

Come and Listen (A Sermon Series on the Parables of Jesus)

How Will You Hear?

Mark 4:1-9, 13-20

Text Introduction: A little boy attended Sunday School. He loved his teacher's stories. His teacher always said at the end of her story. "Now the moral of the story is . . ." as she gave the teaching point of the story. Then, he promoted up to the next class. Some weeks into his new class, his mother asked about his new class and new teacher. The little boy said, "She's got good enough stories, but she's got no morals."

Today, we are beginning a new series for the summer on the Parables of Jesus. Jesus was a master story teller. People of Jesus' day were not really any different from people of today in the sense that they related to stories. Jesus took these stories using the familiar things of every day life in the first century to capture the attention of His listeners. We should not be surprised that He often used the familiar imagery of farming, for example.

Hear the parable of the Sower and the Seed.

Text: Again he began to teach by the sea, and a very large crowd gathered around him. So he got into a boat on the sea and sat down, while the whole crowd was by the sea on the shore. ² He taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. ⁴ As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn't deep. ⁶ When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce fruit. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times." ⁹ Then he said, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

Then he said to them: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ Some are like the word sown on the path. When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them. ¹⁶ And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. ¹⁷ But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away. ¹⁸ Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

Introduction: I heard a story about a man who was about to send his son off into the world to study at a university. The man knew that there was the possibility that the son would encounter teachings that he had never heard. The father knew that there was the potential that his son's beliefs and moral compass would be under attack. He knew that one of the first things professors might attack would be the miracles of the Bible. Choosing the story of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish and the deliverance from that fish, the father warned, "Don't let them take Jonah out of your Bible." That was the father's way of saying, "Stay close to your roots. Stay close to the things you have learned and believed." With that caution, he sent his son to the university.

I think all of us who are parents worry to some degree about that very thing.

The word “parable” literally means “to throw beside.” Jesus, as He taught, threw a story alongside His teaching so as to make the teaching memorable and so that the teaching would have its greatest effect.

As Jesus taught on this particular day, he told a simple story about a sower, the seed, and the soil. Come and listen to Jesus’ story.

To get at the heart of this story, let me point you to three questions.

How will I receive God’s Word?

Some people might assume that this is a story about Gospel advance, and that might be partially true, but it is more a story for us as to how we will respond to God’s Word.

People receive the Word of God with one of four different hearts.

- Stony

When ground is hard, the seed just bounces. The seed never takes root. Some hearts are like that.

- Shallow

Other hearts are like the seeds that fell in a place where the ground did not allow the seed to grow deep.

- Suffocating

This is common soil for our day. The worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires of other things choke out the word. Entertainment, sports, work all do that today.

- Surrendered

But then, there is good soil.

How will I respond to God’s Word?

The way that you receive determines the way that you will respond. There is only one way to really hear God’s Word—with a surrendered heart. Look at each phrase of verse 20—hear, welcome, and produce! Do you welcome God’s Word? This is Your Word, O Lord. That should be the end really of our debate.

James is helpful here.

²¹ Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:21-25)

What will be the result of receiving God's Word?

The result will be determined by the response. Fruit is produced when we receive properly God's Word.

So what?

- **Get into God's Word.**
- **Guard your heart.**
- **Gauge by obedience.**

Am I willing to examine my heart?

Am I willing to examine my fruit?

Am I willing to surrender my life to Him?

Remember the young man I told you about in the beginning. Upon completion of his degree and further post-graduate study, the son returned home for a brief visit. Thinking about his prior admonitions the father asked, "Son, Is Jonah still in your Bible?" Mockingly, the son answered no and added that it was not in his father's Bible either. The father, anxious to prove his son wrong, turned the pages and to his horror discovered that someone had cut the pages of Jonah clean out of his Bible. The son confessed that eight years ago, before leaving for college, he had been the one who had put the scissors to his father's Bible. The son asked his father, "What's the difference in liberal education taking Jonah out of my Bible and neglect taking Jonah away from you?"

Then Jesus said, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."

There is only one way to hear—with a surrendered heart. How will you hear?