

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON 12th March 2023 am SERIES FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL "God's love for the lowest"

Part 12 "Take care how you hear"

Scripture references from the ESV

Luke 8:1-21 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them^[a] out of their means.

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^[b] 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."

We all have times when we struggle to listen. Someone is talking to us and we start to tune out and think about our response to what they are saying, or some other matter so we miss details of the conversation. Sometimes that doesn't matter, but it certainly does matter when it comes to issues of eternal life and eternal death.

Consequently, Jesus warns us to listen well, especially to his words as they are preached. He was on a mission (v1 above) to tell sinful people the good news that, through him, their sin can be forgiven, they can be brought into a relationship with the holy God and have everlasting life. To all who heard him that day, he said

Take care then how you hear (v18 above)

He who has ears to hear, let him hear (v8 above)

The way we listen to the preaching of Jesus matters, as do:

- The way we listen to sermons that teach us about Jesus
- The way we read our Bibles
- The way we engage with books about Jesus or listen in conversations to those who point us to Jesus

There are two ways in which we can hear. There is physical hearing, that we do with our ears. The second kind is spiritual hearing, which takes place in our heart and leads to transformation and eternal life, and to a relationship with Jesus. It is not enough to just hear with our physical ears. We need to hear with the ears of our hearts, so that we:

- Experience a true relationship with Jesus
- Receive the eternal life he offers
- Are changed and live fruitful lives

Parables (the word means 'to cast alongside') are a method of teaching something new by putting it alongside something familiar. The parable of the sower offered the familiarity of a farmer sowing seed alongside

the need to listen carefully to Jesus' words

Through this parable, we see the importance of listening well in two ways.

1. **The teaching of the parable.** Jesus teaches us that there are four ways of hearing.
 - a) **Careless hearing (v5, 11-12 above).** These people do not engage with the message being preached, but are thinking about other matters. The seed of God's word does

not even penetrate their physical ears, and they don't see any point in listening. Jesus warns that, in that moment, the devil is taking the seed of God's word away from them.

b) **Temporary hearing (v6, 13 above)** Jesus says of them: **'But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away'**.

c) **Distracted hearing (v7,14 above)** Jesus says of them: **as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.**

In both of these last two ways of listening, the person hears and makes a response, but it comes out of a desire to avoid hell or to have an easier life with all their problems resolved. A similar response might come from a child who wants to please their parents, and so makes some kind of commitment. However, the seed of God's word hasn't penetrated deeply perhaps because of

- the rocks of self-love in that person's heart. When following Jesus becomes hard, they give up
- a love for the world in their heart. The person wants Jesus because he offers eternal life, but they also want everything the world has to offer. The two cannot exist side by side.

There are many people who began well but ended badly. Having only a superficial faith, not a true saving faith, they gave up on Jesus when life did not turn out as they expected.

d) **Fruitful hearing (v8,15 above)**. These are the people whose hearts have been changed, and who hear not just with their physical ears, but also with their spiritual ears. Hence their lives are transformed.

We are shown an example in **vv1-3** (above). Those who were with Jesus and the twelve as they travelled **provided for them out of their means**. Jesus had become so precious to them that they were willing to financially support the preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God. Their lives had been transformed.

Jesus gives us the application from his parable (**v8** above):

He who has ears to hear, let him hear

He asks us how we listen to him as his word is being preached.

- Are you listening to him **carelessly** – not actually listening at all
 - Are you listening to him **temporarily or distractedly** – only after what Jesus can give you but not willing to carry on when it gets hard or doesn't work out as you expect
 - Are you listening to him **fruitfully**? Are you hearing not simply the preacher's words, but the words of Jesus? Do you really want to hear what Jesus has to say to you because you love him and want him to change your life?
2. **The response to the parable.** This is the second way the parable teaches the importance of listening well.

There are two responses to the teaching of Jesus.

