

Luke 8.1-21
How's Your Hearing?

Hearing and Doing. There's often a disconnect between those two things, isn't there? Sure, you may *hear* the words, "*Take out the trash*" or "*Clean the bathroom*" all day long. But actually getting up and doing it's another matter altogether, *isn't it?*

Well that's what our passage today from Luke 8 is really about. *Hearing and Doing* the word of God. And the main point really boils down to what Jesus says at the very end, verse 21: "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

In other words, if you want to belong to Christ's family, it's not enough simply to hear his words and think happy thoughts about them. No. His word has to grip you in such a way that you *both* hear it *and* do it—*both* believe it and *practice* it.

Now, at *first glance* it might seem as though the different portions of verses 1-21 are disconnected.

You have these people who followed Jesus in verses 1-3, the Parable of the Sower in verses 4-15, the teaching about the lamp in verses 16-18, and then Jesus' mother and brothers trying to talk to him in verses 19-21.

What do they all have to do with each other? Well, they're actually very much connected. And they all move toward that one main point that's summed up in verse 21 about Jesus' family being those who both *hear* and *do* the word of God

And when we look closely at the overall structure of the narrative, we see that it's bracketed by these two brief sections about different groups of people—the women who followed Jesus in verses 1-3, and then Jesus' own mother and brothers in verses 19-21.

And notice the *contrast* between those two groups. The former bore no blood relation to Jesus, and yet they were included in his inner circle. The latter were Jesus' family, but they didn't even make it in to see him.

But before we say any more about those two groups and why Luke mentions them where he does, we need to look first at this parable in verses 4-15. Because that'll help us understand what Luke is saying to us by bracketing Jesus' teaching with these two groups of people.

1. The Mysteries of the Kingdom (verses 4-15)

Now, after telling us in verses 1-3 that Jesus is travelling throughout Galilee with his 12 apostles, and this group of women, Luke sets the stage for the parable in verse 4: "*A great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him.*"

So, Jesus has a large field of people listening as he tells this parable. And here's basically what he says:

A farmer goes out to sow his seed. He indiscriminately sows it everywhere. And some of it falls onto the path and gets snatched up and eaten by the birds.

Other seed falls on rocky places and sprouts at first, but soon falls away because there's no moisture. Still other seed falls among thorns, and so gets choked and doesn't yield fruit.

But finally, there's the seed that falls into the good soil. This seed takes root and grows, and bears a huge crop for the farmer. And, Jesus concludes, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

And he doesn't leave us to ourselves to figure out the meaning of the parable. As after he tells it his disciples go to him and ask him what it means. And he explains it in verses 11-15.

The *seed*, verse 11, is the word of God. Now, that *itself* illuminates the whole parable, *doesn't it?* This is what Jesus has been doing. He's been proclaiming God's word about the Kingdom to masses of people.

Some of those people *opposed* him outright. Others were *ambivalent* toward his message. But others *received* the word with joy. And now only time would tell what sort of fruit would be borne in their lives.

So, *if* the seed is the word, *then* the different types of soil on which the seed of the word is sown corresponds to different sorts of people.

The seed sown on the path are those who hear the word, but that word's *immediately snatched* away by the devil. For these people, there's no growth whatsoever. As they simply reject the message.

Then, there's the seed that's sown on rocky places. These are people who initially receive the word with joy. But since their hearts are hard they have no root. And when testing comes they fall away.

These people may like the gospel in some way. They possibly like the message of eternal life. Maybe they want these heavenly riches Jesus has been talking about. Or maybe they're just afraid of going to hell.

But when the time comes that the genuineness of their faith is tested, they fall away. Because the word hasn't *really* taken root in their heart. Their heart hasn't *really* been *penetrated* by the gospel.

See, there are people who deceive themselves into thinking they're followers of Christ. But then when it becomes clear that the Christian life includes suffering and cross and a definitive break with the power of sin, they walk away from the faith. Because the trials just prove too much.

But Listen to the words of 1 Peter 1.6-7:

Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been *grieved by various trials*,⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This is the result of trials for those whose hearts have been penetrated by the gospel. The testing proves the genuineness of your faith. But *if* your faith is shallow or half-hearted—if it has *not root*—Jesus says here in Luke 8, those trials will eventually cause you to fall away.

Well then there's the seed that falls among the thorns. These are those who receive the word. But as time goes on, the cares and riches and pleasures of life *choke* the word, so that it doesn't produce fruit.

Ultimately, the things of this world are *so alluring* for these people that when push comes to shove, it becomes clear that they're living for this present age rather than the age to come.

Now, it's sometimes debated whether or not these people are *true* believers. And I have to say that I'm *not sure* the text really gives us an answer to that question.

But *this much* is clear. Given what Jesus said back in chapter 6 about there being only *two* ways, only *two* types of trees, and two ways to build a house, you *can't presume* that you're a follower of Christ if the things of this world are choking the word in your life.

And so, *if* the cares and riches and pleasures of life are *more important* to you than Christ and his gospel, *then* there's at least something seriously wrong with your current situation.

