



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

Building a Healthy Church

Listening to the Word

Luke 8:1-18

01/13/2019

Main Point

A relationship with Jesus is defined by receptivity to the Word of God.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who is the best listener you know and why?

What is the difference between hearing something and listening to something?

There are few things more rewarding than knowing you have been heard and understood. Experiences like that inspire us to be great listeners ourselves. This is good for many reasons, not least of which is the desire God has for us to hear His Word and respond obediently. This is our topic of discussion today.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 8:4-8.

What is a parable? Why does Jesus use parables?

What did Jesus describe in this particular parable? Is this a parable about the sower, the seeds, or the soil? Why?

What were the predominant characteristics of each kind of soil?

From this point forward, Jesus used the parable approach to teaching much more. In an agricultural society, everyone would have understood what happened when a sower went out into a field to sow his seed. At least one path ran through most fields, and much of the terrain in Israel was rocky under a thin layer of topsoil. Dropping seeds along such paths was futile. Many fields had thorn bushes along the perimeters. Seeds falling there had no chance to grow and survive until harvest time. Others, however, did fall on fertile soil and produced a bumper crop (100 times what was sown).

Why do you think so many people heard the words of Jesus but then didn't understand them?

What about Jesus' identity and/or mission made Him hard to listen to?

Do you see similar things happening in culture today? In what ways do you see people hearing the words of Jesus but not really listening to them?

Too many people suffer from selective hearing. They either hear only what they want to hear or they refuse to understand what they do hear. Far worse are those who hear and understand but do not act on what they hear. Anyone who has ears to hear should listen is a challenge to carefully consider the story and its hidden meaning and practical implications.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 8:9-15.

Based on Jesus' interpretation, what character traits would be representative of each kind of soil?

Which of the soils produce similar results? What do these results portray? Which soil is unique and how so?

In His parable, Jesus described four types of soil, with soil representing people who hear the gospel. The first three refer to people who are not saved but who have varying responses to the seed of the Word of God. Then Jesus contrasted those types of people with people whose hearts are good ground. The same good seed fell on all four types of soil, but only this last example refers to a person who has been born again.

Do you know people represented by each of these soils? What kind of "soil" best represents you now? Five years ago?

When we share our faith with others, we are the farmer spreading the seed. What help do you get from this parable about sharing your faith?

According to verse 15, what are the characteristics of a person who has been born again?

First, the person hears the Word of God with an honest and good heart. The second characteristic of people whose hearts are good soil is that they hold on to Christ's teaching. Finally, Jesus said the seed in the good soil would bear fruit with endurance. True believers make a faith commitment that endures to the end. Their lives are spiritually productive and they consistently live in obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 8:16-18.

According to Luke 8:16-18, what's wrong with putting a light under a basket or a bed? What's wrong with acting as though faith in Christ is a private matter?

What differences have you noticed in your life when you are applying God's Word and living in His truth, compared to times when you stray from it?

How does the parable of the lamp relate to the parable of the sower?

The truth of the parable and the illustration of the lamp point out the importance of how people listen—what they do with what they hear. Echoing the words of verse 8b, Jesus urged the disciples to take care. They should not be “hearers only” (James 1:22), but rather should apply what they have heard to their lives. People genuinely committed to Jesus will show it by what they do and how they grow spiritually.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What active ways can we till the soil of our hearts to make us ready to receive the word of God? Before worship? Before our group? Before our personal time with God?

Why is it not enough to just hear the word of God? What does putting it into practice reveal about our commitment to Him?

Is there something you have been hearing and not doing?

Pray

As a closing prayer activity, spend time listening to the prayer requests of the people in your group. Encourage each group member to share. In addition to basic needs, ask your group members to voice specific prayer requests concerning areas of their lives where they are struggling to apply God's Word.

Commentary

LUKE 8:1-18

8:1-3 As Jesus was traveling and preaching in Galilee, He was accompanied by the Twelve and several well-to-do women who, out of gratitude for being healed by Jesus, financially supported Him and the apostles. Mary Magdalene (i.e., of the town of Magdala), who became a well-known follower (Mt 27:61), is introduced here. Joanna, who is also mentioned in 24:10, was married to a man who held a responsible position under Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. Nothing else is known about Susanna.

8:5-8 From this point forward, Jesus used the parable approach much more, the purpose of which is explained in verses 9-10. In an agricultural society, everyone would have understood what happened when a sower went out into a field to sow his seed. At least one path ran through most fields, and much of the terrain in Israel was rocky under a thin layer of topsoil. Dropping seeds along such paths was futile. Many fields had thorn bushes along the perimeters. Seeds falling there had no chance to grow and survive until harvest time. Others, however, did fall on fertile soil and produced a bumper crop (100 times what was sown).

