

Deep Listening

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[0 : 00] So, now we have our second reading, this time from the New Testament and from Luke's Gospel. Luke chapter 8, verses 1 to 21. After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

And 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 his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and 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, other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop a hundred times more than was sown.

[1 : 17] 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, 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 and retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

[2 : 28] 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. 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. Good to be with you. Whether you're here in person or if you're in the live stream, my name's Neil McMillan. I'm the minister here at Cornerstone. We're going to take time now to look together at a passage that was read by Jeff. It's in the Gospel of Luke and Chapter 8.

[3 : 35] If you've got a phone on your Bible or a Bible in your pocket or whatever, then you might want to follow along from time to time. I come from ancient times.

In fact, I'm so old that when I was a little boy, there was no internet. And you couldn't stream movies. You couldn't just download a program and watch it.

And so when I was, I don't know, maybe 8 or 9 or 10, there was an amazing invention called the videotape. And a videotape, you had to buy a machine, you got a big tape, you stuck it in the front of the machine, you plugged it into your telly, and it would play a movie for you.

That was an incredibly exciting invention. And then about 10 years later, they came up with something else called DVDs. And that was just a little disc you put into another machine that went

into the front of your TV.

And I have to say, when DVDs came along, I was like, they're rubbish. You know, like, VHS, you can't beat a good old videotape. It took me a long time to get used to the change.

[4 : 44] And that's the way we are as people. Often we don't actually really like things to change. We get used to things a certain way. We like doing things the way we've always done them.

We don't really like new stuff. You know, like even getting a new teacher at school or a new class. Or, you know, sometimes we just don't want things to change because we like it the way it is. And Jesus came saying a lot of new things and doing things in new ways. And most people didn't really like that.

Most people were like, I'm not sure about Jesus. They were quite skeptical. And if the Bible's new to you, if the message of Jesus is quite new for you, if Christianity's quite new to you, then you might be finding this sort of quite tricky, you know, to work out, is this something that is good?

Something that I really like? Something that I really want? Do I want this change in my life? And the change that Jesus brings is not the change we expect.

[5 : 59] I mean, if you know about Christianity to any extent, you'll know that it's a message of salvation and forgiveness. And that Jesus came and died on the cross and rose again so that we could have our sin forgiven.

And so that's a really core, clear, simple message about who Jesus is and why He came. But that's just the beginning.

Because not only does Jesus bring forgiveness and salvation, but when we come to faith in Jesus, when we trust Him as our Savior, He becomes our King.

And a lot of the message of the Gospel of Luke is about Jesus as our King. And Luke is trying to help us to understand that Jesus' kingdom is the best kingdom.

That He's planting a kingdom into this world that will bring the power of God to heal every kind of brokenness in this world.

[7 : 09] Social, racial, economic, psychological, and spiritual brokenness will be healed by the coming kingdom of Jesus.

And from the life of Jesus, His kingdom grows and grows and grows until one day everything in God's new creation will be healed and made new.

And when Jesus is our King, we begin to be healed. And through us, God will begin to heal other people. And so Luke is painting a picture of Jesus where bit by bit, He's just sort of slowly creating a sketch or a picture and He's filling in more details as you turn the pages to help us to see what Jesus is really like and who He really is.

He's showing us a picture of something new that we didn't really expect. And we're not sure if we want it, maybe. And so alongside of that, He's also page by page sort of sketching pictures of how people react to Jesus and His kingdom.

And some people really want to be part of that and are excited by it. Other people are quite hostile. And so here in Luke chapter 8, we've got three stories of a man sowing seed, of a light in the middle of a house, and then a story about Jesus' mothers and brothers coming to see Him.

[8 : 47] And all of these stories are told to help us to think about how we're responding. As we see more of who Jesus is and His kingdom, then Jesus starts to ask us, well, what's your reaction?

What's your response? And in verse 18, if I can find my glasses. This is what it says.

It says this, therefore consider carefully how you listen. So that's kind of the heart of what's going on here is that Jesus is saying, think carefully about what kind of listener you are.

How well are you listening to what I've got to say? And the stories are stories of listening and hearing.

in verses 16 through to 18, there's a story of a lamp or a light put right in the middle of a room, burning really brightly in a way that shows up everything, every detail, every bit of dirt, every kind of bit of furniture in the room.

