

Hearing Jesus: Sovereign Grace
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Brian R. Wipf

In 1995 the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus* was released in theaters. (PIC) Glenn Holland was an aspiring musician and composer who became a HS band teacher to pay the bills. He loved music and dreamed to spread that passion of music to as many people as possible; naturally, of course, he wanted his own infant son to grow up and love music like he loved music. But there was a problem. Watch this movie clip and figure out what the problem is (CLIP).

Little Cole can't hear. He can't hear the music, the rhythm, the melodies and harmonies that his father loves so much. And this movie chronicles the journey and challenges of both Cole learning how to live with a musical father and Mr. Holland learning how to truly hear his son.

You can have ears, but not hear both naturally and spiritually. The Bible warns us about the danger of being able to hear the words of Jesus, the message of truth, the story of grace, but miss glory of it all. To be able to audibly hear and cognitively understand the truth, but not have the ability and willingness to celebrate the truth, rejoice in Jesus' grace. And what's so tragic is that most people who merely hear with their ears, but fail to love and rejoice in God's grace usually don't realize that they are missing it.

And truthfully, my good brothers and sisters, Jesus words of warning and his pleas to hear (anyone who has ears, let him hear!) were to religious people. It was these faithful, knowledgable children of Israel he said, "Please, hear the truth!" And that's something very important for us to consider. That just because you come to church and the message of Jesus comes into your ears and you can answer questions about God and you have these routines that make it *look like* you follow Jesus doesn't mean you hear! And if you don't hear you don't know God. And if you don't know God you don't have a future with him, but instead a fearful expectation of judgment. So, FBC, lean into these next few sermons like you've never heard before so that you can rejoice in receiving the blessings of salvation and forgiveness from God (READ Luke 8:4-21).

Do you see the theme of hearing in these stories? In the parable of the sower, the whole point is the different kinds of hearing, the 3 kinds of hearing that fall short and the one kind of hearing that all people of faith have. The second parable encourages (or warns, depending on how you look at it) a kind of hearing that's authentic and finally, Jesus clarifies that those who are a part of his family are the one's who hear the word of God and do it. All of these stories are about hearing God well.

So, here's what we are going to do: in this passage I see two sets of truth. First of all, Luke tells us about hindrances or obstacles to hearing the word of God like we need to hear them. We are going to spend two weeks looking at those. Then, we're going to turn to the

positive; we're going to talk about what it means to hear well, to believe well, to obey well so that we know how we can be true and authentic followers of Jesus.

The hindrances or obstacles to hearing the way we must are mostly located in the first parable, the parable of the sower. So, let's spend most of time there this morning.

I see 4 realities that keep people from hearing as they need to hear. Let's outline them this way:

- Spiritual Realities - God's sovereignty
- Spiritual Realities - Satan's work
- Hardships
- Love of this World

We are going to spend all of our time this morning looking at this one, the spiritual reality of God's sovereignty.

The first thing we need to observe about the ability to hear is the sovereignty of God. That's found in vs. 10 (READ). The sovereignty of God somewhat hovers over the other 3 obstacles or hindrances to hearing God's word and I wouldn't even really call it a hindrance or obstacle. I call it a reality. It's just a fact; it's the way things are. Facts or truth about God and his way simply must be accepted. Reality is our friend and the longer we live in la-la land ignoring reality the further we will be from the life God has for us. Jesus seems to make this reality fairly clear. Notice what the text says in vs. 10: Jesus makes known the truth, the secrets, of the kingdom to some and not to others. He speaks in parables to those who have not been given the secrets of the kingdom "so that [so this is on purpose; Jesus shares these truths and secrets in parables for the purpose that] seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Let's not try to make this more confusing than it needs to be; Jesus has the purpose of keeping some people from seeing and hearing the secrets of the kingdom. He does that by teaching his truth in parables so they can see and hear, but not truly see and understand.

Two things come to my mind when I read this (maybe you're thinking the same thing): first, why? Why would Jesus want to keep the secrets of the kingdom from some? And the second question is: What does that mean (meaning, will they ever be saved? Are these people just doomed forever)?

First, Why? Why would Jesus say this? There's not much explanation about this in Luke 8, so let's flip to a related passage in Matthew 11. In the passage we are going to read in Matthew 11, remember that Jesus just got done rebuking various cities like Chorizan and Bethsaida for rejecting the message of the kingdom. And then after he does that, listen to the money vs. 25-26 (READ). Just like in Luke 8, the truth of the kingdom is being hidden. But Jesus goes on to explain who is being kept in the dark. The wise and understanding are being kept in the dark and the revelation of the kingdom is being given to the children. Now, you need to know in this context that being wise and understanding is a bad thing and being child-like is good. Being wise and understanding is being proud and self-sufficient. Being child-like is being

humble. Jesus says, “I thank you, Father, [Thanks!... Jesus is happy about this] that you’ve hidden your ways from the wise and revealed them to children; this is your gracious will [gracious! This is gracious!].

A proud heart that refuses to turn to God will not be accommodated. In 2 chapters Jesus again says (vs. 14-15), “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.” Friends, mark it down: without humility, without contrition and repentance the message of the kingdom will be kept hidden by God. Healing and forgiveness only come when God is exalted. If we remain proud (meaning, we stay exalted in our own mind) God will keep us in the dark.

