

Hope for the Hearing Impaired

Introduction

The Text

⁴And 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. ⁶And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸And 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.”

⁹And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰he 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.’ ¹¹Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The 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. ¹³And 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. ¹⁴And 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. ¹⁵As 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.” (Luke 8:4–15)

Fruit as Goal

- A. The endgame of Jesus’ instruction here is fruit in your life. He’s sowing seed, the word of God, so that you and I might “bear fruit” (v. 15). It’s important to see that. He has good things in mind for you.
- B. We put in a garden near the beginning of last spring and have been enjoying the harvest throughout the summer months. But finally, this last week, the cantaloupes have started to ripen on the vine. And, let me just tell you, these are the most delicious cantaloupes I’ve ever had. Golden in color. Exploding with juice. Sweeter than candy. We just cut into these things and enjoy them as a family. You’re welcome to come and enjoy them with us as well.
- C. I share this because that’s the sort of thing Jesus wants for your life. Fruit ripening on the vine. So often we think of obedience to Christ as this sort of hum-drum, party-killing, soul-deadening affair. But really it’s all about you bursting forth with life, and love, and joy!

Listening as Means

- A. In a way, we live in a culture obsessed with its own version of fruitfulness. To help you see this all I need to do is tweak the word a bit. Let’s call it “productivity”.

1. Have you ever visited the iTunes app store? Productivity has a whole category to itself—with never-ending iterations of essentially the same basic products. And yet we’re buying them. Because we’re obsessed with productivity—with fruitfulness.
- B. But Jesus, I think, would say that, even in all our obsession with fruit, we still don’t know the least bit about truly producing it. When we think about being productive or fruitful we immediately start thinking about our own activity, right? “Here is what I’m going to do—here are my roles; here are my goals; here is my action plan.”
1. But Jesus, in our text, is saying that, if you really want to be fruitful—I mean truly fruitful, not just spinning in a hamster wheel, but bearing the kind of fruit that abides before God—you must begin, counter to all your native intuitions, not with activity, but with inactivity: in particular, with listening—with genuine, deep, heartfelt listening.
 - a. And we’re not talking about listening to Fox news, talk radio, or Oprah . . . listening to God, to His words.
- C. If you noticed in Jesus’ interpretation of the parable there in [vv. 11-15](#), every soil type is hearing the word of God, but only one is truly hearing. And that makes all the difference.
1. That’s why, if you drop your eyes down to [v. 18](#), Jesus cuts straight to the point: “[Take care then how you hear . . .](#)” If you want to be the fruitful soil you have to truly listen to, hear the word of God.

One Massive Problem

- A. But there is one massive problem in all of this: According to the Bible, I, by nature, cannot hear or discern spiritual things.
1. I don’t come to God with “[an honest and good heart](#)” ([v. 15](#)). I come with that kind of heart Jeremiah talks about: “[The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick \[anash = ‘incurable’\] . . .](#)” ([Jer 17:9](#)).
 - a. So Nick Weber, along with the rest of fallen humanity, suffers from severe hearing loss. God is moving His lips but I hear nothing—creation is telling me of His glory; the Scriptures are telling me of His ways, will, and works . . . but I hear nothing.
- B. How does that fit into this parable? Well, it does. And that’s what we’re going to deal with this morning. I’m not going to deal with the whole parable right now. I just want to focus on this issue of listening, the problem with my ears. And how it gets right. That’s really the fundamental issue.
- C. As I see it, we’ll kind of back into this discussion by looking at two things in particular: (1) The Purpose of Parables; and (2) The Gift of Grace.

(1) The Purpose of Parables

- A. As the crowds now are gathering in greater numbers around Christ, we find that He will actually begin to speak more and more, and perhaps even exclusively, to them in parables (cf. [Matt 13:34](#)).

1. Let me first make sure we know what a parable is and then we can deal with why Jesus starts to make use of them so often from here on out.

What Is a Parable?

A. A parable can be defined as: “a narrative or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile” (BDAG).

1. So, in our text, Jesus begins by telling a story about a sower, some seed, and various soil types.

- a. But then, as we just saw, in vv. 11-15, He suddenly draws back the curtains as it were and shows us the truths that lay behind it all. He’s not talking about agriculture, He’s talking about the kingdom of God! He is the Sower, His word is the seed, and we are the soil.

B. It might help you to think of it this way: Parables are earthly windows into heavenly realities. With the story He sets the frame of the window. And then, with His help, we start to see the view through the window—the realities that lie beyond.

C. It should go without saying, then, that, if we see the window but we don’t see through it, we miss the point entirely.

