

“These Are My Brethren”

Luke 8:16-21

In verse 21 of this text Jesus said, “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.” This is Jesus’ concluding statement to the discussion he started in v. 5, which we studied together last week. In Luke 8:5-8 Jesus taught the parable of the soils. And in verses 11-15 Jesus explained that parable. And remember, in v. 11 Jesus said, “The seed is the Word of God.” Jesus has been talking about the Word of God and how people receive the Word of God.

But Jesus was not finished teaching his disciples on this topic. In our text this morning we learn that the word of God has been revealed, we are responsible for our response to the word of God, and those who hear and obey the word of God Jesus counts as His brethren. God is pleased when we hear His word and obey it.

I. The Word of God has been Revealed (v. 16-17)

In verse 16 Jesus moved on from the explanation of his parable to an illustration about a candle. Very simply, Jesus said, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.”

The illustration is simple. When a person lights a candle they don’t put it away somewhere or hide it. They put it out in the open, on a candlestick, so that

the people who are present can see by the light it gives. But what does this illustration have to do with what Jesus has been teaching about?

Remember, back in v. 10 Jesus said to his disciples, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” And the explanation of the parable Jesus gave in verses 11-15 He gave in private. He did not give it to the multitude mentioned in verse 4. He gave it to his disciples as we see in verse 9.

What were the disciples to do with this knowledge, these secrets, these “mysteries of the kingdom of God” that Jesus had just revealed to them? Having received the Word of God, the disciples were to share it with the world, and so must we. God doesn’t give us revelation so that we can bury it. Rather, we are to use what we have been given for the glory of God.

Christianity isn’t some sort of esoteric cult where only a few elites know all the secrets. Christianity isn’t a secret to be guarded. It is the gospel, the good news, to be proclaimed. Whatever light God has given to us is not to be hidden away, but is to be held forth to give light to others as we proclaim the gospel and as we live out the gospel.

Jesus taught his disciples that these things which were, for a time concealed, were intended to be proclaimed. In verse 17 Jesus told the disciples, “For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.” This almost sounds like Jesus is contradicting himself.

If you go back to verse 10 Jesus said, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” Parables concealed from the multitudes the truth that Jesus taught. If nothing is secret that will not be made manifest, if nothing is hid that will not be known and come abroad, why did Jesus teach in parables?

The rejection, the hard-heartedness of men, the unbelief, the veiling of His glory: all of these things Jesus suffered here on earth as part of His humiliation on His way to the cross. Remember the prophecy of Simeon in the temple. In Luke 2:34 he said of Jesus, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.”

In Luke 4:41 as the demon possessed were being delivered the demons cried out “Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.” But Jesus rebuked them and did not allow them to speak. There are many reasons why Jesus rebuked them. But one of those reasons is that Jesus was to suffer obscurity for a time.

In Philippians 2:7-8 we read, “[Jesus] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

In John 6:15 there was a massive crowd that tried to make Jesus king in Galilee and when Jesus perceived that this was their intent he left them and went up a mountain by himself.

In John 7 Jesus' brothers told him he should go to Jerusalem to show himself to the world. But Jesus told them in John 7:6, "My time is not yet come."

Now back in our text, when Jesus said, "Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest." He is referring to these things, veiled in parables, only explained in private to the disciples, but which would later be declared in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). These things which are still being declared today. The gospel of Jesus Christ. For a time it was secret, but now it is made manifest. It was hidden, but now it is known and declared abroad.

As Jesus continued teaching his disciples about the Word of God and how people receive the Word of God, the first thing we have seen in our text is that the Word of God has been made known. Christianity isn't a secret religion. It doesn't demand blind, un-informed faith. True Christianity is literally an open book. Open the Word of God and see for yourself what it says. The Word of God has been made known. And, as always, with revelation comes responsibility. In verse 18 Jesus taught on our responsibility.