8:9-10 His disciples, probably indicating the Twelve, inquired of Jesus what He meant. The introductory then suggests the disciples were motivated by the parable to know more about its meaning. Jesus complimented the disciples because they asked about His teaching. Others did not want to understand, did not put their faith in Jesus, and did not understand. Thus they fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, which Jesus quoted. After calling for the crowd to listen

responsibly to His parable, Jesus explained that some harden themselves to the gospel but those who are willing to trust Him can understand its truth.

8:11-12 In explaining the parable to the Twelve, Jesus focused on the one consistent aspect, the seed. While different types of soil are described, the sower did not discriminate as to where he sowed. He distributed the seed—the word of God—all along the way. Jesus described four types of soil. The first three refer to people who are not saved but who have varying responses to the seed of the Word of God. The hard soil of the path represented people whose hearts were hardened. In the agriculture of Jesus' day, fields were crisscrossed with paths where people normally walked from one place to another, wearing the soil into a compacted state, making it resistant to the seed strewn by the hand of a sower. This soil rejects the seed. It represents those who allow the Devil to take the Word from their hearts. Jesus was not saying that the Devil had the power to take the gospel out of the hearts of those who had been saved. Instead, the phrase comes from the Greek word that means "from" or "away from" as opposed to "from within."

8:13 Referring to the seed falling on rocky soil, Jesus depicted people who liked what they heard but who did not receive His message or teaching into their hearts. Many people hear the good news of Jesus and welcome the idea of being saved but do not receive Jesus by faith into their lives. When a time of testing comes, the proof of their lack of receiving Christ is shown by their departure.

8:14 The thorny soil represents people who are not committed to Christ, even though they have heard the Word of God. Instead of making a faith commitment to Jesus, they merely add their thoughts of Christ to the periphery of their lives. Other matters, such as worries, riches and pleasures of life are more central to their concerns. Consequently, such people do not produce mature fruit that would denote seed that actually had taken root in their lives.

8:15 Lastly, Jesus contrasted the first three types of people with those whose hearts are good ground. The same good seed fell on all four types of soil, but only this last example refers to a person who has been born again. Only those who genuinely commit themselves to Jesus Christ will be saved, and they will live consistently in obedience to Him and His Word.

8:16-17 Jesus used the illustration of a lamp to show the absurdity of someone claiming to be a believer but trying to keep it a secret from others. A true believer displays faith not in a self-righteous or self-glorifying way but so others may see the light and come to Christ.

8:18 The truth of the parable and the illustration of the lamp point out the importance of how people listen—what they do with what they hear. Whoever hears, understands, and acts with commitment on the basis of God's Word will gain more insight into that Word. However, those

who have not received Christ's teaching will lose what they think they have. Thus Jesus gave further instructions on listening to Him, calling for genuine commitment that is openly shared and leads to continued spiritual growth.

LUKE 8:1-21

Teaching: Hearing God's Word (Luke 8:1-21)

The Lord continued His itinerant ministry in Galilee, assisted by His disciples and partially supported by some godly women. It was not unusual for Jewish rabbis to receive gifts from grateful people, and these women had certainly benefited from Jesus' ministry. The New Testament church leaders were supported by gifts from friends (2 Tim. 1:16-18) and from churches (Phil. 4:15-17), and Paul supported himself by his own labor (2 Thes. 3:6-10).

The word hear is used nine times in this section. It means much more than simply listening to words. "Hearing" means listening with spiritual understanding and receptivity. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). With this in mind, we can understand the three admonitions Jesus gave His followers.

Hear and receive the Word (vv. 4-15). Initially, the Sower is Jesus Christ, but the sower represents any of God's people who share the Word of God (John 4:35-38). The seed is the Word of God, for, like seed, the Word has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted (John 12:24). When a person hears and understands the Word, then the seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil.

Jesus called this parable "The Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:18), but it could also be called "The Parable of the Soils." The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless. The human heart is like soil: if it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Jesus described four different kinds of hearts, three of which did not produce any fruit. The proof of salvation is fruit and not merely hearing the Word or making a profession of faith in Christ. Jesus had already made that clear in His "Sermon on the Mount" (Luke 6:43-49; also note Matt. 7:20).

The hard soil (vv. 5, 12). This soil represents the person who hears the Word but immediately allows the devil to snatch the seed away. How did the heart become hard? The "wayside" was

the path that ran through the common field, separating the plots; and the foot traffic hardened the soil. Whatever goes into the ear or eye finally enters the heart, so be careful who is allowed to “walk on your heart.”

