

"He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear"

He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Jesus says that twice in this passage. He says that in other places in Scripture as well. Do you have ears to hear? Are you listening to Jesus? Are you obeying him? Are you heeding his Word which he has proclaimed himself, and even through his apostles and prophets?

Sadly, people often "hear" Jesus, without actually hearing him. The words might go in one ear and out the other. Sometimes people don't understand Jesus words, but think they do. Sometimes people do understand his words, but refuse to believe them. Sometimes people understand his words, and even know them to be true, yet they still reject them out of a willful disobedience. Do you have ears to hear? Jesus calls you to listen! To hear! To respond! He calls you to seek out his Word, learn it, apply it to your life, and live it out.

That's what we see Jesus doing in this passage, in parables. This passage teaches us a well known fact - that Jesus regularly taught in parables to the people. But look at what this passage says about Jesus' parables. It says that when Jesus teaches in parables, that there is an element of his teaching that is veiled for some and not veiled for others. As we'll see in verses 11-12, this is even intentional by Jesus. This can be a tough truth to grasp. And yet Jesus' words powerfully describe exactly what we see in reality - that when God's Word goes forth, some understand it and respond, and some do not. Jesus gives us a behind-the-scenes look at how he graciously reveals the mystery of the kingdom of God to some, intervening in their lives, while to some he allows them to remain in their hardness of heart. To some he allows the gospel to remain veiled, so that they remain in their rejection and rebellion against God. And so for some, Jesus words are words of grace and new life, and for some, they are words of judgment and damnation.

And so stay with me as we walk through this passage and look at this truth presented here by Jesus. As we look at this truth, we'll learn more about how parables function in Jesus' teaching, and we'll also be reminded of Christ's call to each of us to seek after him and his Word. We'll be reminded of the importance to not only audibly hear these parables by Jesus with our ears, but to wrestle with them in our hearts, to really grapple with them inwardly, that we might be changed by the power of Christ's Word in our lives.

And so our passage begins today with Jesus telling the parable of the sower in verses 1-9 to a great multitude. In this parable, Jesus talks of a man sowing seeds, and that as this man sows, there are seeds that fall into several different places. Some of the seed falls by the wayside, some on stony ground, and some among thorns. These three places prove to be unsuitable for the seed to grow and bear a crop. But some of the seed also falls on good ground, yielding a bountiful harvest. This is an important parable, and yet when Jesus finishes telling it, it doesn't seem that he explains it to the crowd. Instead, in verse 9, he finishes it by saying "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

And yet, we are privileged to receive Jesus explanation of this parable in verses 13-20. But that's not given to the multitude, it's given to the Twelve and a few other disciples who were with them. Look at verse 10. Later, when Jesus "was alone, those around him with the Twelve asked him about the parable." In other

words, his disciples had heard this parable and it left questions in their minds. They came to Jesus in order to get their questions answered.

This is an important thing to understand about parables - that they often leave questions in your mind. Some people point to Jesus' use of parables as an example of why we should use illustrations in our sermons. (Well, I do think illustrations are helpful in sermons, but I don't think Jesus' parables are the proof of that). Some people say, "See, Jesus used parables to help people better understand his message." Well, that is true, but only in one sense. You see, when Jesus told a parable, he was using an earthly example to describe a heavenly truth. As we see in verse 30, parables are a picture or comparison between something that we can relate to, with something unknown. Parables compare our human experiences with spiritual truths in order to help us understand these spiritual truths better. Parables can be vivid and very helpful in driving home a point. And so they certainly do help in our learning of truth. And yet, we have to recognize the other side of parables. That is, that they often leave questions in our minds. Typically parables spark the imagination and get us to ask questions about the meaning of the parable. Often these questions go unanswered in our minds, and beg for an interpretation. In other words, when Jesus tells a parable, there is often a way that he could say something more clearly. That's what we see in verses 13-20 where Jesus then explains the parable of the sower more clearly for his disciples.

And yet, we don't see Jesus typically explaining his parables to the crowds. According to verses 34, he regularly taught in parables to the crowds, but it was only with his disciples that he actually explained them. That is a big difference. Parables really lose a lot of their clarity in communication if they are not explained. As much as they can illustrate truth, if they are not explained, and their meaning is not correctly pursued, they can serve to veil the truth instead of clarifying it. Just think about today. How many times have you heard someone describe a parable with the craziest interpretation? Or sometimes people take a parable and just make it a mere moral lesson that is void of any greater eternal significance. This is despite the fact that Jesus' parables typically taught about the coming kingdom of God.