- a) **The response of careless, temporary, distracted hearing.** This is how the crowds respond. All they heard was a story about a man sowing seed in his field. They had no interest in really understanding the parable and did not want to know what Jesus meant.
- b) **The response that leads to a fruitful life.** This is the response of the disciples and those who were following Jesus. They wanted to know the meaning of the parable and took seriously Jesus' command in **v8** (above).

They heard Jesus teaching about the kingdom and, realising there is more to this story than it might seem, they wanted to know more (**v9** above).

Which of these two is your response to the preaching of Jesus? It really does matter.

Jesus shows us that failing to hear rightly will lead to:

- **Loss of further understanding (vv16ff).** Jesus is the one who gives us light. He illuminates his own teaching as he did with this parable, and unless he gives light then we will never truly hear. If we are willing to really hear him, then he will give us more light on what he says. However, if we can't be bothered to hear him, then the understanding we think we have will be taken away from us (**v18** above).
- **Loss of relationship with Jesus (v21 above).** Kinship with Jesus is dependent on fruitfully hearing the message about the kingdom of God. That means not just hearing him but also obeying him.

- **Loss of eternal life** (vv12-13 above). The devil takes the message away so that those who hear cannot believe and be saved. Those who want Jesus **and** the world will eventually fall away from Christ.

How you listen to the words of Jesus, in whatever format, really matters.

It matters for the sake of your relationship with him, your transformation now and for your eternal life

How can we listen well? Jesus shows us that we need to love, ask and obey.

a) Love Christ from the heart. The first three soil types demonstrate

- A hard heart that the word of God can't penetrate
- A shallow heart, where the word of God may germinate but not put down deep roots
- A divided heart, where the word grows but is crowded out by other loves.

The fruit grew in a heart that was good and honest, a heart that loved Christ. We listen to those we love.

Unless your heart has been changed to love Christ, you will never listen rightly to Jesus. A changed heart needs a miracle of God's grace to break up the hard soil of a hard heart, to remove the rocks of self-love and to pull up the weeds of worldly love that crowd the word out.

- **If your heart is hard towards Jesus**, the devil will have been snatching away the message you could have heard. He does not want you to believe in Jesus and be saved. Prayers have been offered for you that God will break up the hard ground of your heart so that his word can penetrate it.
- **If your heart is like the stony and weedy soil**, then the call to you is to repent. You may have an intellectual understanding of Jesus but you are afraid of the cost of committing yourself to him, or perhaps love of the world is crowding Jesus out of your life. Turn to Jesus and ask him to do what is needed to change your heart.

We need to listen from a heart that loves Christ, otherwise we will never rightly hear.

b) Ask Jesus for understanding. The disciples did this (v9). Sometimes the message may not make sense to you, or you cannot work out the meaning of something in the Bible, but you want to understand it. Hearing is done in conversation with Christ, so we talk to Jesus in prayer about what we've heard with our ears. We

confess where it convicts us and ask him to plant his message deep in our heart and to give us more light.

Hearing that leads to an authentic relationship with Jesus, to a fruitful life and to eternal life is

hearing that asks Jesus what he means

c) **Obey Christ as he speaks** (v21 above). We are not just to hear but to do. Jesus expects us to obey his teaching. If we are not willing to do so, then we cannot expect to receive more light from him. We need to ask for the help of his Spirit to enable us to put into practice what he is asking us to do.

The path to hearing rightly is to love Christ, to ask him what he means and to obey what he says.

Over the recent weeks, what has Jesus been teaching you from God's word? Has there been a recurring theme recently in scripture reading, in songs or conversations with fellow believers?

God is always speaking to us, but we are often in too much of a hurry to hear. Take some time now to respond to him.

- You may need to confess your failure to put into practice what he has been teaching you
- You may need to ask him to help you understand what he means and what it looks like to obey.
- You will certainly need to ask him to give you an undivided heart that loves Christ above all things and so wants and is able to obey him.

Take care then how you hear