

Take Care Then How You Hear

Introduction

The Text

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

⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he 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.’ ¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸ Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

¹⁹ Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” ²¹ But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” (Luke 8:4–21)

The Trembling Tasks of Preaching and Listening to the Word of God

A. There are plenty of texts in the Bible that can make a preacher tremble before his task.

1. “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).
2. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb 13:17).
3. When my previous pastor asked me to come on staff and start a college ministry, it was because 1 Tim 3:6 that I initially told him no. Speaking of elders and teachers of God’s word, Paul writes: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” You start preaching, you start getting proud, and your heart becomes the devil’s playground.

- B. So teaching, preaching the word of God is a dangerous business. I think we get that.
1. But that's not what this text is about. This text is about the other side of the equation. This text is about the dangerous business, not of preaching the word of God, but of hearing it.
 - a. That's why Jesus comes down with that warning I'll read again to you in v. 18: "Take care then how you hear . . ."
- C. We're going to work our way down to v. 21 today, though the majority of our time will still be spent within this same parable we've been looking at for two weeks now. Nonetheless, here's how we'll divide this up: (1) The Four Soils (vv. 4-15); (2) The Blessing and the Curse (vv. 16-18); and (3) The Fruitful Family (vv. 19-21). I'll show you how these connect as we go.

(1) The Four Soils (vv. 4-15)

- A. As we discussed a few weeks ago, truly hearing the word of God involves not just hearing with the ears of my head, but hearing with the ears of my heart.
1. The four soils Jesus describes in His parable here represent four different kinds of hearts and, hence, four different ways people hear and respond to the word of God.

(1) The Hard Heart

- A. This is the person Jesus is describing in v. 12: "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."
- B. It seems to me that in modern, erudite, secular Silicon Valley, we are prone to downplay the supernatural realm. Everything has a natural explanation, a "rational" explanation.
1. Even Christians here might feel a bit bashful talking about Satan and demons.
- C. But Jesus doesn't blush, nor does He stutter. He knows there is a war waging in this room right now. And it all centers on the word of God. Satan's objective: Keep you from truly hearing and believing and being saved.
1. He'll do whatever He has to do: distract you with thoughts of what you have to do for work this week; buzz you with notifications on your phone; tempt you to lust at the woman in the row in front of you; close your eyes with sleep after another long night; glaze your eyes over with boredom because there's nothing flashy about this stage or this preacher.
- D. Are you aware that this is happening right now—that there is an enemy of your soul (Luke 10:19), a lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), a dragon making war on the children of God (Rev 12:17)?!

1. Why don't people believe and be saved? Paul tells us: "[Satan has] blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ . . ." (2 Cor 4:4).
- E. You're rejecting Christ. You feel so free, so rational. You're not rational, you're blind. You're not free, you're enslaved. O that God would be pleased to open your eyes even now!

(2) The Shallow Heart

- A. This is the person Jesus is describing in v. 13: "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."
- B. Have you known anyone like this? I have friends from college where, sadly, it seems like this is how the story played out.
1. At first, it shoots up with joy—the moment is right, the music is right, it feels nice being in an accepting community, all your friends at the youth camp are doing it, the boy you like is doing it, etc.
 - a. But there's no root. And in a time of testing they fall away—when the moment is not right, when the music is off key, when you find out that the church community is full of sinners like you and sometimes they hurt, when the youth camp is over and you're back down from the mountaintop, when that boy dumps you. You're done.
- C. This is one of the reasons why Jesus just isn't concerned with numbers in evangelism the way we often are. You go on missions or do evangelism and the question is how many received Christ? How many made decisions for the Lord? To pad our numbers we soften the message and just try to get people to "say the prayer".
1. Jesus never does this. There are times where we watch Him and think: "What are you doing?! You had the sale right there and you blew it. You didn't close the deal."
 - a. But Jesus isn't selling anything. He isn't closing a deal. He's offering salvation, entrance into His kingdom. And He wants to make sure we know what we're getting into, lest we receive Him with joy and then fall away when things get tough. Because things will get tough.
- D. We might think here of those scenes that Luke strings together for us in Luke 9:57-62: "⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'⁵⁹ To another he said, 'Follow me.'" But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

1. "I'm not some celebrity here to entertain you. I'm not some genie here to grant you all your wishes. I'm the Christ of God. And my face is set "to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Are you ready to go there with me? Are you ready to take up your cross and follow me? Am I worth that to you? Is My forgiveness, My salvation, My kingdom, worth your life?" "[W]hoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).

