

Luke 8:1-21

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Preacher: Tim Foster

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, take a seat. It is great to see how well filled the church is this morning and I just want to reiterate the welcome that Paul has already given to each one of you.

I'm Tim, I'm one of the interns here and it's my pleasure to bring the word to you this morning. We're in Luke chapter 8. If you have a pew Bible somewhere within reach, go and look for it and grab it and we'll read it in just a couple of seconds. But to begin with, I wonder if we could just start by thinking, because it's very easy for us, humans with our limited attention spans, it's very easy for us to be in attendance but to not pay attention. It's probably most easiest seen in children, isn't it? Where they will be unashamedly distracted while their teachers or their parents try to tell them something of worth. But at the same time, I very much doubt that any one of us have been here this morning and that we have paid full honesty, full attention. Maybe our minds have drifted to whether we locked the door or put on the right temperature of oven. Or maybe we have some situation mulling in our mind. But whatever it is, I'm sure this morning each one of us have not listened to some degree or another. I'm not saying that in any way to shame or to show up and maybe in reality I'm only betraying my own lack of attention on some Sundays. But as we come to hear the word of God this morning, we're going to hear a resounding call to listen, to pay attention to the words of Christ. And at this point, just before we come and read his word, let's pray together and let's ask that he would help us to hear that none of us would leave this morning saying there was nothing for me there. So let's pray together just before we read from Luke chapter 8.

Father, you are so gracious to us in so many ways that you have given us your word at all. It is such an incredible blessing and that we have it in our language, that we are able to read your word to us, that you ever reached out to speak to us. And Father, this morning I pray that you would enliven our hearts to listen, that you would help us to hear all the treasures that you have to speak to us, and that this morning we would be completely sure of what you have said, and that we will take action and go and do all that you have told us to do, even this morning. Father, we need your help, we need your spirit within us, and so we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Luke chapter 8, I'm starting in verse 1.

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases.

Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna, the wife of Chusa, the manager of Herod's household, Susanna, and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. While a large crowd was gathering, and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable. A farmer went out to sow seed, and as he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path. It was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns which grew up with it, and choked the plants. Still others fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop a hundred times more than was sown. When he said this, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to others I speak in parables, so that though seeing they may not see, and though hearing they may not understand. The meaning of the parable, this is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing, they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand so that those who come in can see the light.

[6 : 53] For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore, consider carefully how you listen.

Whoever has will be given more. Whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.

Now, Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see you.

He replied, my mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. That's where we'll stop our reading this morning.

And I think as we come to this passage, and it's quite a passage, isn't it? I think the theme that runs through the whole section are these words, are you listening to me?

[8 : 07] Fellow husbands, I'm new to this. I'm only four months into this. Fellow husbands, do these words cause fear and trembling when you hear them? Are you listening to me?

Perhaps you've been scrolling through something on the web, and the non-committal aha has just come at the wrong time. I think recently there was an occasion where the last question was, you're not even listening to me, are you?

To which I dumbly said, aha, and the game was up. Perhaps our attempts to surprise the other half only succeed to demonstrate the lack of attention we paid when some crucial detail was being explained.

Or perhaps we remember back to childhood when we were asked if we were listening, and to be honest, our minds had long since slipped into something else.

But the new task was given in an urgent manner. And in none of these cases is the right response to then verbatim say back the conversation.

[9 : 20] Are you listening to me? Yes, the last three things you said were, could you put the laundry out? Could you wash the dishes? That's not what they want to hear.

That's not what they want to experience. The correct response is to get up from your distraction and to do what is asked of you.

The aim of listening to one's spouse or one's parents is almost never meant to be a mere exercise in information. Far more often, listening is part of a loving relationship.

And that relationship is then displayed through loving actions based upon what has been heard. This morning our passage contains parables that challenge us to listen.

And it also contains people who challenge us to listen. And that's kind of where we're going from here on out. Firstly, the parables that challenge us to listen.

[10 : 28] We come to this incredibly familiar parable, even more familiar to us because we've already had it explained to us by Peter and the children. The parable of the sower or the parable of the soils.

And this story is incredibly simple, isn't it? Jesus doesn't have to tell some 400 page masterpiece of literature to make his point. A sower goes out to sow some seed.

And without the modern aids of a tractor or one pass sowing system, he begins to scatter this seed all over his land. And as he sows, we see four cases, four options of what happens to the seed.

Jesus explains in verses 14 to 15 how this parable works. He tells us that the seed in the parable is the word of God.

And as we read through, we discover that the different soils are like different people. And in each case, how the seed and the soil interacts.

[11 : 37] That is how God's word interacts with different people produces massively differing results. This is one of the incredible truths that we can learn from this parable.