1. It would be like, do you remember reading George Orwell’s little book *Animal Farm*, perhaps in high school? Well, it would be like reading that and instead of realizing that Orwell is taking stabs at Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union, you come away thinking: “Well that sure was a strange story about talking barnyard animals. Why would that be considered one of the best novels of the 20th century?”

- a. You saw the window, but you didn’t see through it.

Why Speak in Parables?

A. Now, why parables? Why, as the crowds are gathering around Jesus in greater and greater numbers, does He resort to speaking to them in parables?

1. Well, there in v. 10 of our text Jesus gives us the reason. The disciples have now pulled Him aside and are engaged in private conversation with Him concerning the parable He just shared. And He says to them: “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.’”

- a. If you notice, Jesus really gives two reasons here.

B. We love the first reason (and we will look at it a bit more in a moment). He speaks in parables to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of God to His disciples.

1. Parables for those following closely to Jesus—because He is there to interpret it for them—are illuminating, they are insightful. (Think of how much we have learned about the kingdom through parables like that of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, or others.)
 - a. They give window into the secrets, or mysteries, of the kingdom of God.
- C. But there is another reason for parables, and this one is a bit more troubling for us. Did you hear it? “[F]or others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand’” (v. 10b).
 1. “I speak to the crowds in parables so that they won’t see? . . . So that they won’t understand? . . . So that they will see the window but they won’t see through it?” Are we hearing Him correctly?!
- D. To help us understand what Jesus means here we need to go the OT text He references with His words. Jesus is paraphrasing *Isa 6:9-10*. It’s the commissioning of Isaiah. Israel has been rejecting God’s wisdom, His word. They are on the brink of exile, really past the point of no return. And God says to Isaiah: “⁹ 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.”
 1. In other words: “Israel doesn’t want another prophet. But I will give them one anyways. Only now, your words will serve not to open their eyes and ears, but to further close them.”
 - a. The more you hear the word of God without properly responding to it, the heavier your ears become and the less likely you are to ever truly hear it in the future. You go numb. You grow immune. What should awaken your soul now puts you to sleep.
 - i. I hope no one in this room is in this place.

To Reveal and Conceal

- A. To bring it back to our discussion of parables, hear the way one commentator sums up the matter: “Parables both reveal and conceal truth: they reveal it to the genuine seeker who will take the trouble to dig beneath the surface and discover the meaning, but they conceal it from him who is content simply to listen to the story. . . Parables are a mine of information to those who are in earnest, but they are a judgment on the casual and careless” (TNTC).
- B. So, as Jesus looks out at these crowds following Him now, and as He scatters the seed of His word, He knows there’s many soil types represented.
 1. He knows there’s all sorts of reasons these people have for being here—some worldly and selfish, and some are genuinely starting to hear and trust Him.

- C. By speaking in parables Jesus is able to simultaneously weed out the former and minister to the latter. He is able to conceal truths from those who are merely pursuing Him for selfish gain, while at same time revealing truths to those who are truly wanting to follow Him.
 - 1. One group will see in the parables only “animals”, the window frame, a cute little story about a sower and some seed. But they don’t see anything all that intriguing. They don’t see anything in it for them. And so consequently they will soon turn away.
 - 2. But for the others, they see in these silly little stories, nothing silly at all. They see through them to the wonder and the glory of the kingdom of God that’s arriving in Christ!
- D. We gather quite clearly from this that Jesus is not interested in gaining a following but in gaining followers—people who see in Him the wisdom and the power of God and count it all as loss to follow after.
 - 1. So He speaks in parables to initiate this division between the crowd. Are you a following or a follower? Are you just in it for the buzz? Or are you in it for Christ? It’s worth asking ourselves even now.

John 6

- A. We will see this sort of thing, this weeding out, happen often in Jesus’ ministry. Obviously He will continue to do this with parables. But He will do it in other ways as well.
- B. Perhaps one of the clearest examples comes in [John 6](#), and I think you will find this helpful. Jesus had just fed the 5000 from a few loaves and fish, you remember. And so, naturally, the people love Him. We even read in [v. 15](#) that “they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king.”
 - 1. So Jesus withdraws. This would not be the way. They love Him because He filled their bellies but they have no concept of their need for salvation from sin and eternal suffering. They’re not interested in the cross, the real reason He came.
- C. So, when the crowds find Him and surround Him again the next day, what does Jesus do? He initiates this division once more: “[26](#) Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. . . . [51](#) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . [53](#) Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (vv. 26, 51, 53).
 - 1. And a great many in the crowd are disgusted. “He’s talking about cannibalism. Eat His flesh? Drink His blood? That’s insane.” And so we read in [v. 66](#): “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”
 - 2. But when Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks if they’re planning to leave as well, Peter speaks up: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life . . .” ([v. 68](#)).

