

Hearing Jesus: Hindrances and Obstacles

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(READ Luke 8:4-21)

If you weren't here last Sunday, let me help you get up to speed and if you were here then let me refresh your memory. As I'm hoping you picked up, the theme of those verses is hearing. Jesus says at the end of vs. 8, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That's not a suggestion and that's not mere icing on the cake; truly hearing Jesus is both the definition of discipleship and a prerequisite for growing as a disciple. Something Jesus reveals in this passage is that hearing only comes as a result of his sovereign grace; he gives the opportunity for some to hear and he keeps the secrets of the kingdom hidden from others at certain times. Nothing short of God's gracious and powerful will revealing the truth of the kingdom to us will cut the darkness; we need the light of God's revelation. Listen to last week's sermon if you missed it to learn more about that; it may not stop you from scratching your head trying to put some pieces together, but my hope is that it will deepen your love, trust and humility before God. The burden of all of these sermons (this is the second) is to know what it means to hear Jesus. We don't learn that answer from just one or even two sermons; it will come when we put all of these pieces together, especially the last sermon of them all.

We began this little section by focusing on the hindrances to hearing Jesus. What keeps us from hearing him like we need to hear him? I gave you this brief outline.

- Spiritual Realities - The Sovereignty of God
- Spiritual Realities - Satan
- Hardships
- Love for this world

Those last three hindrances are going to be our focus this morning and I get them all from Jesus' explanation of his parable of the sower. Before we get into them, I want to suggest something to you: at least one of these hindrances are currently tempting and threatening your faith. If you think you are somehow immune from the schemes of the Evil One and the cogs of this world that keep us from truly hearing Jesus then Satan has you exactly where he wants you and you are on the precipice of spiritual danger. So, hear today's sermon as someone in the crosshairs of Satan's schemes. You're not a passive observer of other people being threatened; sin is crouching at *your* door.

The first obstacle Jesus mentions is Satan himself. We see this in vs. 11-12 (READ). The Wipf family was at family camp at Forest Springs not too long ago and Forest Springs has all these convenient walking paths around camp... some made on a purpose and others, it seems, are made by campers taking quick, convenient routes through the woods. They are hard and often rocky. Not even weeds are growing on these paths. If a sower through seeds on these paths birds would be given all the time they'd need to find those seeds and have a meal. Jesus says the first kind of heart

that doesn't hear like they need to hear is like that path. Look at vs. 11; it says they hear (do you see that?). But it's not the kind of hearing that produces faith.

No one would mistake a person who heard like this as a Christian. The message of the gospel has been rejected; there's no superficial kind of signs or fruit that comes from hearing the word this way. Instead, Satan comes and just snatches the truth and grace of the kingdom away so nothing even resembling faith emerges from this kind of person's life.

What I find interesting about this first obstacle is where Jesus locates the problem. He doesn't say the hardness of the path, or a person's hard heart, is the obstacle or hindrance (while that certainly is a problem). Instead, he locates the problem with the Evil One himself. Satan comes and snatches the word away; that's why the seed doesn't bear fruit. Notice the wording of Jesus' teaching in vs. 12, "Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that [purpose!] they may not believe and be saved." The reason these people don't get saved by the word is because the devil takes the life-saving word away. That's the problem and our first hindrance.

So, let's talk about what this means; how should we apply it? First of all, notice the cosmic or spiritual forces at work in the battle for souls. If you're waiting for children, if you're waiting for spouses or siblings to turn to Jesus and believe, know that the real battle is spiritual and can not be seen with these eyes. Oh, I know what it looks like. It looks like they drink too much or smoke too much weed. It looks like they run with the wrong crowd. It looks like their music is bad for their heart and mind. And it might just be the case that those things are problems. But that's not the real problem; all won't be well just if those things change. The real problem is the power and principalities of this present darkness is snatching the word of God as soon as it's sown. Flesh and blood, earth and water are no match to the spiritual forces that are unseen whether they are of God or of the devil.

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I wanted to share that testimony with you to demonstrate that the saving power of God can overcome any and every barrier. You wouldn't think someone could get saved high as a kite. But that's the power of the word of God; that's the effectual saving power of the message that Jesus Christ died for sins and was raised to new life for you and for me. And Satan's goal is to snatch that word away; if he can a person will not be saved.

So, what do you do? You pray. You pray like you've never prayed before. Tim, George and myself pray every week for the salvation of sinners. The list has been made primarily by you; as you have shared with us friends, children, spouses and others who need Jesus, we put it on that list and we pray that God would save them. Some names have been on that card for, I'm guessing, 10 years. And do you know what? Sometimes, I'm tempted to doubt whether it's making any difference. But then I'm reminded of the word of God. I'm reminded of God's power and love; I'm

reminded of the power of prayer. I'm reminded that our God loves to give mercy. And I keep praying with watchful eyes. Friends, nothing but the sovereign grace of God (we talked about that last week) will save the lost; the sovereign grace of God can break through the power of darkness of the Devil. So, pray for it. Pray that the word of our God would not be snatched by the Evil One any longer.

Let's move on the other two obstacles: hardships and the love for this world. I'm tempted to give these their own sermons, but I also feel like we talk about this regularly around here so I'm going to cover ground a little faster, and we are going to talk about them more in our third sermon.

