the Bible should be read. They can read into the parable an unintended meaning as being the purpose for the parable.

Most of the time, Jesus explained His parable’s meaning. So we look to Jesus for the explanation of the meaning of the parable. And most of the time, the parable was to teach one, main lesson. So don’t read into the text, which is called “eisegesis” or “putting in.” Rather pull out of the text itself, or “exegesis,” the meaning of the parable. It’s so very important.

So what does this parable mean? Verse 10, “And He said, ‘To you...’” referring to His disciples “...it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” That’s where we want to be; we want to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” We want to be believers, receivers

and receptive to the Word of God. We want revelation from God. So the parables were to reveal to His disciples or believers, including us, mysteries that were hidden but now are revealed.

Verse 10, "But to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" So the parable also is concealed to those whose hearts are hardened by sin and who have rejected the Gospel in Christ. This quote, from Isaiah 6:9-10, happened when Isaiah preached, people's hearts were hardened and they would not listen.

And don't misinterpret these words. Jesus was not trying to hide truth from unbelievers. But the parable sifted out believers from unbelievers. Believers looked into it, were open to it, they believed it, received it and got more knowledge and revelation from it. Unbelievers dismissed the teaching and wanted nothing to do with the teaching.

By the way, this is a turning point in Christ's teaching. He begins now to speak in parables most often, because it weeded out the true believers from the false believers. The parables didn't blind them; the parables revealed their blindness and hard of heart.

Now in verses 11-15, we get the meaning of the parable. Jesus said, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God." Let the Bible interpret the Bible. It says here that "The seed is the word of God." The Bible is wonderful, because it is living.

Have you ever thought about seeds? Seeds freak me out. They have no batteries, you don't have to recharge them. You don't plug them in. You can put seeds in a drawer, and they can sit there for years, you take them out of the drawer, plant them in soil, water them, they have the right conditions and then they produce life. You look at a seed and say, "Where does that life come from?!" They are freaky, little things!

And the Bible is like seed. When it comes into our hearts, it is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). It is like a seed and sword. It is also like a hammer and like a mirror. It is wonderful and has the power to transform our lives.

I heard of a guy who had a Bible that fell apart, so he took just the New Testament part and had it rebound. I've had a Bible rebound. The binding was so thin that the words "The New Testament" couldn't be printed on the spine. So he just had "T N T" put on the spine. That was cool! That tells of the dynamic power of God's Word.

The Bible is also fruitful. The cool thing about one seed is that you can plant it and a corn seed can create a corn stalk with many ears of corn on it. And each ear of corn has many seeds to produce much more corn. It has the capacity to bear much fruit. So the Bible is alive and powerful, transforms our lives and produces great fruit.

There also is a sower in this parable. There is the seed and there is a sower. Matthew 13:37 says, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man." And it also refers to anyone, all of us, who share the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So if you are sharing the Word, whether

it is formally in a church, on radio, on a platform or just in your home with anyone, you are spreading the seed, the powerful Word of God. The sower is the preacher of the Word.

This parable is an encouragement to preachers of the Gospel and to all of us believers to faithfully broadcast, scatter and sow the seed of the Word, because it is wonderful, powerful and fruitful. Even if people don't all respond the way we want, we must liberally sow the seed. I'm glad to be part of a church that does just that; we are spreading the seed of God's Word. We get God's Word out on the radio, on the internet, and God is using it to bless and minister to so many people.

But this parable is not about the seed, not about the sower; the focus is on the soil. The four soils represent the hearts of those who hear the Word. It represents how they hear the Word of God. And the different responses had nothing to do with the seed; the seed was the same in all four responses to it. We don't compromise the seed; we sow, proclaim the Word of God faithfully and let God produce the fruit he wants.

And the parable doesn't teach that the different responses had anything to do with the sower. The sower wasn't responsible for the different responses. The seed was the same, and the sower was the same. We need to keep this in mind.

For me, as a preacher, that is encouraging. All I need to do is faithfully share the Word of God, and God will bring forth the fruit that He ordains.

So the parable is about the soil and the different responses to the seed, the Word of God. The differences lie in the kinds of soil.

The first soil is what I call "the unresponsive soil" or "the hard heart," verse 12. "Those by the wayside..." the seeds "...are the ones who hear; then the devil comes..." notice that there is a devil or Satan "...and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." This seed fell on hard soil. The seed fell on the hard, beaten path, and the birds steal the seed so it brings forth no fruit. The devil is pictured by the birds that swoop down and steal the seed away, "lest they should believe and be saved."

This is what's called "the hard heart." Satan does what he can to oppose the Gospel; he hardens people's hearts. He hardens hearts because he doesn't want them to receive the Word of God. So in the hardships of life, in the proud, sinful heart of man Satan comes. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "...whose minds the God of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them," and they should be saved. So Satan hardens hearts.