- a. There is no halfway in this. Jesus doesn't leave room for the middle ground.

E. So where are you? Where am I?

(3) The Divided Heart

A. This is the person Jesus is describing in v. 14: "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."

B. The "cares" and worries of life, and the "riches" and "pleasures" of life. These two sides, you realize, are unavoidably related.

1. That's why Paul would write to Timothy: "⁹ [T]hose who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim 6:9-10).

- a. When you don't have it you're anxiously trying to get it. When you get it, you're anxiously trying to keep it. And you pierce yourself with many griefs. It's a false gospel. And it chokes out the true gospel.

C. Jesus is not Lord of this heart. This is when you want Jesus, but you want the world too.

(4) The Good Heart

A. This is v. 15: "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."

B. As I pondered this, I stumbled upon an intriguing observation. When we look at the disciples in the gospels, we recognize quite clearly that they often seemed to have a bit of these other soils in them.

1. There's some hardness there. You remember Jesus rebuking Peter for siding with Satan. The word about the cross just got snatched up.
2. There's some shallowness there. You remember how they shot up with joy when they thought Jesus would be king and take down Rome, but then they all abandoned Jesus when the shadow of the cross fell upon Him.
3. There's some division there. You remember James and John and their request to rule. "We want power. We want prestige."

- C. So they had a bit of all this stuff in them. But, in the end, they listen. They repent and listen. They let Him teach them. They let Him have the last word. They know there's junk in them and they want His help. And Jesus is happy to do so. So they bear fruit.

(2) The Blessing and the Curse (vv. 16-18)

- A. In vv. 16-18 Jesus shifts metaphors from seed and hearing to light and seeing, but He is still talking about the same basic thing. Revelation is coming to us from God, what are we going to do with it? Are we going to reject the seed? Are we going to cover the light—put it under a jar or a bed?

- B. There in v. 18 is the essence of the matter, and it's worth reflecting on a bit here for a moment: "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

1. If you hear, hold fast, and bear fruit, more will be given to you. You will hear more.

- a. There is an understanding of God and His word that comes on the far side of obedience. Did you hear that? We like to have everything understood and proven to us before we obey. But sometimes we need to obey God because He's God, and the understanding comes later.

2. But the flip side is true as well. If you keep hearing and never get around to doing, you will hear less and less. Your ears will grow dull, your heart will grow hard, and your time for response will run out.

- C. There's a blessing and a curse held out here. Blessed are those who hear and respond appropriately, they shall hear more and more! But cursed are those who hear and remain unmoved, don't bear any fruit, they shall slowly wither and dry up.

1. Do not think that you can live it up now in your sin and then just repent and get right with God later sometime before you die. By the time "later" comes, you might find that your ears have become so dull, your eyes so blind, your heart so hard, that you cannot repent. You can't bring yourself to care about eternity at all anymore.

- a. That's why the author would Hebrews would write with such conviction: "^{7b} Today, if you hear his voice, ^{8a} do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:7b-8a).

- D. Do we get the gravity of this, of what is happening even in this room right now?

1. The word of God initiates a crisis every time it goes forth. For everyone who hears it is either becoming something more beautiful—as they hear, receive, hold it fast, and bear fruit—or more beastly—as they hear and slowly harden: "Okay, pastor, you've been going long enough. It's time for lunch. I want to get home and watch some football."

(3) The Fruitful Family (vv. 19-21)

- A. O brother/sister, take care then how you hear. For Jesus will go on in vv. 19-21 and say this: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (v. 21).
1. “That’s My family—born again of My Father, trusting in My word, bearing fruit with patience.” O I want to be that! Don’t you?

