

Series: Parables: Did You Hear That?
Message Title: ***The Parable of the Audience***
Date: Sunday, August 12, 2018
Scripture: Luke 8:4-15
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Because of the set-up and arrangement of the auditorium where we meet, it would seem that what matters the most when we gather each week is what happens on the platform. The seats are arranged and eyes are directed toward the platform for screens, music, prayers, etc. Auditorium lights direct your attention to the platform.

But I want to change this orientation today and ask you to “rethink” what is happening in this room or wherever you may be when you hear or read this message.

If you stop and think about it, the number of people in the audience is much larger than the few who stand on the platform or the one who stands behind the podium.

For this reason, I want to help us learn a very vital and valuable truth regarding why

we gather, what we hear and what is really happening here.

We introduced a new series last Sunday entitled, *Did You Hear That?* One of the reasons for this title is found in our text today:

“And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to Him, He said in a parable, ‘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. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 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’” (Luke 8:4-8 ESV).

This is known as the *Parable of the Sower*, or better yet, the *Soils*! There are not many farmers in the room today, but most know enough from planting flower beds that some things thrive and other things die.

Do you have a “green thumb”? According to the *Old Farmer’s Almanac*, this phrase could have originated from one of two plausible sources. Its origin may be linked to the reign of King Edward I of England who enjoyed fresh green peas so much that he had half a dozen serfs working to keep him supplied. He gave a prize to the worker with the greenest thumb, presumably stained from hours of shelling. Or the phrase could reference hands stained by green algae as gardeners work with potted plants.

The real issue in gardening is not the thumb of the gardener, but the quality and condition of the soil that receives seed.

For this reason, Jesus used this very common picture to describe the audience—those who gathered and listened. He ended the story, this parable, with these words: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Did you hear that?

We said last week Jesus often used stories (parables) to teach and communicate spiritual truths. Some 40+ parables are recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but none are found in John.

The word, *parable*, means to *place beside* or *cast alongside*. A parable is a side by side truth! It can be contrast, contradiction or compliment. A parable is a simple word picture with a profound spiritual lesson.

Our story today is one found in all three gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke). One of the things that made the parable so valuable and vivid was the fact that wheat was a staple diet in the land of Israel. The very scene Jesus described in this moment could have been seen over His shoulder as He began to speak and deliver this message.

When a sower sows the field, all looks the same; it is a large, open area with seed scattered over a wide range of space. Yet Jesus takes this common picture and begins to describe what happens spiritually in the "field" with an audience when people like us meet and gather.

Let's examine the story and be sure we understand all the parts. In order to do this, let's not speculate. Jesus provides a explanation that is simple, clear and plain.



The Seed

In Luke 8:9-11, what is the seed? The Word of God. No speculation here.

The Bible describes the Word in many ways:

Light that shines, Psalm 119:105

Fire that consumes, Jeremiah 23:29a

Hammer that shatters, Jeremiah 23:29b

Bread that sustains, Matthew 4:4

Milk that nourishes, 1 Peter 2:2

Sword that pierces, Hebrew 4:12-13

Mirror that reveals, James 1:23

Seed that reproduces, 1 Peter 1:23

“Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23 ESV).

Can't help but wonder if Peter had this scene in mind as he penned these words of exhortation and encouragement.

This is why the pulpit (the teaching time) is central to everything we do. If this Book is not God's living, active and authoritative Word, we don't have anything to offer this world. Nothing! This is the revelation of God.

Soon after I arrived at Warren to be the Pastor of this church, we discussed and described the core values in our ministry. Under *Worship Through the Word* now listed on our website, you will find the following:

“Worship is the first activity of our church and affects everything we do. We believe all true worship is dependent on the knowledge of God. The Bible is the perfect revelation of God—who He is, what He does, and why He alone is worthy of all worship and praise. We don’t worship the God of our imagination, but God revealed in time, history and revelation through the Scriptures. Worship begins and ends with the Word of God reflected in music, prayer and teaching. We gather to confess and celebrate ‘God is worthy’ and depart to live ‘for His glory.’”

The Sower

See Luke 8:5. The seed is clear, but who is the Sower? Jesus. He is the one who came to be the Word of God in the body, even as the Scripture is the Word of God in the book!

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14 ESV).

Light and life are inseparable! God’s work is being done in this world through the active and abiding work of His Holy Spirit who He sent to indwell and empower the church.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8 ESV).

What are we to be in the power of the Holy Spirit? Broadcasters. The ancient sower did not dig holes and drop seeds like we might today. The sower would “broadcast” with a broad sweep of the hand over a wide area with the hope that some seeds would fall on good ground and bear fruit.

The work of God is done through those who scatter the seed of His Word in the world. God has sent you and me on a seed-sowing mission, and if we are unfruitful, it may be because we are unfaithful to the task.

The Soils

Note the plural reference because this is how Jesus told the story. There are four types of soils seen in this parable. But more than soils, here the Bible provides a mirror for us (an audience) to consider not just what we hear, but how we hear. Got your ears on?

