



- Introduction – Are You Listening PowerPoint
- Please turn with me to Luke 8:4-21

You may notice that today there are no blanks on the handout for you to fill out today, only blank handout on which to take notes. In addition, the sermon title on the screen is just about all the PowerPoint that is coming. And it is not because the copy machine is broken, even though it is, currently, on the blink. And it is not because I didn't feel like putting the PowerPoint together. No, it is because our Scripture passage for today is about listening, and I am praying that you will take this opportunity to focus upon doing just that.

You see, the question raised by the video we just watched is the resounding question of the hour: Are you listening? If you and I would learn to live our lives for the glory of God, then we must ask ourselves this crucial question today. But not just today. No, if the teaching of Jesus really is our guide then we are forced to concede that this question is one of the most important questions of discipleship: Are you listening?

Did you know that in the four Gospels alone (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) Jesus either commands or commends the act of listening nearly fifty times. For example, In John 10:27, Jesus says, “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*” Mark 7:14 says, “*Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.”* And in Luke 9:44, Jesus urges his disciples, saying, “*Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.*”

Moreover, take careful note of the extremely concise message that God gives to Peter, James, and John at the very climax of the spectacular events of the Transfiguration in Mark 9:7: *Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"* This event is especially relevant to the question at hand when we realize that the chief reason why Jesus even took Peter, James, and John up on the mountain, and the chief reason why He was gloriously transfigured in their presence, was so that God could impart these simple but powerful words to them with magnificent authority. Here is the message: *"This is my Son. Listen to Him!"*

Know this: God is speaking to us through His Word. Therefore, the question resounds: Are you listening?

-- Read Luke 8:4-21

-- Pray

As Stephanie and I are approaching our twelfth anniversary, I can tell that she has learned a few things about me that she probably didn't know before we tied the knot. For example, she has become a whole lot more deliberate if she is asking me to do something while I am watching sports. Now, after she asks wait a second and say, "Did you hear me?" "Uh...huh...what?" Then she will ask again. Then she will ask me to repeat what she said.

Earlier in our marriage, however, she would make such a request and, inevitably, I would mumble some response like, "Uh...yeah...uh-hu... ok," and continue with my fixation on the game. And, of course, it quickly became obvious that I wasn't really listening when it became obvious that I wasn't moving. She would say, "Did you *hear* me?" And I could honestly say, "Yes," because I really did *hear* her. The problem, however, was that I was not *listening*. If I had been listening, I would have been doing.

And that is the main point of the entire passage that we just read. In it Jesus is urging us to be not just those who *hear* of the Word, but to be those who *listen*, and the difference lies in the doing. **The Big Idea** for this morning, then, is this: **The care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do.**

This parable that begins our passage and that we have the great privilege to study together today, is most often called “The Parable of the Sower,” and it is one of the best known of all of Jesus’ parables. In addition to that title, it is also sometimes called “The Parable of the Soils,” which might actually be a better title for it, since its main point is made by examining the different outcomes that occur when the seed of God’s Word falls on four different types of soil.

With that in mind, I am wondering if you know what special sporting event is happening today? Well, if you have a TV or a radio or a newspaper... or a pulse... you surely know that today is Super Bowl Sunday. And among all of the hype surrounding the big game, it seems like everybody is making predictions about who is going to win today. Well, emboldened by all those predictions, I am going to try my hand at the bold prediction business this morning, and I am going to make two stone cold promises about the Parable of the Sower. Alright, here comes the first one:

1.) You are in this parable (and so am I).

The Parable of the Sower, you see, is a parable of universal application. That is, the message it proclaims is continually going on in every congregation in every place where the truth of God’s Word is preached and proclaimed. Thus, the four types of hearts that it describes—the hardened path, the rocks, the thorns, and the good soil—are sure to be found in every gathering where the Word is heard. Thus, as you and I hear it we ought to listen to it very carefully and ask ourselves, “Which soil is my heart? Which description describes the manner in which I listen to God’s Word? Where am I in this parable?”