And so, there is a twofold sense of parables and their use. In one sense, parables can serve to veil truth, and in another sense they can serve to unveil truth. Both of these senses are revealed in this passage. Let's look first at how this passage shows how parables can veil the truth. Look at verse 11. Here Jesus explains his use of parables to the disciples. Jesus said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.'"

Jesus clearly acknowledges here that parables can veil truth to some people. He says that the truth in these parables is veiled to some, with the result that they won't truly perceive and understand the truth, even though they might hear the parable with their ears. So, to whom is the truth in a parable veiled? Jesus says that it to those who are "outside" (verse 11). Outsiders. Who are these "outsiders"? Well in one sense, we can say that the outsiders are those who do not respond to God's word. It is those people who have hardened their hearts against God and have rejected God's truth. Because of this, these "outsiders" are those people who are under the judgment and condemnation of God. So, that's one sense who the "outsiders" are. But of course that same definition could be applied to the followers of Jesus as well. Christians have also hardened their hearts against God. We too have rebelled against God. But the difference for Christians is that God has chosen to radically intervene in our lives. This is the doctrine of

election at work. God did not leave his chosen people in their sins but performed an intervention. He broke our hard hearts and gave us new ones. He made us alive spiritually. He made us born again. He made us "insiders" instead of "outsiders". That's what's so amazing about grace!

To help explain this distinction, Jesus quotes from the prophet Isaiah when he states how parables can veil truth to outsiders. That's where this quote comes from when he says, "Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them." It's from Isaiah 6:9-10. And if you look at the context of that quote from Isaiah, you'll find that this passage is when God is calling Isaiah to be his prophet to the people of Israel. God is telling Isaiah that part of his prophetic ministry will fall on deaf ears. God is telling Isaiah that though he will preach to the people, his preaching will be ignored, and the people will receive the judgment promised in the Old Covenant. God tells Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6 verse 11, that the result will be judgment on Israel, so that their cities will be laid waste and the people will be forsaken. And yet God then prophesies of a remnant of Israel that he will preserve, a holy seed that will persevere.

And so by quoting this passage from Isaiah, Jesus is acknowledging that his teaching in parables will fall on deaf ears to many. He is acknowledging that for some, his parables will stand as judgment against those people. Some will misunderstand them. Some will ignore them. Some will outright reject them. Yet, all who are "outsiders" are those who have repeatedly shown their rebellion against God, and their stumbling over these parables is just one result of that rebellion. And of course, this rebellion and rejection is exactly what we see in the gospels. Jesus teaching is rejected by those who are "outsiders," by those who are not God's chosen people. This led to the cross. This led to Jesus, the Son of God, the man who had come miraculously healing the sick and liberating the demon-possessed, this led to him being betrayed, beaten, and crucified. And so, to those who are "outside," the parables serve to veil the truth. They serve to announce impending judgment against them. Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" These outsiders should heed the call to seek out the truth in these parables, but instead they ignore and reject that call to hear.

But saints of God, take heart. These parables do not only serve to veil the truth, they also work to unveil the truth. That's what Jesus says in verse 21. He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus is talking about his ministry and message. Jesus has come to proclaim the word of the coming kingdom of God. That is what he is proclaiming in his parables. And in this picture of a lamp in verse 21, he is saying that this message is not being brought to be veiled but to be displayed! He uses the analogy of a lamp. You don't light a lamp just to hide it. If you hide a lit lamp, the light won't shine, so why light it? No, Jesus says. You light a lamp and put it on a lampstand so that its light will shine forth all the more. So this is an interesting contrast with what he said earlier. Earlier he talked about how parables veiled his words to those who are outsiders. Now he uses this analogy of the lamp to say how he has brought his words, not to be veiled, but to be proclaimed and heralded!

So how do Jesus' parables serve to unveil truth? Our text points out two ways. One, there is a sense in which some have ears to hear. Verses 9 and 23 both say that he who has ears to hear, let him hear. That idea is clarified in verse 11 when Jesus says to his disciples, that to them the mystery of the kingdom of God has been revealed. This is again the doctrine of election at work. In other

words, we see God working in his people's lives to enable them to rightly understand the parables. That is why whenever we study God's word, we pray that the Lord would open our hearts and minds to understand and receive his teachings. We recognize that we need God to work in us to help us to truly understand his teachings. We recognized that our depraved minds and hearts will not otherwise rightly respond to his teachings. We need Jesus to reveal to us the mystery of the kingdom.

