

Potomac Hills Community Church

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The Power to Hear

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke Luke 8:1-21

INTRODUCTION: *Just another teaching*¹

This morning we're at the beginning of Luke, chapter 8. We've seen Jesus do some amazing things. He's cast out demons. He's healed the sick and the lame. He's raised the dead. He's called the Apostles and taught the crowds.

But even amazing things get routine.

Especially for the Apostles.

I mean, they're with Him all the time.

Jesus has been traveling with His followers along the northern part of the Sea of Galilee, visiting the various towns and villages along the way.

Look at the first three verses ...

Luke 8:1-3, *“Not long afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby cities and villages to announce the Good News concerning the Kingdom of God. He took His twelve disciples with Him, [2] along with some women He had healed and from whom He had cast out evil spirits. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons; [3] Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and His disciples.”*

Now the people here have heard Jesus say some amazing things.

They've seen Him do even more amazing things.

With a touch of His hand, lepers become clean and whole.

With a word from His mouth, the blind have received sight ... the lame have walked ... and the deaf have heard.

And hey, after you've seen five miraculous healings, what's one more?

And casting out demons happens so often you don't pay attention anymore.

And there have been **so** many great teaching times to **so** many large crowds of people, you think you've heard it all.

But you haven't.

¹ Parts of this message have been adapted from Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, pages 146-150; Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. 1 by R. Kent Hughes, pages 285-293; and Just Like Jesus by Max Lucado, pages 41-55.

Jesus is outside Capernaum now, where a crowd has gathered on the shore. They flock around Him, eager and hopeful. And the crush of people is so great that the parallel passage in Mark 4 tells us that Jesus finally has to step into a beached rowboat and push out from shore.

Lining the shore in front of Him are His twelve Apostles. The sloping, crescent shoreline forms an open amphitheatre for the rest of the crowd. And so Jesus sits down in the bow of the boat, surrounded by the blue water of the Sea of Galilee.

And that's where we pick up the story again in verse 4 ...

Luke 8:4-8, *"One day Jesus told this story to a large crowd that had gathered from many towns to hear Him: [5] "A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds came and ate it. [6] Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. This seed began to grow, but soon it withered and died for lack of moisture. [7] Other seed fell among thorns that shot up and choked out the tender blades. [8] Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop one hundred times as much as had been planted." When He had said this, He called out, "Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!""*

The disciples have anticipated another message like the Sermon on the Mount. A well-crafted sermon with a few rustic illustrations for the common folk. A couple of insightful comments from the Old Testament for the scholars. Maybe a strong altar call at the end.

But when Jesus finishes speaking, the disciples are looking at each other for an explanation. And one by one they shrug their shoulders.

Because Jesus has told a simple story about a farmer casting His seeds about with mixed results. And He finishes with this perplexing statement ...

"Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!"

A cute story ... interesting statement ... but they don't have a **clue** what Jesus is talking about.

And to their credit, they ask Him.

Look at verse 9 ...

Luke 8:9-10, *"His disciples asked Him what the story meant. [10] He replied, "You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But I am using these stories [literally – 'parables'] to conceal everything about it from outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'They see what I do, but they don't really see; they hear what I say, but they don't understand.'"*

Now a parable is a kernel of spiritual truth surrounded by the husk of a down-to-earth story. In the parables about the Kingdom of God, the mysteries of the Kingdom are hidden in such a way so that sincere seekers will find the kernel of truth, while those who aren't sincerely listening will find only the husk.

But why obscure the message?

Why not make it as clear as possible so the greatest number of people can come into the Kingdom?

Well ... because Jesus has already given these people every opportunity to hear the truth about the Kingdom of God ... and by and large, they've rejected it.

When He healed a man on the Sabbath, they plotted to kill Him.

When He cast a demon out of a possessed man, they denounced Him.

Later on, the Pharisees try to persuade Jesus to perform another miracle to convince them.

They've seen **deaf** people hear ...

They've seen **blind** people see ...

They've seen **lame** people walk ...

They've seen **dead** people live ...

"But if we only had a miracle, Jesus, **then** we would believe."

And how does Jesus respond to this?

Look at **Matthew 12:38-41** ...

"One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove that you are from God." [39] But Jesus replied, "Only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40] For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. [41] The people of Nineveh will rise up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And now someone greater than Jonah is here—and you refuse to repent."

When the King is rejected, the offer of the Kingdom is withdrawn.

And there are lots of people here in this passage that are getting ready to reject the King. And Jesus knows this. He's not surprised by this. Because He knows people's hearts. He knew their hearts. And He knows our hearts.

And Jesus knows that hearts can be hard and rocky and full of weeds.

And He wants to be sure the disciples understand this, so He graciously answers their request and explains the parable.

We pick it up with verse 11 ...

Luke 8:11-15, *"This is the meaning of the story: The seed is God's message. [12] The seed that fell on the hard path represents those who hear the message, but then the Devil comes and steals it away and prevents them from believing and being saved. [13] The rocky soil represents those who hear the message with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. They believe for a while, but they wilt when the hot winds of testing blow. [14] The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the message, but all too quickly the message*

*is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity. [15] **But the good soil represents honest, good-hearted people who hear God's message, cling to it, and steadily produce a huge harvest.***"

In this parable, Jesus is describing the spiritual fields that make up the landscape of Northern Galilee. And in so doing, He is explaining to His disciples how He could spread the Good News of the Kingdom of God throughout the land and there be such a varied response to His message.

Because there's four kinds of soil, four kinds of people, four kinds of hearts.

- **Hard Hearts**

Throughout the valleys and hills of the northern coast, there were hearts impervious to the truth – the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees, for example, were trod down by tradition and packed hard by the proud feet of their own righteousness. They had heard straightforward teaching from Jesus that they rejected, and so ultimately, the truth would be taken away from them.