[10 : 10] And Jesus is saying, my words are like this light. They're being planted into the middle of this world and they are going to send out a light that reveals who God is, but also shows up the details of your life, who you are, what you're like, how you think, why you think that way, how life feels for you, why life feels hard.

So, the words of God is like a light planted in the middle of our lives, showing us what life's about, who God is and who we are.

And so Jesus says, if that's what my word does, let it sink deeply into your life. Listen, because this is so important.

That's what Jesus is saying. This is so important. So listen, listen and listen well. How we respond to what Jesus says matters a lot because if God's word ends up being planted really deeply into your life, it has a power within it to change you in really great, wonderful ways.

You'll be more alive, more fulfilled than you'd ever imagined. So, the first kind of real picture that Jesus uses, the main picture is a kind of agricultural picture.

[11 : 40] So, I don't know much about farming. My dad was a farmer when he was a little boy, but I've always lived in towns and cities, so I can't say I know a lot about farming. But the picture here is just of a Palestinian or farmer with a bag of seed and he'd walk up and down the fields with the seed and just scatter it on the ground.

He'd walk up one way, walk back the other way, scattering the seed. They did that in October and then they would get the harvest in the spring. And this seed fell on all different kinds of ground. And Jesus is saying, you know, the way we listen is really similar to the different kinds of ground that the seed falls on.

And so, hearing, how we hear what God has to say really matters. Jesus talks about hearing at least ten times between verses 8 and 21.

So, he's saying, we hear, we hear, are you hearing? How do you hear? Are you listening? What kind of listener are you? Do you hear?

[12 : 54] Are you hearing? Are you hearing and are you obeying? Do you hear what I've got to say? So, this is Jesus just reinforcing and reinforcing and reinforcing hear what I've got to say.

Why? Because my word might not look like much. It might look like a seed. So, I don't know if you were doing the garden this spring at all if you've got a garden. And, you know, you plant a seed, it might look very small and insignificant and lifeless.

And, it can grow into something incredible if you're a better gardener than I am. But, Jesus is saying, you know, my word may look insignificant to you.

It may almost come over to you as lifeless. You know, we think kingdoms will come through political maneuvering and military campaigns and the use of power and wealth.

We think that's how you establish kingdoms. But, Jesus does it upside down. And, he plants this seed through his word that grows into a great kingdom that will one day cover the face of the earth.

[14 : 07] and so, listening to that word is so important. So, what kind of hearing do you give Jesus?

You might have had a politician stop you in the street recently or knock on your door. I don't know if you gave them a hearing or if you hustled on by. Not interested in what you've got to say.

And, that's the way we often are. We're not interested, really interested in what people have to say to us. We don't listen carefully. You know, do politicians listen?

Well, most politicians want to get a hearing. You know, that's what they're after, a hearing. And, most of us in life, that's what we want. We want to be heard.

We want a hearing. But, before that, and God does hear us, and He hears every cry of our heart, but even before that, Jesus is saying, how do you hear me?

[15 : 12] Are you listening well? Are you listening deeply? Are you listening over a long period of time?

Are you listening not just from day to day, but from week to week, and month to month, and year to year? Are you still listening?

Still hearing? Still taking in what Jesus has to say? Because, that's what brings real, powerful change, lasting change, into our lives.

In verse 15, Jesus says, those who hear the Word, retain the Word, and persevere in the Word, produce a good crop. So, this is not just about hearing once, and moving on.

It's about how we hear day by day, week by week, year by year. Are we still hearing God speak? Because it's that long hearing over great periods of time, that listening over long periods of time, that sows God's Word into the depths of our lives, in such a way that it really does transform who we are.

[16 : 26] So, being able to listen well, listen over a long period of time, listen humbly, listen with focus, hear what God is saying to you.

And the parable of the sower, as it's called, it reveals four kinds of hearing, four kinds of listening. And that's what the focus is on in the parable.

It's not in the seed, it's on the soil. It's not on what's been said, it's on how we listen to what's been said. And Jesus describes these four kinds of hearing so that we can think, what kind of hearer am I?

So, there's the road, there's the rock, there's the thorns, and there's the good ground. There's those who listen with a hard heart. There's those who listen with a shallow heart.

