**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**HEARING WITH EARS THAT HEAR**

**PART II**

**Luke 8:4-21**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 8. Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke called “Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt.”

I wonder if you’ve ever heard the statement, “A child’s mind is like a sponge.” A few weeks ago I was reading a bedtime story with my 2 year old son Martin. For those of you who know him, you’ll know that he’s pretty reserved with his words. He doesn’t talk much, not even at home.

So on this evening a few weeks ago, I sat down to read Martin a bedtime story. It was a book called “Steam Train, Dream Train”. Usually, he just selects a book from his book shelf and listens quietly as I read it to him. But that night, he picked the book, climbed into my lap, and began quoting it verbatim to me: “Through the darkness, clickety clack. Coming closer down the track. Hold your breath so you can hear. Huffing, chuffing, drawing near.” This continued for page after page, until he had quoted all 22 pages to me.

If a child’s mind is like a sponge, then I wonder why I cannot remember more of the sermons and Bible lessons I learned when I was a child. I grew up going to church every Sunday, attending Sunday school, and going to various VBS camps in the summer, but I cannot remember very much at all. I’m sure that some of those lessons and messages have impacted me on a subconscious level, but it’s a far cry from quoting pages and pages of “Stream Train, Dream Train”.

But as I entered early adulthood and began growing in my walk with the Lord, something changed. I started to remember sermons months and months after they had been preached. Scripture often came to mind on a day to day basis, and it wasn’t a chore to retain it. It was as if a switch had been flipped in my mind, and now I could finally begin to see the world through the lens of Scripture.

Can you relate to that? Was there a point in your life when the truths of Scripture seemed to be empty, irrelevant, and boring, only to suddenly be illuminated with beauty and power?

Why does that happen? Our text today is going to tell us the answer. Jesus is going to teach us about the connection between our ears and our hearts, between what we truly hear, and what we truly love.

This is Part II of a message I preached last Sunday called **Hearing with Ears that Hear**, which focused on the same parable we will be looking at today. Last Sunday we focused on the three kinds of soil that prevent us from hearing well. The seed of the Word of God is planted in those soils, but it never results in the change that it is meant to have in our lives. Today we will focus on the last kind of soil, the good soil that takes the seed of the Word of God and bears fruit with it.

Our outline is going to center around Jesus’ description of the good soil in verse 15. The good soil describes those who, hearing the word, “hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” We’re going to look at each of these elements of the good soil today:

1. …hold it fast…
2. …in an honest and good heart…
3. …and bear fruit with patience.

My aim today is to show you that **Careful Ear Work Comes from Careful Heart Work**.

(1) **...HOLD IT FAST…**

Let’s begin with an overview of the parable. Jesus tells the parable in verses 5-8: “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.’”

Jesus then explains the parable in verses 9-15. In verse 11, Jesus says that the seed is “the Word of God”. Since Jesus is the one who brings the Word of God, he must be the sower. Of course, the parable has important lessons for anyone who teaches the Word of God, whether it be a pastor preaching from a pulpit, or a faithful Christian teaching others about God, but ultimately it is about the *great* sower, Jesus himself.

Next, we have the soil. There are different kinds of soil, and each stands for different kinds of human hearts. We see that in verse 12, where Jesus says that the seeds sown along the path are snatched away when “the devil comes and takes away the word from their *hearts*”. We also see it in verse 15, where Jesus says that the good soil stands for the “honest and good *heart*” that holds fast to the word.

Then we come to the things that keep the seed of the Word of God from planting itself deep into the soil of our hearts. These are the birds, the rock under the soil, and the weeds. These are the things that snatch up, kill, and choke out the Word from our hearts so that it doesn’t bear fruit in our lives.

Jesus tells us in verse 12 that the birds stand for the devil. Since the seed falls along the path, “the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts”.

The rock stands for hardness of heart, which keeps the seed from growing roots. As we see in verse 13, these are the ones 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.”

The third enemy of the seed is the weeds. Jesus tells us in verse 14 that the weeds stand for “the cares and riches and pleasures of life”. These things choke out the seed, preventing its fruit from maturing.

Lastly, we get to the good soil in verse 15. The good soil stands for those who “hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

Notice how Jesus orders each of the three descriptions of the good soil to show us how each one counters each of the three enemies.