What does this mean? It means we are always dependent on God’s sovereign grace to break our pride and reveal his truth and mercy to us. Sovereign grace. Sovereign means God reveals his grace to whom he will when he will. Just like he says here in Luke 8; *to you* it’s been given to know the secrets of the kingdom; for others it’s veiled by the parables. That’s what it means for God to be sovereign; he does as he pleases and what he pleases is always good and right. Grace means that this revelation given to some is pure gift. The only reason why God gives his grace is his own good pleasure to be kind. And he just... gives it. We can’t earn that; we can’t work for it. God just graciously offers the secrets of the kingdom so that we believe. That’s what sovereign grace means. And this sovereign grace is required to hear.

Now, I’m curious; does this sound like good news to you? Jesus said in Matthew 11 that this sovereign grace is the gracious will of God that he’s thankful for. Can you see the mercy and grace in this (I’m going to share that with you in a moment)? Or do you protest a little? Might you be thinking, “How is this fair? And how can God hold people accountable for not believing when he doesn’t give them the secrets of the kingdom to believe?” Those are good questions. I’ve had those questions myself. I’ve always been a thinker and spent countless hours, particularly in my college and seminary years, racking my brain trying to figure out how all this works and fits, and how God is just in it all. And the Apostle Paul was asked these very same questions himself. He even tried answering them. In the book of Romans after he reveals these same things (the sovereignty of God in the giving of his grace) he asks this question to himself (vs. 19), “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’” Do you hear the plea for justice? God, why would you still find fault with someone who can’t resist your will, who hasn’t been given the secrets of the kingdom? How is that fair? Do you know how he answers that question? Listen to vs. 20, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”

Do you hear it? Friends, to follow the Lord, to love him and his way, to rejoice in his grace we must take a posture of humility. In Isa. 55 as the Lord mentions his mercy he says (vs. 8), “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my

thoughts than your thoughts.” We must come to this place where we recognize that God, his ways, his justice, his mercy are too great for us. He gives us glimpses of truth to believe, but he still leaves us scratching our head. And he invites us to search his ways out, but while we do that we must always be in glad submission to his sovereignty rather than calling God’s justice into question. If we don’t we’ll constantly contend with God and remain on the outside of his sovereign grace.

Now, let me help you as you ponder the mercy of God. It’s not like that’s all Paul says in Romans 9; Who are you to talk back to God? Can the clay make demands of the potter? To a prideful man or a prideful woman that’s a turn off. But humble followers of Christ don’t get offended at God when he says, “Who are you to talk back to God?” Do you know what humble followers say when Jesus says that? They say, “You’re right; forgive me.”

When we have that kind of humility and we’re open to keep reading we actually learn and see the mercy of God; let me show you it. Now, before I read the key verses let me set up the context. In Romans 9-11, Paul is trying to explain the depth of God’s grace to all both Jews and Gentiles (people who are not Jews). It seems that God’s word has failed since Israel seems to have rejected Jesus. But Paul tells us how God saves both Jews and Gentiles while remaining faithful to his words. Then he tells us this in 11:29-32 (READ). Let me summarize what Paul is saying: at various times God has kept everyone in the dark, but he used those periods of darkness for some to draw others into the light. And then, when others came to the light, he used those times, too, to draw more to the light. As the big idea is communicated in vs. 32, he subjected all to disobedience for the gracious purpose of giving mercy to all.

Now, maybe that keeps you scratching your head a tad. Maybe you wonder, “Is that the best way, God?” “Couldn’t there have been another way... dare I say, a better way?” I know what you mean; I’m tempted to think the same thing. But then I’m reminded of what we’ve already heard. God’s ways are higher than my ways; my sense of wisdom and justice can’t be compared with God. So, instead of calling God’s ways into question, I’ll receive them as his gracious will.

Come to terms, dear friends, with the sovereign grace of God. He reveals the treasures of his kingdom as he wills. And what does he will? His gracious will is to reveal the treasures of the kingdom to the humble; he gives the secrets of the kingdom to those who take the posture of children. And he is opposed to the proud, the wise in the world.

The point of these three sermons and this particular text is *hear!* So, don’t let this word go in one ear and out the other. Don’t think little of the sovereign grace of God; instead, take to heart that God is graciously revealing to the truth of his kingdom. All of us today, right now, get the gracious privilege of hearing the truth. God has a word, a revelation, for us that illuminates Jesus Christ as the remedy to our sin problem; he will forgive our sins. So, turn! Follow him!

Also, the revelation of God's sovereign grace should move us to worship and praise. Jesus does that in Matthew 11, doesn't he? Thank you, Father, that you've hid these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to children. Join Jesus in thanking God for his mercy to the humble. And that's Paul's response, too, in Romans 11. The words that follow the revelation that God sovereignly consigned all to disobedience so that he might have mercy to all are these (vs. 33-36), "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." It's worship; passionate, unbridled praise to God.

Key verse: Luke 8:10 ~ To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

Questions for the week

- Do you have any kind of fear of not being able to hear Jesus? Should we? Why or why not?
- Is there any difficulty for you being able to truly think and say, "God, you can do as you please?" Where might be the rub for you?
- What's the most important truth you heard or learned today? Why? Share that with a friend or family member.