

Hearing Jesus: Authentic Faith in God
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Today, we are finishing our mini-series from the Gospel of Luke on what it means to hear Jesus. On July 31 and Aug. 7 we addressed the reasons why some do not hear the Lord. First, the Lord is sovereign in his revelation. Some don't hear because God doesn't allow them to hear; when we do hear it's a gift of God's grace. We saw that God links this gracious gift of revelation to humility. Those who walk in pride are purposefully kept from the truth; in pride we can expect nothing good. But when we respond humbly to God's word the gift of God's revelation is given to us. So, make sure every time you hear God's word you have a humble, eager heart ready to be corrected and changed.

Then on August 7 we looked at specific hindrances to hearing. Satan snatches the word from some. For others, suffering and trials tempt them to fall away. They thought they signed up for an easy Christian life, but when they discover that God actually plans to use suffering to mature them in faith, they walk away from God. Finally, some don't hear because they are too preoccupied with the things of this world. They love the world, the love the things of the world and that love and desire for those things are than their love for God.

But let's turn to the affirmative: what does it mean to hear? What are the characteristics of a man or a woman who actually does receive God's word as it's meant to be received? That's where I want to end this little mini-series. And as you'll see when we read, this truly is a matter of life and death. Those who hear Jesus are truly his disciples; those who don't remain on the outside looking in and will not receive life from God (READ Luke 8:4-21).

There's not much in life more important than family. Nature itself proves our deep and abiding care for immediate family. When I was a kid I didn't need to be taught to stick up for my brother or sister or my cousins. Just something inside of me would come to the aid of my family.

So, it shouldn't be surprising to see the disciples trying to help Jesus' mother and brothers get to the front of the line; surely, Jesus would want to see them before anybody else! We say "No" to teaching Sunday school or leading in Awana because we don't want it interfering with grandkid time; that's what Jesus would do, right? Well, our master reveals again how his kingdom is upside down. He says, "Do you want to know who my family really is? It's those who hear the word of God and do it! That's family." Jesus reorders life in that statement; it's a kind of reordering that should startle us; it should make a radical impact on how you relate and serve and sacrifice here for your brothers and sisters in the FBC community. And the key, according to Jesus, is hearing the word of God and doing it. Hear God's word and do it and you're in God's family. The opposite is true, too. Ignore God's word, don't bother doing it and you're not a part of God's family. That's why I've been saying this is a matter of life and death; this is a matter of heaven and hell. Don't think little of being a hearer of God's word.

You're not even part of his family, you're not a forgiven and adopted son or daughter if you don't hear Jesus!

So, what is that? What is different between hearing Jesus merely with your ears and hearing Jesus with your heart? Look at vs. 15 (READ). You remember the parable: the one place where the seed took root and bore fruit was in the good soil. The seed is the word of God; the good soil is a person who hears as one ought to hear; the kind of hearing that grants access into the family of God.

I really think it's significant to notice that every kind of person, every kind of heart hears God's word. Let's just see this together.

- First, the seed that fell along the path in vs. 12; it says they are those who "heard the word. Then the devil comes and takes" it away.
- Next, the seed that fell on shallow soil in vs. 13 it says they are those who "when they hear the word, receive it with joy." But, because of the trials and sufferings of life fall away.
- Vs. 14 says the soil like the thorns are "those who hear," but the word gets choked by the cares of life.
- Then finally, in vs. 15, the ones like good soil hear the word and then do something with it that the others do not do.

The reality that every kind of person Jesus mentions hears the word, even two of them receive it in some fashion, should wake us up. It should alarm us. The reason being is that this revelation disallows superficial faith or easy believism. So what if you initially heard the word! Initially received the word! So what if someone appeared to be exceedingly glad to accept Jesus or was extremely emotional when they prayed the sinner's prayer? Those like the shallow ground hear the word and immediately receive with joy... but when trials come they fall away. Those like a weedy ground hear the word and "faith" sprouts, but the love for the world and for possessions chokes that so-called faith proving it was never real to begin with. This passage is communicating to us clarity that there's a kind of hearing, there's a kind of faith, that should bring us no comfort for our own soul or for the soul of others.