* The first description of the good soil is that it holds fast to the Word. The reason why that’s so important is that the devil wants to swoop in and snatch it away.
* The second description is that the good soil stands for “an honest and good heart”, which is the opposite of the rock-hard heart symbolized by the rocky soil.
* And lastly, Jesus says that the good soil “bears fruit with patience”, which is contrary to the seed that is not patient and does not bear fruit, but instead is choked out by the “cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

With all that said, let’s look at the first characteristic of the good soil from verse 15: “as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast”. If we are to hear well, if we are to be people who have ears to hear, then we must begin by holding fast to the Word.

We all know how easy it is to forget things. Every day, there’s at least one moment when I forget where I put something, whether it be my wallet, my keys, or my phone. Memory is a fickle thing. It can be selective, it can be vague, and it can be weak.

When it comes to the Word of God, however, we don’t just struggle with holding fast to it because our memories are weak. We struggle with holding fast to it because we have an enemy that labours to make us forget it.

Whenever you are taking in the Word, whether in the privacy of your room or in public on a Sunday, the devil is there, scheming and plotting so that you will not remember it. He does that by distracting you. He does that by making sure you only come to the Word when you’re exhausted. He does that by deceiving you into believing that holding fast to the Word is easy, so you don’t need to do anything to hold onto it other than listen to it.

The reality is that holding fast to the Word takes a lot of hard work. That’s why we have what we call the “spiritual disciplines”. We need to discipline ourselves for the purpose of growing in godliness, and that takes time, it takes wisdom, and it takes commitment.

I think one of the most important spiritual disciplines for the church today to rediscover is the discipline of Scripture memory. You can’t hold fast to the Word if you don’t remember it. If it’s going to make a practical difference in your day to day life, you need to be able to recall it, and the best way to do that is to memorize it.

About seven years ago, our church did a Scripture memory challenge where a bunch of us memorized various portions of Scripture. Some even memorized the entire book of Romans! 16 chapters and 433 verses. That was hard work. It took me 6 months of about 30 minutes of work every day, even though it wasn’t the first time I had done it. I did it a few years earlier as well while in university. Both times, it was well worth my time. Even now, years later, I still find many of the verses and passages of Romans encouraging me, correcting me, and equipping me to help others.

We need to memorize Scripture to hold fast to the Word of God. If you’ve never done it, or it’s been a while since you’ve done it, then just start small. As you’re doing your daily Bible reading, pick one or two verses that stand out to you, write them out on a cue card, and put the cue card in a little box or tin. Then, every day, before you start your devotions, take out 1-2 cue cards and rehearse them. I think you’ll find that reciting Scripture before you start your devotions will give you fresh faith as you start to pray and read. At the end of your devotions, add a new verse to your tin, and before you know it, you’ll have dozens of verses memorized.

(2) **…IN AN HONEST AND GOOD HEART…**

Holding fast to the Word begins with a commitment to the spiritual disciplines, but that’s not where it ends. If we only commit ourselves to the spiritual disciplines, then we actually enter dangerous territory. After all, no one was more committed to the spiritual disciplines than the Pharisees. They knew the Scriptures as well as anyone, and yet they were the seeds that fell along the path. The devil came and took away the word from their hearts, so that they would not believe and be saved. It’s not sufficient just to hold onto the Word. We need to hold onto the Word with the right heart. This leads to our second point: hold fast to the Word “in an honest and good heart”.

An “honest and good heart” is the opposite of the second kind of soil that fails to bear fruit: the rocky soil. The rocky soil stands for hardened hearts, the kinds of hearts that, though they receive the seed of God’s Word, they refuse to let the Word penetrate deeply within.

The Bible often talks about hardened hearts as referring to people who hear the Word of God, but they refuse to submit to it. The Word calls them to obey God, trust God, and love God, but they do none of it. The Bible uses the language of “hardened hearts” to show us that our main problem isn’t an intellectual problem. It’s a heart problem. Understanding the gospel isn’t the hard part. The hard part is truly *wanting* the gospel.

Whether a heart is hardened or not can be difficult to discern. After all, Jesus says in verse 13 that these people, when they hear the Word of God, “receive it with joy”. To human eyes, people with hardened hearts can look just like people with soft hearts.

But God doesn’t see with human eyes. He sees with divine eyes, eyes that gaze deep into our hearts. As 1 Samuel 16:7 says,

“For the LORD sees not as man sees: man look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

What can be done about a hardened heart? On one level, only God can soften our hearts. In Ezekiel 36:26, the Lord says:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

Changing a hardened heart begins with God. Only God can change a hardened sinner’s heart. He will change yours, if you put your faith in Christ. Believe that Jesus is the only Son of God who died on the cross to forgive the sins of all who trust in him. Believe that he rose from the dead, so that those who trust him could be raised to new life, a life lived in joyful relationship with God. When you believe, a miracle happens inside you. God does surgery in your soul, taking out your heart of stone and putting a heart of flesh in its place. This new heart no longer rejects God. Instead, it responds to him with faith, love, and obedience.