A second way in which Jesus' parables serve to unveil truth is through Jesus explaining them to us. We see that Jesus explained the parable of the sower to the disciples. According to verse 34, he explained the parables regularly to them. The disciples would hear the parables that were given to the multitudes, and then in private Christ would explain to them the significance of the parables. Now, of course, Scripture has not recorded for us each of those explanations. But the gospels do give us commentary on Jesus ministry, and so does the rest of the New Testament. So Scripture offers for us insight into how to interpret the parables, so that their meaning would not be veiled to us. And again, that is why we pray that Christ's Spirit would open our minds and hearts that we would rightly understand and apply these parables to our lives. We rely on the Spirit to illumine our minds to understand the parables.

Think about the great love this shows that Christ has for his people. Though he taught the multitudes in parables, his disciples he would take aside and explain all things to them. If you are a Christian, you are his disciple. He continues to explain his words to his disciples. He does this through his Spirit which he sent to teach us his Word. He does this even through the shepherds that he has appointed to proclaim and explain his Word to his people. Christ cares for us his disciples and is continually revealing his truth to us through his Word.

So stop for a moment and think about what Jesus is saying here in this passage. One moment he is saying how parables veil the truth. Another moment he is saying how the parables can unveil the truth. Which is it? Is Jesus contradicting himself here? Certainly not! Rather, Jesus is describing how when God's Word goes forth, for some it serves to open their minds and hearts and bring them to Christ, and for others it serves as a judgment and testimony against their hardness of hearts.

This is actually what the parable of the sower is about. That's why Mark highlights this parable and records Jesus' explanation of it. Understanding the parable of the sower is crucial for understanding how all of Jesus' parables work. That's what Jesus himself says in verse 13 when he admonishes the disciples for not understanding the parable. Jesus says in verse 13, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" So Jesus is expressing the importance of understanding this parable in order to understand the other parables.

You see, the parable of the sower explains how Jesus words are received by people. We mentioned earlier that there were four different places the seed was sown: the wayside, the stony ground, the thorny ground, and the good ground. Jesus explains that the seed is his word, and that the four different places that the seed is sown represents different kinds of people. Essentially, the first three places represent people who are the outsiders, those who persist in their rebellion and unbelief. Though some of them may appear to have some faith for a time, they ultimately show themselves to not truly receive and understand the Word. There is no true fruit born from these people. These three groups of people are ultimately the ones whom the truth of God's word is veiled. The parables fall on deaf ears when they come to these people. For them, the very fact that they externally hear

the word but do not truly receive it internally, only serves as a testimony against them. They are like the seed that was sown that didn't take.

But the fourth group, those who receive the sown word as in good soil; this group are those people who truly receive and understand Christ's words. They understand the parables and apply them to their lives. These are true believers, people for whom God's word is not veiled. The parables have meaning for these people. By God's grace, they are enabled to understand the parables, and all of God's word, and respond to it in faith and repentance. The result is a bountiful harvest. The result is a crop. Of course, this crop is representative of God's blessings and his growth of Christian fruit in our lives.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, what do the parables and God's word mean to you? Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" If you believe in Jesus and his words to you, then you are those with ears to hear. If so, then Christ's parables do not serve to veil the truth to you, but to reveal it! But if you do not believe, then I call you to turn from your rebellion and come to Jesus. Pray that your ears would be opened to hear God's word. Pray that God's truth would not be far from you, but that you would seek after it and delight in it.

And that is exactly what God calls us to do today. Jesus' call for those with ears to hear, let him hear, is a command. It's an exhortation. It's an admonition. It's acknowledging that the parables have meaning that has to be searched out. You have to think about the meaning, you have to consider the message, you have to weigh it in your hearts and minds. You have to go to Jesus and ask for him to explain it to you. That's what we see the disciples doing. That's what we need to do ourselves. Parables, by their very nature, need to be explained; they need to be interpreted. Jesus is calling us to seek out their meaning.

And Jesus calls us to do that with all his truth. It doesn't take too much work to realize that there are all sorts of strange views out there about the Bible and about Jesus' teaching. But is every interpretation and every strange belief about Jesus correct? For example, can the same parable have different contradictory explanations? No. In our day and age, there is a postmodern love for relativism. The idea of absolute truth is a dying notion. People will read something and ask, what does it mean to you? Now, certainly, application of Scripture will speak to you personally and individually. But that doesn't mean that God's truth is relativistic. There are fundamental absolute truths in Scripture. There are right interpretations and wrong ones. We must seek out what God is intending to say in his Holy Word. We must do that with the parables. We must do that with all God's word. Just because we are fallible and sometimes error in our interpretations, doesn't mean we should continue to seek out the meaning of Scripture.