Even though the devil is represented by the birds that steal the seed, the soil, or the person, is the one responsible. You can't pass the blame to "The devil made me do it! The devil hardened my heart." Satan uses our hard hearts against the Word, but we are the ones who are responsible for hardening our hearts and not believing the Gospel. Psalm 10:4 says, "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts." So

because of sin and the hardships of life, people hardened their hearts.

Sometimes you share the glorious, marvelous, wonderful truth of the Gospel, but people are hard-hearted rocks; Satan blinds their minds, so they don't receive the Word and it doesn't change their lives or produce any fruit.

There is a second heart represented in verse 13. It is the unresponsive heart, the impulsive heart or the shallow, superficial heart. "But the ones on the rock..." with a thin layer of soil over it "...are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away." So there is an immediate but superficial, shallow response.

I believe that the first, second and third soils represent people who are not born again. They may be professing, having an emotional response, but they didn't really get regenerated or born again. They weren't saved. Only one out of the four, the fruitful heart, is saved. So these first three soils should be categorized as people who are not truly saved. Someone who is saved does stumble and fall and may backslide for a time, but they don't lose their salvation. They do lose their sanctification and many times, their service for Christ, and their rewards.

That is not what it is talking about here. These first three categories are talking about people who don't respond with receptivity properly to the Word, and they bring forth no fruit, no evidence of true conversion.

So this second category is an emotional response. Mark 4:16 says, "When they hear the word, immediately [they] receive it with gladness." These are the emotional hearers. Many times the Gospel that was preached to them was not preached that they are sinners, that they need to repent, that they need to trust Jesus as their Savior. Rather, it's preached that if you want to be happy, come to Jesus. Sometimes they even say that if you want to be rich, come to Jesus. If you want to have joy, come to Jesus. If you want your marriage healed, come to Jesus. It's a feel good, "I'll try Jesus out" response.

Jesus is not a pair of shoes that you try out. When you buy a pair of shoes, you try them on. You walk around a little. "Yeah, these are good." Then when you get home, you wear them all day and say, "No, these are not good!"

You don't "try Jesus out." You must come to Him contrite as a child. You must see that He is the Savior and you are a sinner, He is your only hope and you bring nothing in your hand but trust Him to save you. If there isn't true repentance and faith in Christ, true regeneration and you aren't born again, then you really aren't a Christian. You can just have an emotional experience.

Even when I give an invitation on Sunday mornings, I understand that some in the group just came forward, because their friends came forward. Or they came forward because of the emotion of the moment. Or they may be sad and they want help. God knows their hearts.

My job is just to sow the seed. God's job is to convict, to convert, to regenerate and to dwell in them. We can't see a person's heart; we can only see their fruit. Sometimes it looks like they are so emotional that they're crying. But those may not be tears that are sincere and genuine in repentance. Or they get all excited and start coming to church and reading the Bible. But it isn't true salvation that took place. Their commitment was just shallow, superficial and emotional in its response.

And notice that in a time of temptation, verse 13, they fall away. The word "temptation" would be better understood as "trial" or "testing." It has different meanings depending on the context. It could be temptation, but in this context, it probably refers to tests or trials.

Have you ever known somebody who seemed to have a true conversion with a lot of emotion of excitement? They get really excited about Jesus, but the minute something goes wrong, they check out. The minute their marriage isn't fixed, they check out.

People come to us for marriage counseling, they've been married for 20 years and they want us to fix it in one hour. They bring us teenagers who are all messed up, and they want us to fix them in an hour. You messed them up for 18 years, and you want us to fix them in an hour?! It's not gonna happen! True repentance, true faith in Christ, being born again, becoming new creatures—"Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17)—that will fix it. Only God can do that in a person's heart.

So this second category of soil is the person who responds with a shallow, impulsive response.

And when trials come, verse 13, they come to strengthen our faith and to help produce more fruit in our lives. So when a Christian is tried and tested, their faith is strengthened and they bear more fruit. When a professing Christian is tried and tested, he falls away and doesn't bear fruit. It's the same sun that melts wax and hardens clay. So the condition of the heart is what matters.

The third soil is the crowded heart. We have seen the hard heart, verse 12; the shallow, emotional, superficial heart, verse 13; and now we have the crowded heart, verse 14. "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity." Again, Matthew and Mark have a far more colorful description of this seed that gets choked out and bears no fruit.

This is the preoccupied or crowded heart. This involves the thorns of worry that choke the seed. Many times people don't bring forth fruit because they worry all the time. They don't trust God. Even true Christians can do this. They're worried about their finances, their health, their marriage, their kids—all their problems.