Different people prepared in different ways will respond differently to God's word. Some will outright reject. Others will accept it.

But as many of us know all too well, it's not quite that simple. Some will then fall away. Others will never quite seem to get to the end goal with it.

But thankfully, others will accept it. And will believe it. And will hold on to it. And will be fruitful. On one hand, you could read this parable and question the wisdom of the sower, couldn't you?

Why is he so reckless with the seed? Why so much is seemingly wasted? Why is the ground not properly prepared? Why is it? Why is the seed?

[12 : 43] Why is he so reckless with the seed? Why is the seed that finds good soil is incredibly productive? If farmers could get a hundred yield from seed, they would give their left arm.

a hundredfold returns is extraordinary and the seed must go far and wide to find these patches of good soil the plan of God this plan of God to raise a harvest by scattering the word of God globally is not in vain as is shown by 2,000 years of church history the gospel will go forth and it will go on bearing fruit even as it has across the face of this earth but on the other hand many of us perhaps come to this parable with heavier hearts and we have real challenging questions why does my wife why does my husband not get this why do my children never seem to quite make the connections why do my co-workers not understand the gospel why do my classmates not hear what I'm trying to say to them and our heavy hearts they're not wrong these are hard situations and there's nothing that I can bring out from this parable which will make those circumstances easier but this does explain why these situations exist and it does graciously liberate us from the notion that we are in control to save people it reminds us that we have one job we are to be many seed sowers and after that the sower has no direct influence on what happens with that seed people respond to the word of God not based on how well or clever we present the gospel but dependent on the state of their hearts towards the word of God and maybe we would prefer to have a bigger role maybe you are desperately struggling with God because there are loved ones who have not yet accepted the good news about Jesus don't give up keep on speaking about Jesus keep on sowing keep on praying to God to soften that heart to clear away those weeds to enable the seed of the gospel to grow powerfully but do not give yourself the heartache of taking upon yourself the task of saving a soul that is a work too great for any of us to bear and these are hard questions and they're the questions that instantly come to us when we come to this parable but these aren't primarily what Jesus is teaching through this parable this is a parable that turns the lens not to our unsaved friends families and people around us but this is a parable challenging us to listen notice verse 8 the summons for all who hear to pay attention to what has been said it happens again in verse 18 at the summary of the explanation take care then how you hear the whole point of this passage the parable of the soils as well as the parable of the lamp is that we would examine our own hearts not just the hearts of our neighbours and colleagues

this parable is a tool for self-diagnosis and so we must be very frank with ourselves this morning are we listening are we hearing are we paying attention to the word of God and putting it to action in our lives perhaps as we think about how we currently interact with God's word we find that we are far more like the soil beset by weeds rather than the good soil which will be fruitful maybe tension at home or stress at work worries about money maybe all these things are crowding in and strangling our devotional lives maybe some of us are young in the faith new Christians and we're only now starting to feel the struggles and trials that are part and parcel of the Christian life are those trials going to scorch you are they going to dry you out and leave you weathered young Christian or are your roots going deep have you invested in your walk with God so that you are now able to thrive even in the hard times and perhaps there's even some of us who have grown hard to the word of God we read and we listen week by week and yet nothing really impacts us anymore and it's very quickly gone from our minds and it's a sad reality that could be true for so many of us here this morning and these are realities that we must face up to not quietly excuse or politely ignore because regardless of how we evaluate ourselves the truth will become self-evident maybe not today and probably not tomorrow but only one of the soils bore a crop from the implanted seed and likewise only one response to the word of God will bear fruit you see it in verse 15 don't we the good soil they hear the word just like all of the other people and situations that we've met so far but they have a good heart what does that look like is that just a genetic reality

I mean what makes their heart good well the answer is right there what makes their heart good is that they hold on to the word firmly they retain what they have heard they dwell upon that seed and fruit is born through patience I noticed and I couldn't help noticing how one of the children answered the question what happened to the seed on the good ground perhaps you noticed it as well the seed fell and it grew and nothing bad happened to it that's how we often think of it isn't it we have this unrealistic ideal I'll become a Christian and everything will be good from then on but this isn't an unrealistic ideal this can be a reality in our lives to have hearts that love God's word and then that patiently bear fruit because of it the same sun will come the same lack of rain will come to this seed as to the one in the rock as to all the others but this one has what it needs to survive this is the goal to strive for so what are we to do maybe we maybe many of us need to come to God afresh this morning we realise that our lives are not matching up to what we would want perhaps we're in some dire need of weeding and ploughing without which we cannot be fruitful