I think of our children when I read this passage; many of us have kids. Some are young; some are in HS. Some are grown up and out of the house. And we remember so well the night that they received Jesus at home or in Awana. We can remember their involvement in youth group and the testimonies they shared after coming home from camp or from a missions trip. But now, today, as they might be in HS, they care very little about the things of God. Their joy is band, friends, sports or girlfriend/boyfriend. The word of God remains dusty, there's no participation with the people of God. Or maybe your children or grandchildren are out of the house now, maybe with families of their own, and you're surprised that the things of God seem so absent from their lives. Maybe they have even told you that they don't believe like you believe. It seems pretty obvious that they have not taken God's word seriously about sexuality,

entertainment or lifestyle. They might be polite about it (maybe they are not), but they roll their eyes or poke fun at your “old fashion” beliefs.

Some of you rightly fear for your children and grandchildren. You shed many a tears for them. Others of you, though, have some weird confidence for them. Tell me why you’re hopeful again by their faith? Tell me why you think they are saved? Forgiven by God? Have a sure hope in the saving work of Jesus? Because they prayed a prayer at camp? Because they completed the Timothy award in Awana? Because they were a student leaders in the youth group? Friends, those are not the signs of authentic faith. What we once thought, what we once believed, how we once lived is not as important as what we currently think, what we currently believe and how we currently live. That’s why we must take care how we hear; it’s why we must care deeply about how our kids and grandkids hear.

Jesus highlights two characteristics to true hearing, authentic faith. They are found in vs. 15 and they are as follows:

- Holding the word of God fast
- Bearing fruit

Notice how these two characteristics are set in contrast to those who are like the shallow ground and the weedy ground. I would argue that “holding the word fast” is the opposite of falling away (as those of shallow ground do when trials come in vs. 13). Also, did you see how those who are like weedy ground have a faith where “fruit does not mature” because that faith is choked by love for this world. In this passage, it’s pretty clear to us that true faith is merely the opposite of the preceding two examples. People who truly hear, who have true faith, do not fall away and do in fact bear fruit for Jesus. So, let’s examine them.

First of all, when we truly hear (meaning, we have authentic faith in God’s word) we hold God’s word fast. Several weeks ago, I showed you how holding fast to God’s word is a sign of true faith. Heb. 3:14 says, “For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” Original confidence in what? In the gospel. In the work of Christ for us. In the word of God that saved us from our sins. We share in Christ *if we hold on to him to the end*. That’s holding the word of God fast.

And that’s the opposite of falling away from the word when trials come. All of scripture point to this. Remember Romans 5? Vs. 3-5, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings [our trials, our hardships.... Why in the world would we do that? Do you hear how silly and stupid that sounds to an unbelieving man or woman? Why would we rejoice in sufferings], knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Do you see how trials and enduring faith play a critical role in God giving us confidence in our faith? When through a trial I have more hope in God, I cling to his promises and word even more instead of me falling away, God shows me with greater clarity that God’s love has been poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit. I really am

saved! That's what real believers do. Even in hardships, they hold fast to the word of God and do it.

Look at the modifier: truly hearing God's word is holding it fast in an *honest and good heart*. Can you hear with a dishonest, evil heart? Well, I think that's what's happening with those who fall away. Do you know why we fall away when trials come? We fall away because we are duplicitous in our motives and desires for the word. We're hungry for the word, we're hungry for faith because we think God and faith will get me the stuff I want now on this earth. I'm wanting God to keep me and my family healthy. I believe in God so that my life can be as comfortable as possible. If God loves me he gives me what I want, we are tempted to believe. And what's the trial? The trial is me not getting those things. It's God not coming through for me like I expect him to. The trial is me losing something I love. Oh really, God! Well, if all faith gets me is trouble then, no thank you! A person who falls away failed to see from the beginning that the reward of true faith gets is more of God. More of him. More of his grace. More of his presence. The end game of faith is more of God and those who want more of something else fall away in the trial.