But here’s the thing: although God gives us a new heart, we still need to grow into that new heart. We live in the “already and not yet” age of history. God has already done everything he needed to do to save us through Christ, but the reality of his completed work is not yet fully realized. We are completely saved from the penalty and power of sin, but we still sin. We are completely saved from the tyranny of the devil, and yet he still tempts us and hurts us. We are completely saved from the sorrow of death, and yet, we still die. The work of our salvation is complete, and yet we are called to work out our salvation.

The same is true of our new hearts. God has taken away our hearts of stone and given us hearts of flesh, and yet we must still fight off hardness of heart so that we remain soft, receptive, and alive to his truth.

This is why we need to cultivate an “honest and good heart”. Though God has done the work of giving us an honest and good heart, he works with us to cultivate such a heart. What is an honest and good heart?

To find the answer, we need to look at verses 16-18: “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. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. 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.”

When you first read this text, the first thing that comes to mind is Jesus’ words in Matthew 5, when he uses the same imagery of a lamp on a stand and says, “You are the light of the world…let your light shine before others…”

In our text, however, he’s saying something different. He doesn’t say “You are the light of the world”. He doesn’t talk about our light shining for others to see. Instead, he warns us in verse 17 that this light will manifest the hidden things and make known the secret things.

In other words, Jesus is saying here in Luke that *he* is like a lamp that is put on a stand. Why? In order to illuminate the depths of our hearts and bring everything to light. The light of Christ shines so brightly, and penetrates so deeply, that nothing that is hidden in our hearts will not be made manifest, nor will anything secret not be known. All our hidden motivations will be revealed. All our secret thoughts will be exposed. They may be hidden from others, and even from us, but they will never be hidden from Jesus.

This is what we need to believe in order to cultivate an “honest and good heart”. To have an “honest and good heart” is to be free from deceit. Those who have such a heart don’t lie. They don’t lie to others, and they don’t lie to themselves. Every time we tell ourselves that our sin isn’t really that bad, or that our sin was another person’s fault, or that we’re not responsible for our sin, we’re lying to ourselves. And when we lie to ourselves, our hearts become less like the “honest and good heart” and more like the hardened hearts that reject God’s Word.

But Jesus already knows all your sin. There is no dark corner in your heart that Jesus cannot see. He is the light of the world, the sunrise who has visited us from on high, and his light illuminates all our sin and brings it to light. He sees all, even if you cannot. The good news is that, if you trust him, then he does not condemn you. If you believe that he died for every single one of your sins, past, present, and future, then he does not judge you. Your sins were already judged when he took the punishment that your sins deserved by dying on the cross in your place.

This is the key to cultivating an honest and good heart. We will only be honest with ourselves about our sin if we believe that Jesus knows all our sins already. We will come to the point where we have nothing to hide, because we know that nothing is truly hidden.

But if we are not honest with ourselves about our sin, and we continue to believe the lie that we can somehow cover up our sins and hide them from God, then our hearts will slowly harden until the Word of God no longer has any effect on us.

Jesus ends this instruction with a promise and a warning in verse 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.” If you receive the Word of God and hold fast to it in an honest and good heart, Jesus promises that he will sow more seed into your heart that will bear more and more fruit. But if you do not hold fast to it in an honest and good heart, Jesus warns you that even what you think you have will be taken away.

The stakes are high. We can’t afford to play around with how we hear the Word of God. We need to cultivate an honest and good heart by daily confronting our sins, believing that Jesus already knows them all. If we do, then our hearts will remain soft to the truth and power of God’s Word.

(3) **…AND BEAR FRUIT WITH PATIENCE**

Now we get to the best part, to what happens when the seed of the Word of God falls onto the good soil of honest and good hearts: it bears fruit with patience. This leads to our third point.

There’s two parts to this characteristic of the good soil: it “bears fruit”, and it does so with patience. The “bearing fruit” part of it isn’t so much a characteristic of the good soil as it is the result of good soil. “Bearing fruit” doesn’t describe the good soil. It describes what the good soil does. Jesus describes the fruitfulness of good soil to *assure* those who hold fast to the Word in an honest and good heart that they *will* bear fruit.