And so Jesus' call for those with ears to hear, let him hear, is a command to seek out the truth and meaning in Jesus' parables, and in all his teachings. But as we do, may we do so with great humility and reliance on God. Don't be proud of your personal growth as a Christian. Don't take pride in your understanding of God's word in the sense of giving credit to yourself for your great insights. Don't take pride in your ability to live out God's word in the sense of giving credit to yourself for your growth in godly living. No, give glory to God. As you grow in your knowledge and understanding of his word, praise him, for as we have seen today, it is God who intervenes in our lives to give us eyes to see and ears to hear. It is God who awakens us that we could read and understand his word. And it is God who softens our hearts so that we would respond to his Word; so that we would learn to delight in his commands, even when our old natures want to resist his words.

And have the same attitude when you outreach and evangelize. As you bring God's Word to the world, there too you must do so with great humility and reliance on God. Don't be proud, or even worse, arrogant, in how you reach out to others who are not Christians. Who are we to be arrogant when we ourselves have only understood and responded to God's Word because of his intervening grace in our lives? Who are we to think of ourselves better than someone else? We must be humble servants of God who recognize how much we have been forgiven. We must have that constantly before us. That doesn't mean that we ignore unbelief. It doesn't mean that we give approval to sin. It doesn't mean that we don't stand firm on the rightly interpreted word. It doesn't mean that we give audience to any and every crazy idea that people call an interpretation of Scripture. But it does mean that as we go to those around us with God's word, and seek to explain it to them, that we do so with an attitude of humility, compassion, and charity. We can be bold and zealous, while at the same time being humble and loving.

I would also like to direct you to another important exhortation by Jesus in this passage. Verses 24-25. "Then he said to them, 'Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.'" Jesus calls us to "take heed". Literally in the Greek, it is "See what you hear". We are to be looking at what we hear; we are to pay attention to it. We are carefully consider it. In other words, God's word brings responsibility. We need to not only listen and understand it, but we must also obey it. We must apply the word to our lives and then pour it out to others. We have been given the word not to just academically learn some truths about God. We have been entrusted with it. We must live it out ourselves and give it to others. We must shine forth the light of God's word just as Jesus shines his light as a lamp on a lampstand.

And he tells us that as we take heed to his words that we will be given more. Jesus again in verses 24-25 has two kinds of people in view. There are some who understand his words, and they will receive more of his words, and more of his blessings, and more growth. But there are some who do not understand his words; for them, even the blessings that they experience now will be taken away when he returns to judge the world. That is why Jesus tells us to take heed to what we hear. He is entrusting us with these words, and he has given them to us for a purpose - to bear fruit. Remember the parable of the sower. The good soil is the one where the sown word bears an abundant harvest. And yet, notice that not every seed has the same yield. For some the word bears thirty-fold. For some sixty-fold. For some a hundred-fold. Don't be content with the small yield when there is opportunity for you to bear a greater yield. For the Lord would have us to "take heed" to what we hear and strive for greater growth and fruit.

Lastly, let me end our message for today with some final encouragement. There are three parables in this passage about seeds and growth. In the parable of the sower, we see there is a sower. That sower is God. In the parable of the growing seed in verses 26-29, there is a man who scatter's seed, but doesn't know how the seed sprouts and grows. The growth comes from God. In the parable of the mustard seed in verses 30-32 the mustard seed is seen as something so tiny yet grows into something so amazing. That seed is described as the kingdom of God. God is behind all three of these parables. And all these three parables then encourage us that it is God who is at work to grow us as Christians. For if you are one who "hears;" if you are one who hears God's word, then praise God and give him the glory. For, it is God who has sown the seed in your heart. It is God who brings the growth in your life. It is God who brings you into his marvelous kingdom. It is God who brings the very kingdom power into your heart right now. Though the world might think God's kingdom is insignificant, like only a mustard seed, we know that it is

something far better. And we look forward to the final appearing of that kingdom. That day when the Great Lord of the Harvest will return to reap the fruit of his work. On that day, our crop and fruit will be complete. We will have bore the harvest of 30, 60, and 100 fold as Christ promised. And on that day, we will not take the credit. We will praise our glorious Lord and Savior, the Lord who sows, and grows, and reaps. And we will thank him for revealing the mystery of his kingdom to us. Isn't his grace amazing? All praise be to him! Amen!

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