There's some reason to think that these next two kinds of people who hear are saved. Look at vs. 13-14 (READ). The text says they hear and believe. It looks like they receive the word; that must mean they are saved. I don't think they are saved. I have two reasons for that.

The first clue is discovered when you compare these two with the one described as good soil. It says that when those whose heart is like good soil they hear or receive the word (look at vs. 15) and "hold it fast." We'll talk more about what that means, but for now I just want to point out to you that God's word says that holding God's word fast is required to be saved. Or another way of saying it is those who do not hold the word of God fast aren't saved. Here's one of those verses that says that; Heb. 3:6, "But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house [this is a word picture of being a part of God's family] if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." What's the implication? The implication is if we don't hold fast our confidence in Christ we are not a part of his house; we're not a part of God's family if we don't keep holding fast.

The second clue is found in the phrase at the end of vs. 13; it says that during a time of testing those whose heart is like rocky ground "fall away." This has been a theme for Luke, hasn't it? We just read not too long ago that even John the Baptist was tempted to fall away. What Jesus is saying here in vs. 13 is that the time of testing causes some to fall away because the word of God doesn't take root in a person's life so leave Jesus and the faith. This word for "fall away" is the exact same word used in 1 Timothy 4:1, which says, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spiritus and teachings of demons." Depart. Leave. Jesus says in vs. 13 that some leave, depart from the faith during times of testing. That's not what happens to people who are saved.

Now, saved people struggle. Saved people give into temptation. Saved people fall short more than we like to admit, right? Saved people are far, far from perfect. But do you know what else saved people do. They keep repenting. They keep turning. They keep, bold and gutsy as they are, believing that the blood of Jesus Christ is enough to forgive them of all their sins. Saved people hold the word fast when everything natural would make you think there's no point. Holding fast, standing firm doesn't mean we're perfect; it simply means the word has taken root in such a way that we remain with Jesus

We're talking about saving faith here, friends. Jesus is not trying to comfort you by saying, "Well, you're still saved if hardships make you fall away; if the things you love and care about in this

world are your top priority, you can still be a part of God's family." No. That's not what Jesus is saying.

First, Jesus says hardships are an obstacle of hearing well; look at vs. 13 (READ). I'm very zealous for the word of God to be firmly rooted in your life. Life is a test. Everyday, we are tested. Some of these tests are big; these big tests don't come around all that often, but when they come they rock our world. Sickness and disease. The loss of career or income. Adultery and divorce. The death of a loved one. These are big. But there are little, daily tests, too, that are no less dangerous to our faith. The daily test to be honest with those you work with or live with. The daily test of waking up single when you're like to be married. The daily test to remain patient, kind and helpful your kids when they keep disobeying you. Here's my point: God has given us his word to obey. That's what it means to be a disciple (Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?). And there are big hardships and little hardships that tempt us to ignore his word. And if you're not careful (if you don't take care how you hear), then it's quite possible that you will depart from Jesus as a result of the test. Oh, you will won't call it departing, you'll just find an excuse why you don't need to obey Jesus; and it will be a good excuse... to you. But that's what it is.

The last obstacle we are going to talk about is the love for his world. I get that from vs. 14 (READ). August is somewhat of a weird month in my estimation. On the one hand, it's still summer. I like the warmth of the sun; I enjoy time at the lake. Yet, since the school year is bearing down on us along with all of it's demands, the last month of summer doesn't feel that enjoyable. The cares of the upcoming school year can choke the joy out of August. That's what can happen with our faith. The cares and joys of this world can put a noose around our faith and kill it. What might be some of those cares and joys? Family time. Vacations. Favorite TV programs. Working out at the gym. Sports and games. Our favorite hobbies. Anything and everything on this earth can become too important to us and can choke the word. What does that mean? Too important? I take that to mean that some things vie for preeminence in our life the way Jesus is to be preeminent in our life. And anything can do that to us; we're all different. For some of us, our love of comfort is preeminently valued by us and it can choke our faith. For others, maybe it's our love of sports. The love of "me time" or even the wonderful gift of family. When that happens, these things put a stranglehold on our faith until our faith is dead.

This passage is a warning, FBC. You should feel the danger, the dread, of falling away or having your faith choked. You should be concerned about the Devil snatching the word away. That's why Jesus says in vs. 18, "Take care how you hear." So, first, let the warning remain on you. Sit with it. Ask yourself, "Where might the temptation come for me? How should I take care how to hear?" Spend some time and analyze if the word of God is taking root in your life which is demonstrated by enduring faith in the midst of tests. Or if the word of God is producing fruit instead of it being choked.

Let me give you some hope as we end. Your God is fully able to keep you. So turn to him. He is able to completely save those who draw near to him.

Key Verse: Luke 8:12 ~ The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

Questions for the week

- If the salvation of sinners is a spiritual battle, how does that change our thoughts and actions? Why?
- Do you think the kinds of people described in vs. 13-14 are truly saved? Why or why not? And how does your answer impact Jesus' call for us to "take care how we hear?"
- Are hardships or the love of this world obstacles for you to hear the words of Jesus? How so?