



“Listen Up!”
Luke 8:4-15

Idea: The call of the Kingdom necessitates a willingness to believe and walk it its message.

Intro: “Can you hear me now?” This slogan was made famous by Verizon Wireless’s ad campaign from 2002-2011. Hey, is there anything more frustrating than your phone not being able to get a good signal? This past Wednesday when I landed at Dulles International, I did what nearly every other person on the plane did. I turned my phone on to check my messages and let my wife know we were on the ground. Unfortunately, like every other time I have flown through Dulles, the cell signal was terrible. There we were in the nation’s capital, and we could not get a quality signal. Obviously, this is a first-world issue, and it is definitely not a life-or-death situation. Yet, we do expect people to be able to hear when we call or receive the text being sent. It is frustrating.

We can also get frustrated when the people we are speaking too are not listening. This one is puzzling. How is it possible for a person who is setting in the same room with you to not hear a single word that you have said for the two minutes you were speaking? The person has ears and is within hearing range, so why was what you said not heard? The answer, perhaps, is best explained as “selective hearing.” The person, whether it is your spouse, child, or employee hears what he or she wants to hear. The sound waves emitted from your lips traveled and reached the person’s ears, but they were not received and heard because the person was not tuned in to them.

While someone not receiving your text or your child not hearing your order to empty the dishwasher will probably not result in a crisis, you do want to be heard because what you said was important. For this reason, we get frustrated. In the same way, but on a much greater level, God speaks and many times He is not heard. Failing to hear His Words, however, is a matter of life-or-death. Luke, as the good doctor that he was, shares with us in this next pericope how important it is to listen up and have ears that hear. Let’s look at the next stop on our journey through Luke’s gospel.

Read Luke 8:4-15.

Inquiry: This pericope, like the next two (vs. 16-21), relate to the theme of revelation and response. We saw in verse 1 that Jesus was traveling “*through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.*” As Jesus preached the gospel people responded in various ways. The parable of the soils explains the types of reactions made by those who heard Jesus.

As I traveled with the other members of our South Asia team last week, we witnessed various responses to our preaching of the gospel. We saw people who were hearing the message of Jesus for the first time believe and

repent of their sins, trusting Christ as Lord and Savior. We saw others decide to publicly identify with Jesus through baptism after they had heard the gospel shared multiple times. We also observed people who willingly wanted to profess faith in Jesus, while simultaneously also wanting to continue following their idols. They simply wanted to add Jesus to their list of gods they worshiped. Then, there were also some who openly rejected our preaching. They did not want to hear it or at least refused to believe it.

Jesus speaks to this issue in the parable before us. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The parable of the soils draws upon a rich agricultural image, which the Lord's audience would have understood. The parable reminds us that people will respond to the gospel in various ways. In it we also see that while there are various responses to the gospel, there is only one right way to respond. God's message of the kingdom graciously comes to us, but it necessitates a willingness to believe and walk in its message. We find here a call to listen up. Let's dig into this parable.

1. The Characters in the Parable (vs. 4-8)

There are three characters on display.

- Sower (vs. 5)
In the story, a man is holding a big bag tied to his waist. He is walking his field and rhythmically casting seed on the ground. The sower represents Christ and anyone else who proclaims and brings the good news of the kingdom of God to those who have yet to hear or believe. He or she casts it out that it might produce a crop.
- Seed
The sower "*went out to sow his seed.*" Within every seed there is almost infinite potential for life. When the sown seed finds the right conditions, it sprouts and produces life. The seed represents the Word of God (vs. 11), and the seed of the Word is mighty because it can sprout forth in eternal life.
- Soils
There are four soils in this parable. The first soil is that on the path. In the fields of Palestine there were paths that ran through the common field, separating the plots. The foot traffic hardened and compacted the soil. The second soil is rocky. In many parts of Israel there is a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of dirt. In this soil, seeds can sprout quickly because the soil is warm. The bedrock, however, prevents the young plant from sending roots down deep. So, when the sun gets hot, the shoot withers having no moisture because it has no root. The third soil is full of weeds. The dirt is deep enough to establish good rooting, but there is not enough room for the plant to grow upward and produce fruit. It is choked out by the surrounding weeds. Finally, the fourth soil is good soil. It is deep, fertile, and loose. In this soil, the seed can sprout, develop strong roots, grow up, and yield a crop.

These three characters work together to explain four different responses to the gospel.

2. The Concepts in the Parable (vs. 9-15)

Again, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. While there are three characters in the parable, the point is not for us to focus on the earthly picture. Instead, we are to focus on what they represent and convey. We are to see the heavenly picture, which in the parable of the soils is focused on how people respond to the gospel. There are four responses represented by the four soils.

- Calloused Response
The soil of the human heart that is calloused is hard and impenetrable. It is like the soil on the paths in the field that has been beaten down as hard as pavement by feet, hooves, and wheels. As the seed is

sown, some of it falls upon the path, and it bounces as it hits the ground. It does not and cannot sink down into the rich black earth. Instead, the seed is a prime target for the birds to feast upon (vs. 5). They swoop down and pick up the seeds.

These hard, beaten paths are emblematic of some people who hear the gospel. The busyness and challenges of life have so hardened them that nothing in God's Word stirs them. Many times, the hardest hearts reside in those who are sophisticated, educated, and wealthy. There is no interest at all in God's Word or the gospel because they "know better" or have no needs that cannot be met by their own means.