II. We are Responsible for Our Response to the Word of God (v. 18)

“Take heed therefore how ye hear.” Consider this statement in light of what Jesus has already said, not just in our text this morning, but in this whole passage. He has been teaching about the word of God. He described how different people respond to the word of God. Some have hard hearts and the devil comes and takes the word of God out of their hearts (that’s in v. 12). Some receive the word with joy but they have no true root of faith and they fall away in time of temptation (v. 13). Some receive the word of God, but before it brings forth fruit it is choked out by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life (v. 14). And some hear the word of God with an honest and pure heart, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (v. 15). As we have just seen in verses 16 and 17, Jesus taught that the Word of God has been made known. As hearers of the Word of God, what application should we make?

Jesus told us here at the beginning of verse 18, “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” Take heed Be careful. Watch out. The word that is used here implies “intent, earnest contemplation.”¹ Do not be a forgetful hearer of the word of God. Do not merely make a show of listening to the Word of God. Do not be like the multitude in verse 4 who heard Jesus teach but left without understanding. Be like the disciples in verse 9 and go to God humble and prayerfully and ask for understanding. Be a diligent student of the word of God. You cannot be fruitful in

¹ *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Heed, 1

the kingdom of God as Jesus described fruitfulness in v. 15 apart from the word of God. Therefore take heed how you hear.

Next, we see a promise in v. 18: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given.” Whoever has the word of God, whoever fits the description in verse 15, whoever, “hear[s] the word of God with an honest and pure heart, keep[s] it, and bring[s] forth fruit with patience,” to that person “shall be given.”

What will be given? More knowledge, more understanding, more insight into the Word of God. The longer you faithfully walk with the Lord the more you will learn about Him and His ways. The Christian life is not static. There is not a moment of salvation and then you just coast until you die. Like the seed which grows into maturity and bears fruit, so the word of God in the heart of a faithful hearer grows and bears fruit. “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given.”

There is also a warning here in verse 18. “Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.” Notice that someone can seem to have, yet have not. In the visible church there exists the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the bride and the harlot, those who are truly born-again and those who only appear to have the grace of God. Heed the warning of Paul in Philippians 2:12 “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

(Philippians 2:12) Listen the warning Christ gave in this verse: “Take heed therefore how ye hear [the word of God].”

To whom did Jesus give this instruction? Who first heard these words from Jesus? The disciples. If you and I had been present when Jesus first spoke these words we might be tempted to think it an unnecessary warning. Jesus was, as the saying goes, preaching to the choir. He was talking to the disciples. These were people who took his words seriously. These were people who had sacrificed tremendously to follow Jesus. These were the same people who went to Jesus in v. 9 and asked him, “What might this parable be?” Though it was still early on in the ministry of Jesus, this group certainly gave every appearance of being the “good soil” spoken of in v. 15 who “In an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

But we have the benefit of history. We know what happened. We know that not all who appeared to be true disciples were true believers. We know that Judas Iscariot would go on to betray Jesus. He looked a true disciple. He was trusted, so trusted that he was their treasurer. He was involved in ministry. He did many wonderful works in the name of Jesus. But in the end, he betrayed the Lord. It is possible to look like a true disciple, and yet fall away in the end. Heed the warning of verse 18: “Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”

From our text this morning we have seen, first, that the Word of God has been revealed. Then in verse 18 we saw that we are responsible for how we receive the word of God. We must take heed to how we hear. Jesus promised, “Whosoever

hath, to him shall be given.” But Jesus also warned, “whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”

As this text continues there is a shift in style. Verse 18 is the end of this portion where Jesus is teaching. Starting in v. 19 we have a narrative account from the life of Jesus. But in this narrative account we learn that those who hear the Word of God and do it are received by Jesus as his brethren.

III. These Are My Brethren (v. 19-21)

Let’s look at this account starting in verse 19. First, we read that some members of Jesus’ family were trying to come see him. Mary and Jesus’ half brothers had come to where Jesus was teaching at that time. But they could not get close to him because of the press, the crowd, that was around him. And notice that they came to see Jesus, not listen to him (v. 20). At this time His family had no desire to listen to the message He preached.