More than that, Jesus is assuring those with good soil that they will bear *much* fruit. In verse 8, Jesus says that the good soil “yielded a hundredfold”, which would have been the maximum yield for any seed-bearing plant that Jesus could have been referring to.

What is this fruit? To help us understand, we turn to the last part of our text in verses 19-21: “Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.’ But he answered them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’”

How does this relate to the parable of the sower? Like the rest of our text, this little story is also about what it means to hear the Word of God well:

* Verse 12: “The ones along the path are those who have *heard*…”
* Verse 13: says “And the ones on the rock are those who, when they *hear* the Word…”
* Verse 14: “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who *hear*…”
* Verse 15: “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, *hearing* the word…”
* Verse 18: “Take care then how you *hear*…”
* Verse 21: “My mother and my brothers are those who *hear* the word of God and do it.”

Out of all these verses, only verses 15 and 21 involve hearing that is accompanied by something positive. The hearing in verse 15 is accompanied by fruitfulness, and the hearing in verse 21 is accompanied by *doing* the Word of God. This shows us that the fruit of the Word is the doing of the Word.

Doing the Word is the sign that someone truly holds fast to the Word in an honest and good heart. Don’t misunderstand. Doing the Word doesn’t make us good soil. Doing the Word is the result of good soil. If we find that we are not doing the Word, and therefore not bearing any fruit, then the answer is not to work harder on our fruitfulness. The answer is to work harder on our hearts.

The same is true about what Jesus says about his mother and his brothers. If we find that we are not doing the Word, the answer is not to work harder to become part of God’s family. Doing the Word doesn’t make us part of his family. Doing the Word is the result of being part of his family.

What we need is to become part of God’s family, and then it’s only a matter of time that we will start obeying God’s Word. The only way to become part of God’s family is to hear the gospel and believe it. When you do, then God adopts you as his child. Just like that, you become sons and daughters of God, and you become brothers and sisters of Christ. Nothing more is required. Nothing more is necessary. Faith in Christ and him crucified is the only thing you need to be welcomed into God’s family.

But when you become a part of God’s family, God doesn’t just change your name. He changes who you are. As his sons and daughters, he makes you more and more like his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who obeyed and continues to obey his Father in perfect obedience. That’s ultimately what it means to *do* the Word of God. It’s becoming more like Jesus. As Romans 8:29 says,

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

This is the fruit that comes from holding fast to the Word of God in an honest and good heart. Becoming like Jesus is the hundredfold fruit that comes from a single seed.

But here’s the thing about fruitfulness: it takes time. The good soil is the soil that bears fruit with *patience*.

One of the reasons why the weeds come in and choke the plant so that it does not bear fruit is because we become impatient with our apparent lack of fruitfulness. We wait and wait for fruit in our own lives, and in the lives of those we are trying to serve, but it doesn’t ever seem to come. We keep struggling with the same sins. We don’t see our loved ones come to Christ. We don’t see our church growing. We keep working at it, labouring at it, praying for it, but at the end of the day, it still seems like there’s no fruit.

It’s in those times that we can be tempted to give up and give in. We give up on holding fast to the Word in an honest and good heart, and we give in to the pleasures of the world. We start looking for fruitfulness from the success of our careers, or we start looking for satisfaction in the temporary pleasures of this life. Before you know it, you’ve not only lost a desire for true fruitfulness. You’ve lost a desire for God himself, because the weeds of the world have taken up too much room in your heart.

Jesus is telling us today to not give up and give in. Why? Because the harvest is coming. The little seeds of the Word of God are ready to burst with a hundredfold yield. It may take months. It may take years. It may take your entire lifetime. But what is a lifetime compared to eternity? No one will be complaining to God that he took 80 years to bear fruit in and through our lives that will last forever. Instead, all we will have is praise and thanksgiving to the One who not only saved us, but used us to bear fruit for his glory.

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus has a question for all of us today: how are your ears? Are you hearing the Word, agreeing that it’s true and good, but you’re having a hard time seeing the difference it’s making in your life? Or are you hearing the Word like it’s going in one ear and out the other, and it’s not making it to your heart at all?

Jesus wants all of us to hear with ears that hear, and that starts not with our work, but with his work. We need him to soften our hearts. We need him to take our hearts of stone away and give us hearts of flesh, and he only does that when we trust in his life, death, and resurrection. It is through faith, and faith alone, that spiritually dead men and women are raised to life. But once we are raised, Jesus calls us to work on cultivating a good and honest heart, so that we remain soft to the precious truths of the gospel. How? By holding fast to the Word. By being honest with our sins. And by daily being reminded of the love that God showed us in the gospel.