Jesus points out that the birds of the air represent the spiritual warfare that is happening in a person's life (vs. 12). The devil does all he can to weed out the seed of the gospel from a person's life. He understands that if the gospel seed ever were to take root, then everything would change. His hold would be broken, and the individual would be free and alive in Christ.

Just as seed is sown upon the hard path and finds no fertile soil, the person with a calloused response to the gospel hears the Word but he or she immediately allows the devil to snatch the gospel seed away. This person's heart is hard and is not a Christ-follower.

- **Crusty Response**

The soil of the human heart that is crusty is shallow and deceptive. Like the soil alongside the highways, the ground is shallow but warm, allowing the seed to sprout and grow quickly. Unfortunately, when the weather turns hot and dry, the plant quickly withers because it has no rooting.

The crusty response is indicative of the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the gospel (vs. 13). When difficulty or persecution comes, and they will come, the emotional hearer's interest fades, and he or she no longer desires to follow Jesus. While persecution and hardship can and do deepen the roots of a true believer, they only expose the crusty shallowness of the false believer. Like the calloused heart, the crusty heart is not a Christ-follower.

- **Crowded Response**

The soil of the human heart that is crowded is infested and distracted. The soil is deep enough for roots to grow deep, but there is not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded, and the fruit is choked (vs. 14). The cares, riches, and pleasures of the world are like weeds in a garden that prevent the soil from being fruitful.

Illustration: Last week, I had the opportunity to share with a few people in South Asia who seemed to like the message of the gospel. They even indicated that it was a message they believed. They were ready to put their faith in Jesus Christ. However, as I shared that believing on Jesus as Lord and Savior meant they would have to turn from their Hindu idols and serve only Jesus, they were disappointed. Following Jesus would mean things would change in their family structure. It would alter their community standing in the village. One lady refused to take off her Hindu necklace for fear of what her family would think. They were willing to follow Jesus as long as He could be placed right alongside all the other gods in their lives.

Today, a crowded response happens when a person hears the gospel's call to repent of sin but there is an unwillingness to leave a sinful lifestyle. It happens when there is no desire for Jesus to have first place in your life. Of the first three soils, this one is the closest one to genuine faith, but the crowded response is a half response. The person with a crowded response lets Jesus halfway into his or her life. This half-Christian has had an emotional response to God's Word and a temporary greening of the heart, but the cares and pleasures of the world will not allow fruit to be produced. There is an unwillingness to repent

and weed out the things that kill a harvest. Without fruit there is no transformation (Matt 7:15-20), so the crowded heart is not a Christ-follower.

- Capable Response

The soil of the human heart that is capable is rich and fertile. It is deep, loose, and spacious. When the seeds are sown on the capable soil, they do not bounce away or choked out. Instead, they are attached to the moist dirt and ready to be covered up for sprouting. This soil brings forth fruit, up to a hundredfold (7:8; Mark 4:8).

This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the gospel, understands it, receives it, and proves it by producing fruit through perseverance (vs. 15). The capable heart has shown fruit proving new life, so this is a Christ-follower.

3. The Call of the Parable (vs. 15)

This great parable gives us insight into what goes on with those who sit under the Word and who believe the gospel. It reveals to us how people will respond, and we see of the various responses there is one that is right and true. It is here that we discover the call of the parable.

- Hear the gospel.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. – Rom 10:17

Jesus calls us to hear what the Spirit is saying (vs. 8). Our ears need to be open and attentive. Our selective hearing should be tuned to His frequency.

- Believe in faith.

The call is to *“hold it fast in an honest and good heart.”* We want to agree with God about our sin, turn from it, and receive forgiveness. We dare not strive to have Jesus and the world.

- Bear fruit with perseverance.

The good soil produces fruit. Therefore, if there is no identifiable fruit, then there is likely no lasting, saving faith.

Conclusion: Can you hear me now? Maybe a better question is, “Are you listening now?” Do you have ears that hear God’s call to you?

As we consider the image of a field being seeded in this parable, it is best to recognize that seeding in Palestine generally preceded plowing. The seed was casted upon the ground, and it fell into all the different types of soils mentioned in the parable. After the seeding, the farmer would come back over the field with a plow and turn over the soil, breaking up the hard places, removing the weeds, and covering the seed with good soil.

Hardship and pain are often God’s graces He uses to plow calloused hearts. In South Asia this past week, I got to serve alongside a brother that came to Christ during our visit in 2019. His name is Runjeet. Jonathan and I shared with him in a village. He felt like a failure because he could not adequately provide for his family. So, he turned to alcohol, wasting his life away. He was a terrible husband and father. But when Runjeet believed the gospel and gave his life to Christ everything changed. This past week, I got to see with my own eyes the power of the gospel to change a life. Runjeet boldly declared the gospel in every house we visited. He has been the catalyst for the gospel moving within villages where they had previously had no success. The gospel seed that has sown by the sower found fertile ground within Runjeet’s heart. The hardships he faced plowed the ground and prepared him to listen. The gospel found capable soil. It sprouted, grew, and has resulted in lasting fruit.

As we consider the four soils and the four responses they represent in this parable, which soil does your heart represent today? If you have yet to turn from your sin and trust in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, then what is the condition of your heart? Is it calloused, crusty, crowded, or capable? I pray the Lord will give you ears that hear. I pray you will listen up and respond in faith and repentance. I pray you will hear the news the Bible wants to share.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?