I heard of a guy who woke up one night worrying about owing his neighbor some money. He was pacing around in the bedroom, and his wife woke up. She said, "What's your problem? Why aren't you sleeping?"

He said, "I haven't told you this, but I borrowed \$1,000 from our next-door neighbor, Joe. I was supposed to pay him back yesterday, but I don't have the money. I can't sleep; I'm worried."

So his wife got up, opened the window and shouted out, "Joe, Joe!" Joe got up and opened the window, and said, "What?"

"Joe, you know that \$1,000 my husband owes you? He hasn't got it."

She slammed the window shut, turned to her husband and said, "Now let's let him stay up and worry about it and you go to bed!" I like that.

We worry—I call these "worry weeds"—so it chokes out God's Word. "I can't read the Bible right now; I'm too worried!"

Then notice "riches," in verse 14. It's the "deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22). So there are the worry weeds and the riches. I call these "money weeds." Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon" or "money" (Matthew 6:24).

Then there are the pleasure weeds, in verse 14, "pleasures of life." The other Gospels say, "lust for other things." One of the signs that we're in the last days is that "Men will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:4-5).

When the rich, young ruler asked how he should follow Jesus, He said, "Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). But the ruler turned sorrowfully away, because he didn't want to give up his riches. So his riches choked out the Word, and it brought forth no fruit to eternal life.

The fourth soil is the good soil, the responsive, fruitful heart, verse 15. "But...here's the contrast "...the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." This is the good heart. Matthew 13:23 says that this heart produces "some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." So the evidence of salvation is not your emotions or your enthusiasm; it's fruit. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now the question is, how much fruit will be produced and how quickly will it come? We need to be patient; verse 15 says this happens "with patience." We need to be careful not to judge people, but there must be some fruit showing up in their life to indicate that their heart has been receptive.

Unlike the hard heart, this heart is softened by the Holy Spirit. If your heart is hard, ask God to soften it. This heart has a deep, sincere commitment. It's not just superficial or emotional. Unlike the cluttered heart, this heart is clean. It's not bound by money, pleasures or the deceitfulness of this life. It's a good heart, verse 15. It is prepped by the Spirit and repentant,

turns in faith, believes in Jesus Christ and trusts Him for salvation. Believing alone is necessary for salvation. But believing also involves repentance, turning from sin to faith, receiving the Word of God and being born of the Spirit. That's true, genuine salvation. We want to be in this fourth category.

We're going to look at the categories quickly. Verses 16-18, hear and share the Word. Hear the Word and receive it and share it. "No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed." If you light a lamp, you don't put it under a bushel, a basket or a bed. "...but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter..." that is, the house "...may see the light." He's not trying to conceal; he's trying to reveal.

What we should do when we receive the Word in our hearts and bring forth fruit, we should go on to share the Word with others. One of the ways to be strengthened in the Word, grow in the Word and to be changed by the Word is to share the Word with others. If you only take in and you never give out, the Word will not have its effect in your life. You must pass on what you have learned. Let your light shine, verse 16.

Starting with verse 17, "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has..." referring to those who receive the Word and share it with others "...to him more will be given..." more knowledge and understanding "...and whoever does not have..." those who don't receive the Word and believe the Word "...even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Next, in verses 19-21, not only are we to hear, receive, and to share but also to obey. "Then His mother and brothers came to Him." This literally is His mother, Mary, and His brothers. Mary and Joseph had other children, his stepbrothers. "...and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.' But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'"

The other Gospels are more full and complete. His mother and His brothers came to Him, because they thought He had flipped out. They went to save Him from Himself. But they couldn't get to Jesus because of the crowd, so someone told Him that His mother and brothers had arrived. Jesus wasn't diminishing the value of the family, but He was elevating the value of the Word of God—of hearing it, sharing it and obeying it.

That is more important than your biological family. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). What's more important than your own biological family is that you hear God's Word, receive it, share it and obey it. Jesus said, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

The book of James tells us that the Bible is like a mirror. Have you ever noticed that mirrors

don't lie? I don't like mirrors that have good lighting around them. I like softly lit mirrors. When the light comes in just right, then I'm lookin' good! But when someone flips the light switch, "Ahh! Turn the light off!" If you're having a problem with what you see in the mirror, you don't need a new mirror; you need to fix yourself up.

So when you look at the Bible and you see yourself in the parables, it's because they're mirrors. Where's your heart? Is it hard? Is it shallow? Is it crowded? Is it cluttered with worries and cares or pleasures of this life? Or is your heart good soil? Do you hear the Word of God? Does it take root in your life? Does it bring forth fruit for the glory of God?

The parables in the Bible are also windows that we see through and see the world around us. And what we need to do is take what we see in the Bible, what we hear, what we receive, and we need to put it in shoe leather. We are to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).