And what you *need* to do is get rid of those thorns, receive the word with a good and honest heart, and produce fruit!

Then, finally, there's the seed that falls into the good soil. These receive the word and bear fruit. It *isn't* snatched away by Satan. It *doesn't* land on rocks and fall away. It *isn't* choked by the things of the world.

Rather, it *penetrates* deep into the heart, takes root, and bears much fruit. This is the natural life of a disciple of Jesus. And notice *how* the good soil produces fruit. Verse 15: they hold fast to the word "*in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*"

But what does it mean to hold fast with an honest and good heart? Well, it means hearing the word and believing it *entirely*.

You see, the other sorts of soil have these other things *vying* for their devotion. The seed along the path remains under the dominion of Satan. The rocks allow for only a shallow faith. The thorn infested soil is concerned more about the things of this world than God's Kingdom.

But the good soil isn't stopped by those things. It takes the word in, treasures it, and *strives* to grow by putting it into practice.

And just like a tree is known by the overall fruit it produces, so the type of soil is known over time by the crop it produces. That's why Jesus specifically says the good soil bears fruit "*with patience.*"

Because the soil is *proven* over time—as it's met by the trials and the temptations of life in this world.

Now, you may have noticed that I sort of skipped over verse 10. After Jesus told the parable and his disciples asked him what it meant, he didn't start explaining it right away, *did he?*

No. First he told them *why* he was speaking in a parable. And 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.'*

Have you ever someone say Jesus spoke in parables so that *everyone* who heard him could understand *exactly* what he was saying? I'm sure some of you have.... But notice that's the *exact opposite* of what Jesus says the purpose of parables was here in verse 10.

You see, the reason for parables was *so that* the mysteries of the Kingdom would only be known by those to whom that knowledge is given.

Now, in a sense, it's true that everyone could understand these simple stories Jesus told, right? Of course... the parable of the sower makes perfect *agricultural* sense. When farmers put down their seed, it's not the case that each and every seed bears fruit... That's simple.

But the point's that it's the mystery of the Kingdom *revealed by* the parable—the *deeper spiritual meaning*—that's only grasped by those to whom such knowledge is given.

You see, the *parable itself* is about the purpose of parables. That's the *genius* of Jesus' teaching here. This parable of the sower informs all the other parables Jesus tells.

Those to whom it's given to know the mysteries of the kingdom are the good soil that takes the word in and yields a crop. They're the ones

who respond to the message of the Kingdom with repentance and fruit in keeping with their repentance.

The others either reject it or fall away. But eventually you know the type of soil by the crop it produces. In other words, Jesus is saying to the crowds, *“I know you all hear the words that are coming out of my mouth. But are you really listening?”*

Kind of like when someone’s talking to you and you’re zoning out. And they ask, *“Are you even listening to me?”* And sometimes you’re able to focus really quick and come up with the last things they said.

You say, *“Sure, I’m listening...”* And then you just repeat the last sentence or two. Now, the sound waves may have reached your ear drums so that you *heard* the *sounds* that were coming from the other person’s mouth and so were able to repeat those sounds.

But you know very well you *weren’t really* listening. Well, that’s something like what Jesus is saying: *“I know you hear me. But do you really hear me?”*

2. Take Care Then How You Hear (verses 16-18)

And *that’s why* he then goes on in verses 16-18 to tell us to *take care* how we hear. Because the issue here is, *“How’s your hearing?”*

In verse 16, he talks about lighting a lamp. *“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.”*

Now, *what* does that have to do with what he just said. Well, remember the context. Jesus is sowing the seed. He’s proclaiming the *secrets* of the kingdom.

He’s, in a sense, lit the lamp and put it on its stand for people to see. And notice the explanation in verse 17: *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”*

Nothing is secret that will not be made manifest.... Remember verse 10: *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God.*

You see, he's lighting the lamp and putting it on its stand—proclaiming the word, and making the secrets of the kingdom known. But only those with eyes to see understand. And only those with ears to hear will hear!

And so, the exhortation in verse 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.”*

Take care how you hear... Make sure that you're really listening... I'm proclaiming the truth of God's Kingdom. What kind of soil are you? If you're good soil yielding a crop, then more will be given to you.

But *if* you deceive yourself into thinking you're listening when you're really not, *even* what you think you have will be taken away.

And this is primarily an issue of the *present*, not of the *past*. The real question of our text *isn't*, *“Have you really been converted or not?”* The question is *“Do you believe now?” ... “How are you hearing the word today?” Are you taking it in and putting it into practice?*

That's important because we can tend to look at passages like the *Parable of the Sower* and get caught up in things like *whether or not* you're *really saved* or *if* you can lose your salvation.

But while there's a sense in which those are valid questions, focusing on them can *detract* from the main point—from what the Lord's saying to you here and now.

Brothers and sisters, take care how you hear, *today!* In other words, Christ is *still speaking* through his word. He's *speaking* to you. *How's your hearing?* What are you doing with that word?

Remember the call of Psalm 95 that's taken up in the book of Hebrews: *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

And so, it's the duty of each one of us to be attentive to how we're hearing the Word—*both* when it's read *and* when it's preached....