- a. To one group His words are foolish. To the other His words are life! Again, Jesus is not interested in gaining a following but in gaining followers.
- D. This is one of the reasons why we're just not going to be afraid to say the hard word in this church. I don't care what the culture says. If it's in God's word, we're going to go with that.
 - 1. Learning from Jesus here, we're not afraid to say things that will confront and reveal where hearts are really at. Those who truly hear His voice will keep pressing in, but those who have been in it with Him for something else will go.
- E. Maybe that's what God is doing in your life even now. Maybe not with parables or enigmatic sayings, with trials or unmet expectations. You're being confronted. Your heart is being exposed.
 - 1. Are you going to stick it out with Jesus in this, or not? Are you going to follow Him through the valley or not? Does He have the words of eternal life, or not?

(2) The Gift of Grace

Ears to Hear

- A. So, back in our text, Jesus uses this parable to confront the crowd and initiate this division between those who are truly starting to hear God's word and those who aren't.
 - 1. That's why He comes out at the end of the parable there in v. 8b, with that strange command: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
 - a. "Not all of you who have ears are truly hearing. Sure you hear with the ears of your head, but you are not hearing with the ears of your heart."
- B. And the whole point of this sermon has been to get now to this critical question: How do we get those kind of ears?!
 - 1. The parables initiate the division between those who have them and those who don't but they don't tell us how we get them. How do I become the good soil with the good heart who will hear the word, take it in deep, hold onto it, and bear fruit a hundredfold? How do I get ears to hear?! Because that's what everything turns on.

To You It Has Been Given

- A. Well, the answer comes to us in the beginning of v. 10 with that little phrase: "To you it has been given . . ." "Disciples, you hear, you understand the secrets of the kingdom that lay behind the parable, because . . . 'To you it has been given . . .'"
 - 1. In other words, and I will make the case for this now, you and I, if we have ears to hear, we have been given them as an act of God's sovereign grace.
- B. The OT background to that phrase "ears to hear" takes us all the way back to Deut 29:4. The people of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land. And we read in v. 2: "²Moses summoned all Israel

and said to them: “You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land,³ the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders.⁴ But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (vv. 2–4).

1. If the hardness, the blindness, the deafness of the human heart is going to change, the Lord is going to have to give it.
 - a. If we keep reading into [ch. 30](#), Moses says: “Listen, Israel, these hearts of yours will ultimately get you cast out into exile. But, the Lord won’t abandon you forever. In the fullness of time (v. 6): ‘[T]he Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.’”
 - i. In other words: God is going to take care of my heart problem, which in turn will take care of my seeing and hearing problem.
- C. And God does this through Christ ([Col 2:11](#)). On the cross Jesus was treated as the spiritually dead, blind, and deaf. He took the wrath of God due my sin. So that He could come to me, sinner though I am and say: “[To you it has been given . . .](#)”
 1. This is what He does with Peter. Do you remember how Jesus responds to Peter’s confession of Him as the Christ and the Son of God? “[Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven](#)” ([Matt 16:17](#)). If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God . . . God gave you that!
 2. This is what He does with the Eleven, when He appears to them after His crucifixion and resurrection: “⁴⁵[Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,](#)⁴⁶ and said to them, “[Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead](#)” ([Luke 24:45–46](#)). If you see the wisdom and power of God in the cross of Jesus Christ . . . God gave you that!
 3. This is what He does with Lydia, as Paul was speaking to her about Jesus: “[The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul](#)” ([Acts 16:14b](#)). If you hear the gospel and believe it . . . God gave you that!
- D. A bad soil can’t make itself good. An incurable heart can’t make itself well. A blind man can’t make himself see. A deaf man can’t make himself hear. God has to do that in an act of sovereign grace. And He’s done it for all of us who are in Christ!

Three Marks

- A. Three things that should mark the life of a Christian who has been mentored by this text:
 1. Humble: We did not arrive at this knowledge of the kingdom by our own intellect, for it was given to us. And it was not given to us because God saw our great potential, but because God had great mercy. As Paul says: “[\[I\]t depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy](#)” ([Rom 9:16](#)).

2. Grateful: There's a gratitude that subsists now at the core of our Christianity. Because we know all of this is a gift of God's grace. I fear there's a lot of grumbling in my life these days. But there wouldn't be if I understood all that's been freely given to me by God in Christ.
3. Fruitful: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16).