The shallow soil (vv. 6, 13). This soil illustrates the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the message, but his interest wanes and he does not continue (see John 8:31–32). In many parts of the Holy Land you find a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of soil. The shoot can grow up, but the roots cannot go down, and the sun withers the rootless plant. The sun represents the testing that comes to all professing believers to prove their faith. Sun is good for plants if they have roots. Persecution can deepen the roots of a true Christian, but it only exposes the shallowness of the false Christian.

The crowded soil (vv. 7, 14). This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and “weed out” the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. “Cares, riches, and the pleasures of this life” are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the “crowded heart” comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth “fruit to perfection.”

The good soil (vv. 8, 15). This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, is truly saved, and proves it by patiently producing fruit (see 1 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22–25). Not everybody produces the same amount of fruit (Matt. 13:8), but all true believers will produce some fruit as evidence of spiritual life. That fruit may include winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), money given to God’s work (Rom. 15:25–28), good works (Col. 1:10), Christian character (Gal. 5:22–23), and praise to the Lord (Heb. 13:15).

This parable shows that Jesus was not impressed by the great crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of the people did not really “hear” the Word and receive it in their hearts. He gave this story to encourage the disciples in their future ministry, and to encourage us today. When you consider how much teaching, preaching, and witnessing goes on in the course of a month or a year, you wonder why there is such a small harvest. The fault does not lie with the sower or the seed. The problem is with the soil. The human heart will not submit to God, repent and receive the Word, and be saved.

“Faith comes first to the hearing ear, not to the cogitating mind,” said A.W. Tozer, the much-quoted pastor and author. Faith is not a matter of IQ or education; it is a matter of humbly preparing the heart to receive God’s truth (James 1:19–21). The wise and prudent are blind to truths that are easy for the babes to understand (Matt. 11:20–26).

Hear and share the Word (vv. 16–18). The disciples were perplexed because Jesus taught in parables, so they asked Him for an explanation (Luke 8:9–10; also see Matt. 13:10–17). His reply seems to suggest that He used parables in order to hide the truth from the crowds, but just the opposite is true, and Luke 8:16–18 makes that clear. His teaching is a light that must be allowed to shine so that sinners may be saved.

The word parable means “to cast alongside.” A parable is a story that teaches something new by putting the truth alongside something familiar. The people knew about seeds and soil, so the Parable of the Sower interested them. Those who were indifferent or proud would shrug it off. Our Lord’s parables aroused the interest of the concerned.

A parable starts off as a picture that is familiar to the listeners. But as you carefully consider the picture, it becomes a mirror in which you see yourself, and many people do not like to see themselves. This explains why some of our Lord’s listeners became angry when they heard His parables, and even tried to kill Him. But if we see ourselves as needy sinners and ask for help, then the mirror becomes a window through which we see God and His grace. To understand a parable and benefit from it demands honesty and humility on our part, and many of our Lord’s hearers lacked both.

It is a serious thing to hear and understand the Word of God, because this puts on us the obligation to share that Word with others. Everyone who receives the seed then becomes a sower, a light-bearer, and a transmitter of God’s truth (see 1 Thes. 1:5–8). If we keep it to ourselves, we will lose it; but if we share it, we will receive more.

Hear and obey the Word (vv. 19–21). Our Lord’s mother, Mary, and His half brothers (Matt. 13:55–56; Acts 1:14) were worried about Jesus and wanted to talk with Him. Some of His friends had already said that He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21), and perhaps His family agreed with them. Jesus took this as an opportunity to teach another spiritual lesson: being a part of His spiritual family is much more important than any human relationship and is based on obedience to the Word of God. It is not enough to “hear” the Word of God; we must also “keep it” (Luke 8:15).

In one of my radio series, I emphasized the importance of doing the Word of God, putting it into practice in daily life (James 1:22–25). I warned listeners that it is easy to think we are “spiritual” because we listen to one preacher after another, take notes, mark our Bibles, but never really practice what we learn. We are only fooling ourselves.

A listener wrote that my words had made her angry, but then she faced up to the fact that she was indeed guilty of being an “auditor” and not a doer of the Word. She began to listen to fewer

radio preachers, to listen more carefully, and to practice what she heard. "This new approach to Bible study has transformed me!" she wrote. "The Bible has become a new Book to me and my life has changed!"

As His disciples, we must take heed what we hear (Mark 4:24) and how we hear (Luke 8:18), because God will hold us accountable. Listening to the wrong things, or listening to the right things with the wrong attitude, will rob us of truth and blessing. If we are faithful to receive the Word and share it, God will give us more; but if we fail to let our light shine, we will lose what we have. It is a solemn thing to hear the Word of God.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 199–201.