



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Be Careful How You Hear (Luke 8:4-18)

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In our account, Jesus has been travelling through the various towns and villages for the purpose of proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom to the poor and broken of the land. The Scriptures reveal that the way the good news interacts with those it touched was as varied as the individuals to whom Jesus sought to minister. In these various interactions, which cover the pages of this gospel account, the underlying purpose of proclaiming the good news and bringing the word of God to these lives remained the same; and this is at the heart of the teaching moment in this account. As the masses gather from around the area to hear from Jesus, he proclaims to them the good news through the parable of the soils. In this moment, he reveals to the crowds the appropriate response of those who have the word sown into their hearts; his teaching reveals there is only one acceptable response to his message. The other responses failed to meet Jesus' expectation of those who have the seed planted into their lives. In Jesus' ministry we find his willingness without hesitation to engage the crowds, to heal the sick, and meet the needs of the broken. Yet from the large gathering there was always the call to closer fellowship to him through obedience to his teachings. Those who accepted this call for deeper fellowship quickly found proximity to Jesus meant exposure to the corruption of their heart which should prompt repentance and obedience. In this text, Jesus shows that the illuminating work of God's word is meant to reveal the condition of the heart for the benefit of one's growth in Christ. However if unchecked these loyalties will not remain hidden but exposed for the purpose of distinguishing between those who are followers of Christ and those who follow the world.

Luke 8:4-18 - (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."

THE GATHERING CROWDS

And when a great crowd was gathering – Jesus' ministry had tremendous popularity among the masses as he travelled from town to town. Here we find Luke uses a repetitive phrase to highlight the amount of people gathering. He not only speaks of a great crowd gathering, but of people journeying from various towns to see him. This large contingent of people sought to hear his teaching, see a miracle, or maybe get close enough to interact with him personally. The expression "a mile wide and an inch deep" speaks to what this mass of people represented to Jesus. They were the broken and desperate of this region who sought him because of their needs and Jesus, out of love and compassion, healed and cared for those who sought him. Yet once they received from Jesus what he willingly gave, there appeared to be no lasting impact in their lives. As he brought the good news that met their physical needs, he understood that most stopped short of the bounty he had to offer. From their self-focused perspective, the multitude was blinded to their true need. Jesus sought to communicate eternal truths in a manner accessible for those who saw their true poverty, but those who were blind found Jesus' teaching inaccessible.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear – Luke in narrating this teaching to the crowd identifies Jesus' communication as parabolic. In this, Jesus is shown not so much teaching the crowds as interpreting what happens as he broadcast the good news of the kingdom. From this perspective, the question is less about who hears the word (for it is accessible to all), and more about the quality of one's hearing. While this story is relatable to his audience whose lives and livelihood were rooted in agriculture, a disconnect existed in the understanding of both the crowds and the disciples. This story was not immediately self-evident to any in this setting. Jesus' teaching has relevance, but it requires "hearing," a process that needs further

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assistance by Jesus. Hence the concluding words of this parable offer caution, but they are also a call seeking ears that will hear. This story of the soil includes categories that are realistic of general farming practices, and yet are overstated. The seed planted in any soil is at risk from birds of the air, and thorns grow in good soil as well as bad. What distinguish the good soil from the bad are not the presences of these hazards (since these threats are seen normally), but the producing of a crop for harvest.

THE QUESTION DISCIPLES

And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, - Jesus is not seen offering an explanation to this parable until a question is raised by one of the disciples. Luke is presenting Jesus as the one who discloses God's hidden plan. Some are unable to grasp this truth because they have not allowed their worldview to be reshaped by Jesus, and so will only puzzle over his message. The importance of having God's interpretation through Christ is being made evident, because without seeking such intervention one will never be able to grasp spiritual truth. For this reason, this separation between the disciples and the crowds is not an insurmountable barrier, but is accessible to those who diligently seek Jesus with hearing ears. Even in Jesus' explanation of the parable, Luke records no change in scene, no separation of Jesus and the disciples from the crowd. What is taking place is not private instruction by Jesus to a selected few; rather he is communicating the truth to all who would hear. Then in quoting from Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus provides the biblical explanation to the reality that some see and hear but do not perceive and understand. This should not lead one to conclude that additional proclamation would be ineffective or that candidates need to be more carefully screened. The good soil is only recognized as good when its fruit becomes evident. Jesus' message will always receive a mixed responses; this has been highlighted in previous accounts in this gospel, and will increasingly categorize Jesus' ministry in the following chapters.

Now the parable is this – Having just provided the way for those who follow to understand the diversity of responses, Jesus will address their question directly. He begins with the statement “the seed is the word of God.” This statement in itself is pregnant with theology and grounds the meaning of his ministry in the context of Israel's history. In referencing the seed in this manner, his audience would make an immediate connect to the power demonstrated in the creation of the heavens and the earth by the spoken word of God. The prophets were also seen as heralds of God's word, and now Jesus is being presented as the one who reveals and bring to a conclusion the divine purpose. For Jesus, the declaring of God's word is not done simply to convey information, but to produce a decision in those who

hear the message. In this parable Jesus highlights three possible outcomes as the seed is sown: (1) no growth, (2) some growth but no fruit, (3) growth and bearing fruit. This growth is linked in tandem with a response of faith and a continuing faithfulness to the message. In the case of no growth, faith is prevented by the devil. In this one may see the anticipated involvement of Satan in the activity of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. To those who experience some growth but no fruit Jesus utilized two illustrations. The first identifies those who respond to the word of God, but face threats in form of persecution which expose a lack of fidelity to the God's purpose. The other has its growth stunted by seeking security in things rather than God. They become preoccupied with what they possess and what others think of them. While these two types of soil experience some growth, they are presented by Jesus as tragic because they do not accomplish his intended purpose for the sown seed. The “good soil” is identified as those who hear, respond by faith, then continue in faithfulness despite the challenges they will face. Authentic hearing is presented as hearing that leads to faith, and faith that lead to behaviors consistent with the word of God.

THE ILLUMINATING WORD

No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar – While the imagery changes abruptly, Luke makes no shift in topic. Jesus' main concern in his interpretation in the tale of the sower has been “how one hears.” Having established the basic expectation of discipleship, where the production of a harvest is the expectation for one's life, Jesus continues to insist that correct hearing, though grounded in one's heart, is also displayed in one's behavior. Even though one may try to conceal what Jesus is seeking to illuminate, they are fighting a losing battle. How one has heard the word of God cannot be hidden but will eventually reveal itself, either in actions appropriate to God's people, or in a failure to do so. These expectations are outlined in Jesus' Sermon of the Plain where he calls his followers to love their enemies, be merciful, and not hypocritical in their judgment of others. Jesus closes by admonishing them to be careful how they listen because it will become evident to all, so one must listens well. It is impossible to know another's heart, but we can see their actions. This should provide a stark warning to our own heart; we cannot hide our devotion to God's word, our lives will proclaim it boldly for all to see. While we are part of a spiritual kingdom, Jesus is promising that there is a distinction between those who have noble and good hearts who hold faithfully to the word and those who began by faith but whose lives demonstrate no evidence of holding to his word.

Green, Joel B. (2010-04-19). *The Gospel of Luke (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)* (p. 322). Eerdmans Publishing Co