• The Skeptical Hearer

See Luke 8:12. There was a problem with penetration. Here we have the description of good seed falling on hard ground —the hardened areas around the edges of a field. And the seed is snatched away. See Luke 8:5 (birds).

As much as I want to press and persuade in preaching and teaching God's Word, I am aware there are some whose hearts are hard. They are closed of mind and callous of heart.

See Ephesians 4:17-19.

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of

the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4 ESV).

There is nothing wrong with someone who has honest questions, and struggles with sincere doubts. Many have not grown up hearing and being exposed to God's Word, and this can all be a bit overwhelming. But when skepticism turns arrogant and cynical, there are some who use skepticism as a cloak of callous resistance and rebellious lifestyles toward God. They love their sin. They love their lifestyle. They disregard truth. They choose their "own way" and like Judas—who deceived by his presence—had no heart or part in the kingdom of God.

Warning: "As it is said, 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'" (Hebrews 3:15 ESV).

Just as God's Spirit is working in and through God's people to sow the Word, Satan is portrayed as seeking and working to snatch the seed. He works to antagonize and in an adversarial way, to snatch the seed and keep it from germinating.

• The Emotional Hearer

See Luke 8:13. The emotional hearer has a problem with continuation, preservation and retention. It is really hard to hang onto your emotions because they are ever changing.

The Middle East does not look like the area where we live. When the ground around us is exposed, we see red clay. But in the Middle East, there is limestone and it is all around the fields.

The seed lands in the soil on the rock, but the soil is so shallow that it cannot hold the moisture. The rock is so dense that the seed may sprout, but it quickly fades.

Emotional hearers are the opposite of the resistant hearers. Emotional hearers are all over the seed at the moment it comes, but emotions quickly dry up and they have no roots. When the heat of adversity or the presence of temptation comes—GONE!

Nothing can get deep into the heart of this hearer. My son's fifth grade Science Fair project demonstrated this. Sand provided a

great place for quick germination, but there was no sustained growth. The soil could not retain moisture nor did it have the nutrients of deeper soil for greater fruition.

“God never does His deepest work in the shallowest part of our being.”

• **The Casual Hearer**

See Luke 8:14. The casual hearer has a problem with distraction. Instead of going deep and growing up, there is a choking out of faith and fruit. Instead of treasuring the Word, they simply toy with it. The information is there, but it is just something to discuss, debate, etc., but not something to protect and to allow to produce the fruit of obedience.

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:21-22 ESV).

The last sentence takes us to...

• The Fruitful Hearer

See Luke 8:15. The fruitful hearer is a product of maturation. When a plant is healthy and grows, it will do what plants do—bear fruit. And this fruit will remain and be sustained over time due to the health of the root structure and resource that perpetuates and makes it productive.

The idea of “patience” at the end of this verse is not a plant that waits, but a tree that perpetuates! It is the idea of endurance.

“Perseverance with fruit is the necessary sign of genuine, saving trust in Christ. This is one of the key lessons of the whole parable: the mark of authentic faith is endurance. Jesus said, ‘If you abide in my Word, you are my disciples indeed.’ Temporary faith is not true faith at all.” —John MacArthur

Note the profitability (100-fold). The seed is small, but the return is large. I can’t help but rehearse Psalm 1:3 with you here:

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its

leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:3 ESV).

This is the life God creates in those who treasure and secure His word in their hearts—thriving, productive, beautiful and fruitful.

Lessons From the Parable of the Audience

- **O Be Careful Little Ears What You Hear**

Warning! Hearing God’s Word is not a casual or passive experience, and what happens with your ears can and will have a big impact on your heart.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23 ESV).

- **Prepare for Worship Before You Get to a Service of Worship**

There is a new feature on our app and website to help you to prepare.

- **Ask God to Help You Hear**

See Psalm 51:10; John 16:7-8; Ephesians 1:15-21.

- **Open a Bible and Take Notes**

I am told the United States Air Force did a study and found we forget 95% of what we hear within 72 hours. I have to admit, this is depressing as a pastor!

Treasure the Word! See Psalm 119:11. God's Word will direct you, protect you and make you wise.

- **Partner With Your Pastor in Preaching**

Beyond listening to the message, pray for those who are listening near you. If we believe this seed we are scattering is alive, then let's pray for it to be received and for response to be evident.

- **Always Ask, "What Now?"**

Most of the time when we say, "Amen," or "See you later," our thought and talk is "What's next?" But it is vital that we ask, "Lord, what now?"

Every service closes with a time of response and we pray for others to hear, receive and respond to the gospel, but that is not all. What about your response?

Is there a phone call to make or a note to write? Is there a place to serve? Is there a conversation to have? Is there a gift to be made? Is there a habit to address (time with God)? Is forgiveness needed?

• **Scatter the Seed With Confidence**

The seed is living and powerful; it brings forth life. Bear the seed with anticipation and confidence. Trust God with the soils. That is what I'm doing right now as I close.

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11 ESV).

Let's respond here, now, today!