There's those who listen with a divided heart. There's those who listen with an obedient heart. So, the first person described is this person with the hard heart. It's like the word has been scattered onto the path where the ground is really hard.

[17 : 33] It's been compacted in by people walking backwards and forwards all the time. And so, Jesus is saying, don't be like the path. Don't be like the road. Don't listen with a hard heart.

And the hard-hearted listener is somebody who hears, but it never gets beyond their thoughts and into their heart.

It never gets beneath the surface of their lives. And they never really feel the power of what Jesus is saying within themselves.

They never really feel their heart being gripped by what Jesus has to say. They never really feel themselves being moved by what Jesus has to say.

And I've seen many people like this, and you may be like this yourself, or you may know people like this, who go to church regularly, year after year, and they're never changed.

[18 : 33] They hear it, they understand it, but they're not changed by it. They're not saved by it. It bounces off them because their hearts are really hard to what God has to say.

It never gets beyond the theoretical to the personal. It's an idea, but it's not a life-changing idea. It's not a heartwarming idea.

It's not a heart-melting idea. And Satan is grabbing the message away from this person, and they are not saved. And then the second person we read about are those who receive the Word.

This is the rocky ground. They receive it with joy, but when they hear it, well, they have no root.

They believe for a while, but in the time of testing, they fall away. So this person, of course, listens with a shallow heart.

The soil is shallow. It's a superficial hearing. So it comes, and the seed of God's Word falls on their life, and it looks great.

[19 : 46] It's bringing change. It's bringing life. They're excited by it. But over time, they don't really seem to flourish. As Christians, they get stuck somewhere.

They start off in the Christian life joy and excitement, but it's short-lived. Because there's not enough depth to their listening for the gospel to really take root.

And so when the heat comes, when the hard times come, when suffering and troubles come, they don't really hold on to what Jesus has to say. They start to think to themselves, I thought Jesus was going to give me a better life than this.

If this is what Christianity is, then what uses it to me? And they haven't really entered Christ's kingdom. What they've wanted is Christ to enter their kingdom and do what they want to give them the life they've dreamt of, to make life work better.

Jesus, the magic genie who will answer their prayers and give them their dreams. And the thing that they worship is being lost in the heat of suffering.

[21 : 06] And so they go after that thing that they really love more than Jesus. They've never really repented, never really trusted in Jesus.

They still want to find their salvation somewhere else. Their happiness, their hope, isn't really in Jesus Christ. They haven't seen their sin and turned from it.

Christ is not their king. They listen with a shallow heart. And then there's a person who listens with a divided heart and a thorny ground. We read about them as well. So the seed fell amongst the thorns.

That stands for those who hear. But as they go in the way, they're choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. They don't mature. There's not really great maturing going on, not really good change over time.

So again, things look good, but actually their heart is divided. They seem to love Jesus, but alongside loving Jesus, they love their money or their wealth or their success.

[22 : 09] Good things, perhaps, but they've let these good things become the God thing, the thing that really holds their heart. And so they're trying to have a foot in two worlds.

They're pursuing Jesus and they're pursuing His Word, but they're also pursuing their own ambitions, their own dreams, their own greed or lust.

They're not really fully on board with Jesus. Do you know what having a foot in both worlds does? It makes you uncertain, anxious, stretched and pulled in different directions.

And this person can't really see that their happiness lies in living fully under the rule of Jesus Christ and obeying Him in every area of life.

And so they say to Jesus, you can be Lord of my life except when it comes to money. That's mine.

Or you can be Lord of my life except when it comes to my sexuality.

[23 : 15] That's mine. That's mine. Or you can be Lord of my life except when it comes to my career. That's mine. And that way of living makes us miserable.

We're divided. And it begins to choke us spiritually. We never really flourish, thrive or grow as Christians because Jesus doesn't fully have our hearts.

And then there's the fourth person and this is the person who does really hear, who takes on board what Jesus has to say. Their hearts are good, open, listening, hearing, receiving the Word of Jesus day by day, month by month, year by year.

They're hearing and holding on to the Word of God. Their life flourishes under God's Word and its rule. Jesus is the good king that they long for.

They persevere in obeying Him even if that feels like it's the hardest thing to do. So this is a picture of a flourishing life that really does bear good fruit.