Conclusion

- A. Now I wanted to close with a few points of application. If we are to “take care then how [we] hear”, what does this “taking care” look like?

(1) Get in the Word

- A. First it means we are taking care to hear the word in the first place. Do you open your Bibles? You can’t “take care then how you hear” if you are not hearing his word at all.
- B. Certainly we like the idea of bearing fruit, but how can we expect fruit from soil in which we’ve sown no seed?
1. Fruit doesn’t just happen in the Christian life. It’s the result of hearing and believing. Where’s the peace? Where’s the freedom? Where’s the love? Where’s the joy?
 - a. You’ve got to get in the word and fight for that. You’ve got to roll up your sleeves and get in the dirt for that. You’ve got to lay your heart like soil before the Bible if you want that.

(2) Pray for Help

- A. But there’s more to it than this right? Do you remember the first message I preached on this text? Everything turns on how we hear, but, in ourselves, we can’t hear. Truly hearing the words of God is a gift of God. So we beg Him for it. We open our Bibles and we beg.
1. One of my favorite verses on this is [Psa 119:18](#): “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” In other words: “If you don’t open my eyes, I won’t see a thing!”
- B. Don’t be satisfied with mediocre times in God’s word. Resolve that you will beat down the door of heaven before you’d ever close your Bible unmoved. “God, awaken me! Open my ears! Open my eyes!”
1. Pray this in the mornings, pray it in the evenings. Pray it on the weekdays, pray it when you come in here on Sundays. Pray it for yourself, pray it for others. God open our eyes!

(3) Prioritize Sundays

- A. It seems to me that Silicon Valley culture has us rather casual in our commitment to the Sunday service of worship. We all work hard, we’re all tired, we all want a break, so we’ll make it when we can.

1. And our souls and our churches suffer because of it.
- B. How seriously do you take this moment? There is no such thing as just another Sunday. And I don't say this because it's my job. It's my job because I believe this. I give my life to preaching because I believe this.
1. Is God there with you in your morning devotions, yes, absolutely. But He is here in a special way when His people gather to hear His words preached.
 - a. I think that's part of Jesus means in [Matt 18:20](#) when He says: "[W]here two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."
 - b. I think that's why Paul would exhort Timothy: "[Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching](#)" (1 Tim 4:13). Something special happens in these moments. In fact, Paul goes on in [v. 16](#) and says this is how people get saved!

(4) Let It Linger

- A. What I mean by this is: Don't rush out of here without doing business with God.
1. I've mentioned this in the past, but one of the reasons we weighted the service with more time for song and prayer after the sermon is, at least in part, because of this text. I don't want the seed to be snatched up or to only settle superficially in your heart.
 - a. Maybe God was pressing heavy on you and you know there's business you need to do, but then the service ends, lights come on, so you quickly wipe the tears from your eyes, put on your smile, and get ready to shake hands and go out to lunch.
 - i. And the seed is just snatched up by the birds of the air. When you try to recall it in the evening, you're too tired to even remember why you were so moved.
- B. We don't want that to happen. We shaped the service to try to keep that from happening. We want to give you time to think and pray, confess and believe, weep and rejoice.
1. We want the seed of God's word to take root in your hearts here in this place that it might bear fruit in your life throughout the week.

(5) Consider the "Evening Service"

- A. No we're not starting an evening service. Here's what I mean by this: Your hearing of God's word on a Sunday morning doesn't stop when the service ends.
1. The reason I take an extra hour and create this handout is to help you take care then how you hear. To give you the main points to review, questions to talk about with your spouse or your roommates in the evening around the table. "Let's get the word into our hearts. Let's help each other hear." I don't lead the evening service. You do.

B. And parents, we just shifted curriculum for our children's ministry. And it's awesome. Right now, you're kids are getting an Activity Page and a Big Picture Card that they'll take home with them. These have the main points from their lesson, some family discussion starters, and even a family activity to help you apply it.

1. I beg you: Don't just drop these things in the recycle bin. Look them over, and around your dinner table this evening, help them care for how they are hearing the word of God!

a. I encourage you: Consider the "Evening Service".