Ok, that was the first bold prediction, and perhaps you are thinking, “Hey, I don’t mean to be rude or anything, but that prediction really wasn’t very bold.” Well, then, hold on to your seat, because this next prediction is as bold as they come. Here it is:

2.) I can give you a 100% guarantee that I can provide a 100% accurate interpretation of this parable.

Now, I wouldn't normally say that because it would normally be a very arrogant and dangerous thing to say. However, in this case I can claim such ability with confidence because in this passage we are blessed to read Jesus' perfect, personal interpretation of His own parable in verses 10-15. About this parable, J.C. Ryle writes, "The meaning of the whole picture is so fully explained by the Lord Jesus Christ that no human exposition can throw much additional light on it." Therefore, let us learn from our Lord what this parable means.

-- Read verses 10-15

There are at least three points here of which we want to take special notice. First, let us be sure to realize from verse 10 that the seed being spread here is the Word of God. Notice, further, that it is the very same seed of God's Word that falls upon each of the four different soils. Thus, the four vastly different outcomes cannot be blamed upon the seed, but only upon the quality of the soil upon which it falls. It not a problem with God's Word, it is a matter of the human heart.

Second, observe the strong emphasis that Jesus gives to hearing. In fact, the word "hear" appears in every sentence of the explanation that He provides. It is clear from these verses, therefore, that merely hearing the Word of God is not good enough, for even the unproductive hearts in the parable are credited with having heard the Word.

Therefore, as we meet together today, and as read these verses, and as we hear this message preached about them, we need to understand that the very same seed of God's Word is simultaneously falling upon the soil of each one of our hearts. But are we listening to it, or are we merely hearing? And how can we tell? Well, Jesus shows us how we can tell in verse 15, when He says, "*But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*" In other words, listening happens when hearing turns into doing. Or as the big idea suggests, "The care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do."

You see, the heart in the parable represented by the path is one that may hear the Word of God, but it never gets the chance to truly listen because it allows Satan to snatch the Word away instantly. Sometimes it gets snatched away through a

obviously bad attitude or severe hatred toward God. Sometimes, however, Satan snatches it away through something so simple as wandering thoughts, sleepy eyes, or distracted attention.

The rocky soil heart, on the other hand, is simply too shallow to allow hearing God's Word to become listening to God's Word. The rocky heart just wants to feel good, and it cares little for the hard work and perseverance that true transformation requires.

The third heart type, the thorny soil, is the person who hears the Word but will never completely listen because its heart is captivated by the deceptive the sounds of the world. In this heart, God's still small voice is drowned out by the glitter, the glamour, and the noisy luster of this life.

The good soil, however—and hear this—is really listening. It not only hears the Word of God, but it retains it. It loves God's truth... it meditates upon Scripture... and, most of all, it puts what it hears into practice. The main point here is really not very complicated. It is this: As is the case with any good soil, you can tell whether or not a heart is good by the crop that it produces.

And that is the main point of the Parable of the Sower. It is the same point that Jesus makes earlier in Luke's Gospel, when in Luke 6:43-44 He declares, "*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.*" Just as a tree is identified by its fruit... and just the soil is judged by its crop... so too our hearts are revealed by our behavior. And here again, we must stress our main point this morning which is this: The care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do. So... Are you a listener, or have you been merely a hearer? You don't have to guess. What does your behavior say?

With that in mind, please look with me now at verse 16. And as we look to this next section of our text, it is important to realize that it ultimately makes exactly the same point as this parable we have just examined. Not only so, but even the passage that follows it makes the same point. Therefore, the eighth chapter of Luke essentially begins with three consecutive lessons that all hammer home the

same point. Jesus is teaching us that true listening is much more than just hearing; it demands acting upon what we hear.

In verse 16, Jesus says, “*No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.*” Whereas the Word of God was represented by the seed in the previous parable, it becomes the lamp in this verse. In essence, what He is saying here is that no one who is really listening to God’s Word will hear it and then decide to do nothing with it or try to hide it away. Not a chance! No, those who truly hear God’s Word will do all they can to put its truth into practice. They will, in essence, “[*put the lamp of God’s Word*] on a stand [*of personal obedience*], so that those who come in can see the light.”