Sure, it's the responsibility of the preacher to present the word in such a way that it's understandable and compelling.

But it's also the responsibility of you, the hearers, to be diligent in your attentiveness to the Word. To prepare your hearts and minds to hear it. And to make an effort to understand and practice it.

But how? Well, The *Shorter Catechism* gives some really good guidelines. Question 90:

That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend to it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

First, you need to attend to the word with *diligence, preparation, and prayer*. That's about what you do *before* hearing the word.

So, *How do you spend your Saturday evenings?* Whatever you do, there should be an element of praying and preparing for worship and hearing the word.

Or, what are your Sunday mornings like? Are they filled with chaos and busyness, or do you come prepared to hear the word?

Now, I understand that's often a lot easier said than done, *especially* when you're trying to round up a large family. But we need to do whatever we can to be as prepared to hear the word as we can.

And then, the catechism says we need to *receive* the word in faith and love, *lay it up* in our hearts, and *practice* it in our lives. This has to do with what you do during and after hearing the word.

As the word is read or preached, we're to *receive* it in faith and love, and *lay it up* in our hearts. How do you approach the word when you read it and hear it? Is your posture one of *submission and reception*, or *superiority and skepticism*?

And then, lastly, we need to *practice* it in our lives. Notice, according to the catechism, this is all a part of *properly hearing* the word. Right hearing *includes* doing.

3. “Those Who Hear the Word and Do It” (verses 1-3; 19-21)

And that’s exactly where these two groups of people at the beginning and end of our passage come in. The scene started by saying that Jesus was accompanied by his 12 apostles and this group of women he healed of various infirmities.

Remember when we looked at Jesus’ choosing of the 12 apostles in chapter 6, we saw that they really weren’t the sorts of people you’d normally pick if you were going to start a new movement.

Peter, James, and John were fisherman. Peter was a sinful man by his own admission. Matthew was a tax collector. Thomas had issues with doubt. And none of them were remarkable in terms of their social status or natural abilities.

And then in addition to those apostles, there were these women who followed Jesus—Mary Magdalene, Joana, Susanna, and many others.

These women were from a variety of social and family backgrounds—sinners, demon possessed, diseased. But now *forgiven, restored, healed*. They followed Jesus and they served and provided for him and his apostles. They’re *hearers and doers* of his word.

And then there are Jesus’ own family members at the end of the passage. Now, we’re not sure within the context of Luke’s Gospel exactly what their take on Jesus’ teaching was at this point in his ministry. But that’s not the point.

The point’s that *they’re standing outside*. They’re *not with Jesus*. *Their status*, much like Simon’s in the last scene, is ambiguous. And so, only time will tell exactly what sort of soil they are.

They’re *looking* for Jesus. But we don’t know exactly why.... Really, we *don’t know anything* about them other than that they’re *outside*.

While the women at the beginning of the chapter were *with Jesus* regularly. They received the word with joy and bore fruit. And so they were showing themselves to be *good soil*.

That was the case regardless of the lives they lived before hearing the word. Prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners of all kinds, when they hear the word and that word takes root in their hearts, they become good trees that produce good fruit.

That's because the work of conversion—of repentance and faith and following Jesus—is the *work of God* in peoples' hearts, through the simple means of the Word preached.

It has *nothing* to do with *how good* a person you are or *your place* in society. It has *everything* to do with God's work in you *through* his Word.

This is the *mystery* of the Kingdom. Christ is scattering the seed of the word of the Kingdom throughout the land. And Entrance into that Kingdom depends only on hearing and doing that word, and nothing else.

And Christ himself is the one who reveals the secrets of the Kingdom—who gives ears to hear the word.

So, then, *Who are* Christ's true disciples? Or to put it another way, *Who's included* in his family? Jesus answers in the final verse of our passage: Those who're included in Jesus' family are, "*Those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

This is what right hearing of the word brings—*listening* and *doing*. And so, only those who hear the word and do it are Christ's disciples.

And what we see here in Luke 8 is that *that reality* runs *so deep* that *even* demon possessed women and prostitutes (*the least of the kingdom*) can be elevated above Jesus' *own family members*.

You see, yet again, Jesus is *completely overturning* the assumptions of this present age. According to worldly assumptions, Jesus' family should've been specially privileged.

But what Jesus shows us here is that in the Kingdom of God, those assumptions don't apply. In the Kingdom of God, what matters is hearing and doing the word of God.

And whether you're *royalty* like Herod, a *Pharisee* like Simon, one of Jesus' *own family members*, a *tax collector*, or a *prostitute*, the case remains the same.

You *cannot* presume any claim to God's favor on account of your own *presumed goodness* or your place in human society.

At the end of chapter 7, Simon the Pharisee *didn't* repent, but the sinful woman did. Here in chapter 8, sinners and formerly Demon possessed women were *with Jesus*. But *his own family* remained outside.

The tree is known by its fruit. The type of soil is known by the crop it produces. Jesus' family members are those who *hear* and *do* the word of God. So... *How is your hearing?*