And there's a lot of people like that today. Their constant comings and goings and the incessant traffic of life have so hardened them that nothing in God's truth stirs them.

For many of these people, life is no more than a sports program and a beer, a checkout line tabloid and the beauty shop, or just driving around in the car. There may be no obvious sin, but there's no interest in the things of God and His Word either. Life is simply too crowded.

For others, they're just too sophisticated. They're not interested in God's Word because they don't believe that objective truth can be known. They worship the brilliance of technology and substitute it for God. They don't usually bother to pursue the logical end of their presuppositions. Their hearts are hard as nails and dulled of all feeling by the busyness of a barren life.

This ground needs to be broken up. Most often, the plowing that's needed is some pain or stress or trial to soften up the hardness of their life to the seed's of God's truth. That's how Grace came to many of us. Difficult things entered our lives which made us stop the heart-numbing pattern we had gotten locked into, and then the Word of God fell into the broken ground created by hardship and disappointment.

And then there are ...

- **Shallow Hearts**

There were hearts that embraced the truth, and sudden sprouts of spiritual life sprang up around the countryside like wildflowers. But with only a shallow commitment to the truth, their roots never grew very deep. And under the heat of testing, their faith withered.

In Israel, much of the land is a thin two- or three-inch veneer of soil over limestone. So the seed quickly sprouts, but when the sun keeps beating down and

the roots hit the limestone bedrock, the plants wither and die.

And there's lots of people like this too.

They appear to respond to Christ, but have a shallow emotional response that never really penetrates the heart. And so affliction brings rejection. Too many people have emotionally tasted something of God's power, but never really came to Christ wholeheartedly. You might call them "half-Christians."

Hermut Thielicke, one of the great minds of Christianity, has said, "There is nothing more cheering than transformed Christian people and there is nothing more disintegrating than people who have been merely "brushed" with Christianity. People who have been sown with a thousand seeds but in whose lives there is no depth and no roots. Therefore, when the first whirlwind comes along, they fall away. It is the half-Christians who always flop in the face of the first catastrophe, because their dry intellectualism and their superficial emotionalism can't stand the testing. And so even that which they think they have is taken away from them. ... A person who lets Jesus only halfway into his heart is far poorer than one who is 100% worldly."

Then there are ...

- **Infested Hearts**

Then there were hearts where the roots ran deep. They sent up sturdy stalks that survived the sun. But a few seeds of worldliness were overlooked, their creeping vines tolerated, and before long the life of that sturdy stalk became stunted and choked off by the vines and thorns.

Now Jesus explains that the thorns represent "life's worries, riches, and pleasures." This is a divided heart, torn between two irreconcilable loyalties. This heart makes gestures toward Christ, but "life's worries" draw it back and lure the soul away from Christ.

Like the business guy who not only embraced the truth but followed Jesus all over the hill country, asking questions, learning, helping out whenever he could. But finally he decided it was time to get back to business. After all, his customers were depending on him, his competitors were catching up with him, and his creditors were coming after him.

Besides, there was the mortgage on the vacation house, the new boat he wanted to buy, and the comfortable life on the beach that beckoned. And so slowly, imperceptibly, the vines won out.

Sometimes today, it's just the materialism of "Keeping up with the Joneses" – buying things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like. And **that** is dangerous to your soul.

And finally there are ...

- **Good Hearts**

Then there were those patches of ground that farmers live for. A few hearts

that were fertile and receptive to the truth, cleared of any obstacles to their commitment, weeded of any competing loves. And in these hearts, God's Word took hold, took root, and began to grow.

These are people who heard God's Word and obeyed it.

In other words, they did what God said.

Just to be sure the disciples are getting the point, Luke follows it up with two more short stories about Jesus' teaching ...

Luke 8:16-2, *"No one would light a lamp and then cover it up or put it under a bed. No, lamps are mounted in the open, where they can be seen by those entering the house. [17] For everything that is hidden or secret will eventually be brought to light and made plain to all. [18] So be sure to pay attention to what you hear. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But to those who are not listening, even what they think they have will be taken away from them."*

[19] Once when Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, they couldn't get to Him because of the crowds. [20] Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, and they want to see you."

[21] Jesus replied, "My mother and my brothers are all those who hear the message of God and obey it."

Jesus says that when you hear the Word and do it, you are like a lamp that lights the darkness. Then he goes on to say that His real family is made up of people **"who hear the message of God and obey it."**

Jesus is just trying to hammer home the point that there's lots of soils and lots of hearts, but only good soil and a good heart where the Word of God is living and active, where people are hearing and doing.

In each case in this parable, the productivity of the seed is dependent upon the receptivity of the soil. In essence, Jesus is saying that the condition of one's heart determines whether there is any receptivity to the truth.

And if the ratio in the story is significant, three-fourths of the world isn't listening to God very well. Whether the cause be hard hearts, shallow lives, or anxious minds, 75% of us are missing the message.

It's not that we don't have ears; it's that we just don't use them.

The Bible has always placed a great premium on hearing God voice. In fact, the great command from God through Moses in **Deuteronomy 6:4** begins with the words, **"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One."**

James 1:22-27 says, *"And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. [23] For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. [24] You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. [25] But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that*

sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. [26] If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. [27] Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.”

Herein lies a mystery.

Why would God confine the boundless power of heaven to a few seeds of haphazardly scattered truth, putting the hopes of a harvest of eternal life, into such uncertain soil as that of the human heart?

And an even bigger mystery!

Why would God put such a powerful message in the uncertain soil of **your** heart?

And then say to us, “***Go ... and tell ... what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.***

'God blesses those who are not offended by Me.' "

All those willing to hear should listen and understand and then say, “Amen.”