[24 : 30] It bears good fruit for the person because they're so deeply rooted in Christ through His Word and it bears good fruit for the people around them. In loving obedience to Jesus and His Word we find that we come alive as human beings.

That life is freeing and fulfilling. It's in giving up our life we find our life. And this is an obedience from Jesus that flows from love.

We don't earn His love by obeying Him. We obey Him because He loves us. And so there's a long obedience in the same direction.

Walking in the Word of Jesus day by day obeying the Word of Jesus day by day. And it's that perseverance that pays off.

You know sometimes we want the Christian life just to solve everything for us instantly. And yet the picture is much more agricultural or horticultural.

[25 : 45] It's of growth, change, harvest coming not in an instant but through night and day and day and night and night and day and season after season.

So, Luke has painted pictures for us of different responses to Jesus and we see these pictures scattered through His Gospel. We see in chapter 4 the people from His village Nazareth when He speaks the Word to them they are really angry and furious with Jesus and try to kill Him.

So when they hear God's Word they are hard-hearted against it. And then we see somebody like Simon the Pharisee who is in chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel and you know he seems to give a bit of a listening to Jesus but it never really goes very deep.

It's superficial hearing. In the end His pride means He disdains Jesus. But then there are other people who really do listen. Unexpected people.

A centurion. A woman with a shady past. And their lives are changed because they hear and obey what Jesus has to say.

[27 : 08] So Jesus is calling me and you just to be really patient and persevering in our listening and in our hearing. And if we're patient and persevering in our listening and hearing if we listen deeply and well God's Word will bring a harvest in our lives.

God's kingdom will take root. You and I will be different kinds of people and this will be a different kind of church and there will be more and more of God's grace and goodness and generosity around us.

So what is your response? I love the way that Luke paints two different kinds of pictures here of different responses.

At the end of the chapter or at the end of the reading in verse 19 his family turn up his mum and his brothers come to see him. Right, you think Jesus would be delighted to see his family.

They can't get near because there's so many people crowding around Jesus. So somebody has to come in and tell Jesus your mum and your brothers are standing outside. They want to come in and see you.

[28 : 14] And you know what Jesus says? Basically he says tell them to get lost. Which, you know, is rude. Shocking. Seems to be anyway doesn't it?

Like in our culture telling your mum and dad to get lost would be rude. But in that culture it's staggeringly, you know, it's like whoa! What's Jesus doing?

Okay, this is not an excuse to lock your mum and dad out of the house by the way. It's not saying parents and family don't matter. But it's Jesus is saying where's your true priority in life?

At this point Jesus' mother and brothers didn't trust him, didn't listen to him, didn't hear what he had to say. They were very sceptical. They thought he was losing his mind.

They couldn't see what God was up to through Jesus. And so Jesus says are they my mother and brothers? Those who hear.

[29 : 20] Those who hear and obey, they're my mothers and brothers. They're my family. And so he gives us a really lovely picture at the start of the chapter of a group of women who are like family to him.

A woman who's been demon possessed, women who've had broken lives that have been healed by Jesus and his word. And who pour their lives out to serve Jesus.

Give everything they've got to serve Jesus. And so Jesus is just asking which one are you? Are you hearing? Are you listening?

The kingdom is coming. God's kingdom is growing in us and through us and across our world. One day everything will be transformed by God's kingdom.

Justice, healing, mercy and truth will cover the face of God's new creation. And are you part of that kingdom? Are you hearing?

[30 : 27] What kind of listening are you doing? If you're not listening well then say to God soften my heart. Take the thorns and the rocks away from it so that I can be changed by what you're saying to me.

Take away my stony heart. Because our only hope is this Jesus. Jesus. There's only one king like this.

There's only one good kingdom. And there's only one saviour. We long for change in our lives and we long for change in our world.

We can take that on our own shoulders and it will crush us. Or we can trust it all to Jesus. And we will flourish so let's trust him with our lives with our world.

I need to stop and pray. Jesus we do want to say help us to listen well to hear to understand to reflect to pray to absorb your words.

[31 : 46] God make us good deep thoughtful listeners.

Take away the thorns and the stones from our heart and help our hearts to be good soil where your word will flourish and bring life.

Amen. Amen.