Let's look at the second characteristic before we figure out how this is supposed to make a daily impact in our lives. Jesus says that true hearing is also characterized by "bearing fruit with patience" (vs. 15). Bearing fruit means I'm doing the good works Jesus has for me to do. Col. 1:10 says we are to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, *bearing fruit in every good work* and increasing in the knowledge of God." So, I'm truly hearing and receiving the word when I do the good works God has called me to. That's how you know the word of God is rooted in your life. If you are doing good works for Jesus that means his word has been heard and received.

So, to put it plainly, it means I endure suffering with greater patience because the Word of God tells me to. It means I sacrifice my time, my money, my desires for the work of God because that's what the Word of God says. It means my parenting becomes more gracious and helpful rather than critical because God's word says that's what parents should do. It means I run from adulterous relationships and activities because God's word says fidelity is right and good. I spend more time helping the disadvantaged because that's what God's word says true religious is. Do you get what I'm saying? If God's word says it, that's what I do. That's when you know you've heard Jesus.

Look at the modifier to bearing fruit; it says when we truly hear the word we "bear fruit with patience." Do you why Jesus says that? It's because sometimes (oftentimes) we can't tell if we are bearing any fruit. We might be working hard, but is it making any difference? I know some of you women are married to unbelieving men. And God's word says that godly women are to have good, respectful conduct towards unbelieving husbands; God's word says that's how they are won. Has it worked yet? For some of you I know it hasn't. What do you do? You keep doing the good works God's word calls for patiently. Some of you parents have repented and changed your tactics because you've been convicted by your ungodly treatment of your children. But it doesn't seem to be changing your children's behavior much. You keep doing it

patiently. Some of you kids heard Tim's message a few weeks ago about obeying mom and dad, and so you're trying to be obedient, but it doesn't seem mom and dad heard the message themselves. What do you do? You keep obeying God's word and you honor your father and mother patiently. The fact that we don't see the results to our efforts doesn't mean that we stop. What Jesus is saying is that when we truly hear God's word and it takes root in our life we do the good works Jesus has called us to even when it takes a really long time.

Look at vs. 16-18 (READ). Here's the point of these verses: you can't fake true hearing. True hearing is evident when we rightly apply the word of God. So, take care how you hear, FBC. If you truly hear, more grace, more truth, more wisdom and revelation will be given to you. If you ignore the word, be warned, even what you think you have will be taken away. You will receive no grace, no wisdom and no truth.

Can I give you some ideas on how you can take care how you hear? I'll give a couple.

1. The most important quality of true hearing is actually doing what the word says. The epitome of not hearing is ignoring the word. If you ignore God's word about purity, about fidelity, about service, about sacrifice, about giving, about obedience and you ignore it, you put it off, you are not hearing the word of God. When you hear the word, friends, plead to God to do what it says. We don't do to be saved. We are saved by grace. But your doing proves you are saved.
2. I've hinted at this already, but you can take care to hear well by pleading with God in prayer to both be hungry for God's word and attentive when you hear it. Don't be casual in your hearing. Fight the temptation to be relaxed in what you hear, like hearing God's word isn't that big of a deal. Every time you hear God's word preached or taught, when you read God's word, is a life or death moment. It's potentially a moment for life if you receive it, hold it fast and bear fruit. But it's a moment for death if it goes in your ears but doesn't take root in your life.

Be doers of the word, FBC. Not merely hearers who deceive themselves. The kinds of hearers who think it's ok to ignore the word of the Lord. Don't be fooled; you can not fake true hearing. So take care how you hear.

Key Verse: Luke 8:15 ~ As for those in good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Questions for the week

- Is it obvious to you that your immediate family should be more important than your church family? Or is it obvious that your church family should be more important than your immediate family? Why is this (should this be) a challenging question?
- Are you tempted to think that genuine Christians can fall away from faith or not bear fruit in their life? What tempts you/causes you to believe this?

- What attitudinal and behavioral changes is God convicting you to make so you can take care how you hear?