In Matthew’s parallel account we are told that they wanted to speak to Jesus. (Matthew 12) In Mark 3:21 we are told that it was the opinion of some who were close to Jesus that he was out of his mind, “beside himself.”²

They had no interest in hearing Jesus. They wanted to see him and talk to him. Maybe they wanted to try to talk him down from what they thought was

² KJV translates this verse with the word “friends.” It is an unusual phrase and literally means “the (ones) beside Him.” Some take it to be a reference to friends, associates, disciples, or family. It seems that family best fits the context.

madness. “Look at these crowds. You are going to attract the wrong sort of attention. You don’t want to stir up any trouble. Just come home.”

Or maybe, “You are pushing yourself too hard. You can’t go on like this. You can’t sustain it. It’s madness. You need to stop before you ruin your health.”

Maybe it was something else they wanted to say to Jesus on this occasion. We don’t know. They could not get close enough to speak to Jesus.

In verse 20 we read that someone brought word of this situation to Jesus. (read v. 20). They told Jesus, “Your family is outside and they want to see you.” Apparently Jesus was in a home or some other building at that time. And the crowd was so large that his family could not get inside to see him. Jesus was told that his family was outside, trying to see him, but look at what he said in v. 21.

First, it is important to point out that Jesus is not renouncing his earthly family. One of the last things Jesus did as he hung upon the cross was instruct John to care for Mary, his mother (John 19:26-27). Jesus is not commenting on the family here. The focus is still on the word of God. And we see in this verse the importance of the Word of God. Look at the high value Jesus places upon the word of God. “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God, and do it.”

Jesus valued his work as Messiah above any natural relation. And He expected this of his disciples as well. In Luke 14:26 Jesus said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren,

and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” In Matthew 10:38 Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” In Luke 9:59 a would-be follow of Jesus said, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”

And again, don't misunderstand what Jesus was teaching in all these passages. He was not minimizing the importance of family. Heaven forbid. The Bible is very clear on the importance of the family unit. Jesus was teaching that the gospel, the good news, the word of God, is more important than anything in this world, even those things which we value most.

And finally, we see in this verse the love Jesus has toward those who “hear the word of God and do it.” Jesus had been preaching the word. In Luke 8:1 we read that Jesus was “preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” In verses 5-8 Jesus gave the parable of the soils, and then in verses 11-15 he explained that parable to the disciples. And that parable is about the Word of God: how people receive and respond to the word of God. In verse 17 Jesus taught that the Word of God has been revealed. In verse 18 He gave a promise and a warning when He told His disciples to “take heed” how they listen to the word of God. And here in verse 21 Jesus said, “My mother and my brethren are these, which hear the word of God, and do it.”

It pleases God when we hear His word. God is pleased to have His word go out into the world. When we read the word of God, when we sit under faithful teaching and preaching of the word, when we listen to it, when we pray it, when we sing it, when we meditate upon it: this pleases God.

But it is not enough to simply hear the word of God. We must also do it. We must obey. True faith will always be followed by obedience. Be very careful on this point. Obedience does not lead to faith. There are no works associated with salvation. Salvation is the gracious gift of God. But when we are saved by the grace of God, He does a transforming work in our hearts and lives. There will be a new desire within us to walk in obedience to the word of God. We will not simply hear the word of God, but we will take heed, and we will apply it in our lives. We will walk in obedience to the revealed word of God. This does not mean that we will walk in perfection. But there will be a desire to obey. We might not win every fight against temptation, but we will be engaged in the conflict.

This entire passage in Luke 8 has one singular theme: The Word of God. And the application for us comes down to this: Don't be satisfied with simply hearing the word of God. Humble yourself in obedience before the word of God. And then you will hear Jesus say of you as he said of those true disciples who were present on this occasion, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it."