Then, in verse 17, He says, “*For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.*” Here, we hear Jesus harkening back to the same idea he has already voiced in verse 10, when he is explaining to His disciples why it is that He speaks in parables. Look with me there. Jesus says, “*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.*”

We could easily spend an entire sermon on these two verses, but the main idea of them, at least as it relates to the context of the message for today, is this: God intends to use our obedience to reveal the truth to others. In other words, the concealed truths that we come to understand through our careful examination of God’s Word are meant to be demonstrated to others through our obedience to them. In other words, much of the teaching that Christ has concealed in His parables is supposed to be made visible through good soil Christians who hear it, meditate upon it, understand it, and then do it.

Our lives, then, become like those lamps that placed on stands, shining forth the truth and power of God’s Word. Good soil Christians, then, are also Matthew 5:16 Christians, *who let their lights so shine before men, that others see their good deeds and give praise to God in heaven.* You see, once again we are taught here that the care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do.

Next, we come to verse 18, which—please hear this—might be the most important verse in this entire section between verses four and 21. Here Jesus culminates the previous verses by giving a command to which we ought to listen very closely this morning. He says, *“Therefore consider carefully how you listen.”*

Notice here that Jesus begins this admonishment with the word “therefore.” As a general rule of thumb, whenever we see a “therefore” in Scripture, we are monumentally blessed to ask, “What is it there for?” This is so because crucial applications of the preceding verses very often follow the word “therefore.” And such is the case here, for both the Parable of the Sower and the metaphor of the lamp on a stand have combined together to emphasize the critically important biblical caution Christ gives in verse 18 when He warns, “Be careful how you listen.”

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. No, He continues on to tell us why it is so very vital that we listen to God’s Word so very carefully. In the second part of verse 18, He explains, *“Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”*

Why, then, should we be so careful as to how we listen? Because, as Jesus says, *“Whoever has”*—that is, the one who is not just hearing, but truly listening to God’s truth—*“will be given more.”* Like the good soil, he/she will continue to grow in holiness hundreds of times greater than any holiness he could ever produce on his own.

Why else should we be careful how we listen? Because *“Whoever does not have”*—that is, the one who fails to really listen to God’s Word—*even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.* In other words, because he won’t consistently obey it, even the stuff that he thinks he knows about the Bible will not result in a life that brings glory to God. Rather, he will end up like the path from the parable, and the truth will be plucked away from his heart. Or he will be like the rocky soil. The Word may spring up in him quickly, but it will surely die a shallow death. Or he will be like the thorny soil. The Word planted in him will be choked to death by his desires for everything except God. Again and again, we see in this text that the care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do.

Finally, we come to verses 19-21, which might seem to be a bit odd until we see realize how well it fits into the context of the previous two passages. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Luke writes:

*Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."*

You see, Jesus isn't attempting to dismiss or demean His biological mother and half-brothers, and there is no hint here that He doesn't wish to see them. On the contrary, He is simply reemphasizing the truth that we have already established. He is once again assuring the crowd around Him that the care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do.

Thus, in verse 20, when someone tells Jesus that his family is outside, He wants to impress upon them a much more profound point about the nature of His family. And what He says about his family is this: It is made up of *"those who hear God's word and put it into practice."* In other words, the evidence of God's family is not seen in biology; it is seen in obedience. In essence, our Lord is teaching us that His true family is not made up of the mere hearers who claim to be in it. Rather, His family consists of the listeners whose desire to listen to God's Word is clearly seen in their obedience to it.

In conclusion, then, please understand that this teaching of Christ in the eighth chapter of Luke is in no way meant to suggest that we are in any saved by what we do. As Ephesians 2:8-9 so clearly states, *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."* We are saved because of what Christ did on the cross, never because we have earned God's favor.

However, as certain as that truth is—and it is ironclad—so is the teaching of today's passage equally true, which is this: Our true hearts are revealed by our behavior. Therefore, if Christ is really in our hearts, then Christlikeness will

increasingly be evident in our behavior, for the care with which we listen is seen in the character of what we do.

God is speaking to you and to me through His Word. Therefore, let me ask you: Are you merely hearing it, or are you sincerely listening?