Christians it's interesting I came off a farm and it wasn't an arable farm but there were plenty of those around and weeding and ploughing are never pleasant exercises neither are painless at the time but both are for the good of the soil and both will ultimately be for the good of the harvest so we have this first parable challenging us to listen the parable of the soils the other little parable here is perhaps harder to understand and it's much less dealt with but if we see here that it's a continuation of the explanation to the previous it becomes just that little bit easier Jesus has just explained that we need to take care in how we listen to God's word and in this case it's his word and now he goes on to say that we ought to put a lamp in its proper place

[22 : 40] Jesus loves to mix his metaphors but I think as we look at it the seed and the lamp are the same talking about the same thing so having accepted the word of God we're not to cover it or to conceal it or to hide it but instead we should make it prominent so that it may reveal everything going on around it this lamp of God's word is meant to be in the highest place so that the light will shine into every dark corner of the room and maybe this parable is what's going to show us where we're going wrong maybe just maybe some of us are being exposed to the truth of the gospel but as soon as that lamp is lit it starts to shine into the darkness of our hearts and it starts to expose depths of unpleasantness that we'd never seen before it's quite possible that as we begin to see the truth of the gospel that light will shine into our lives and we will see that there is stuff there that we have hidden for years unexposed sin and our instant response to that is to attempt to cover it and to hide it and to extinguish the lamp but Jesus reminds us that nothing will remain hidden forever no sin will go eternally unexposed at the end of time we will stand before

God and all will be shown clearly there will be no excuses and there will be no cover-ups and so we're called again to carefully consider how we listen to Jesus words to pay attention and to remember the importance these words hold words that will never cease to be relevant the warning is compounded with this final statement in verse 18 read it there that those who have will gain more and that those who do not have will lose everything that they thought they had Jesus is imploring us not to waste the opportunity to listen to God's word and to lose everything because of our carelessness but rather to pay close attention to the truth of God's word and be rewarded at the end with great gain we have these two parables a clear call to hear the word and to put it into practice but very quickly what about the rest of the passage it's full of people who challenge us to listen at the start there you'll have noticed that Luke introduces us to those who are traveling with him and we find these twelve disciples that we've met many times before but we're first introduced to these interesting group of women who are with

Jesus there's three mentioned in particular and we know little or nothing about each one of them Mary Magdalene goes on to become a witness to the resurrection and to the crucifixion and she's experienced incredible healing through Jesus ministry Joanna is this lady married to one of the top civil servants in the region and yet here she is instead of enjoying her nice comfortable middle class home she's out and about with this odd bunch of disciples and their rabbi and then we get Susanna of whom we know absolutely nothing and a group of others who are all contributing to the ministry why on earth is this here why does Luke even mention these women I think the most logical answer is that these are some of the people Luke has interviewed remember that Luke when he was building his gospel didn't just go to one person he did his research he was a historian and he went and interviewed people and it's likely that these ladies are those who are still able to verify what went on 20 or 30 years earlier these are the witnesses to what

Jesus taught and what Jesus did and why does he mention them here because I think they're an example of what Jesus is just about to teach what we've just heard him teach that these three women and the others are people who are following because they've been transformed by the word of God in their lives whether from demonic possession or from a life of middle class domestic bliss or from utter obscurity these women are examples of people who are good soil who have put the lamp of God's word in its most prominent place in their lives so that all who come into contact with them will hear and see the good news of Jesus Christ at the end of the passage we have this other curious story about Jesus family coming to find him and Jesus response is sometimes read as kind of a curt dismissal of his family but let me ask a question or two here we've just seen all these ladies who are travelling far from their homes to be with Jesus why isn't

Jesus' family with him I wonder why is this house packed out with people but his family aren't making up the numbers I wonder where they land at this stage in the soils that Jesus has just been talking about and rather than thinking that Jesus is dismissing his natural family here look at what he's actually doing he's opening the doors of his family or opening the arms of his family to everyone and to anyone who would heed the word of God if we're Christians here this morning we still benefit from that to millennia later that we who are those who hear and do God's word are accepted into his family that's incredible the third and final group is the disciples notice what's said in verses 9 and 10 they've come and they've heard this parable and they're unsure they're confused so like us but Jesus teaches them an incredible little lesson right in the middle here to them these ragtag bunch of fishermen and outcasts to them the secrets of the kingdom are given not to the social elite not to the academic theologians but to these men who have encountered the word of God and who are being radically transformed from a random collection of men into the initial team through which

[31 : 05] God will bring his saving word to every corner of the world as we've gathered here this morning we have been given the secrets of the kingdom of God plain as day written in English bound in a book we have this incredible opportunity to hear how God's kingdom works and operates and we've heard these incredible truths and so here's the challenge of the disciples to us we've heard the word now what are we going to do with it are we too busy and too distracted or are we going to say yes I am listening and I am going to put this in the right place in my life and do what it says to me today we