

Listen Up!
Mark 4:1-23

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Good morning everyone. My name is Justin, I'm the youth pastor here at Sturgeon Valley, and I would like to thank you for being a part of this special Sunday. Today is Graduation Sunday, and we want to celebrate all of our grads today.

I still remember my high school graduation and my university grad. I still remember how it felt standing there waiting to go stage. I remember shaking peoples hands and getting my pictures taken, and I remember the feeling of being finished! But I don't remember the speeches. Aside from our high school valedictorian address, I don't remember a single other word that was spoken. I heard them all, but I was too caught up in the excitement to really hear and understand what they said. Sometimes we hear, but do not listen.

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Sometimes we hear, but do not listen. And we all struggle with this. For example, have you ever been having a conversation with someone and then all of the sudden, they ask you a question, and in one horrifying moment you realize that you haven't been listening to a thing they have said? And after thoughts and possible responses race through your head, you finally admit that haven't been listening to anything they have been saying. You heard them auditable, but didn't understand.

This happens to everybody, sometimes we don't hear our parents asking us to do something, or we get in an argument with someone and we hear them, but we're not listening to them, or sometimes we simply forget someone's name ten seconds after they said it.

And that's fine if it's something small, but what about when it's a bigger thing? Have you ever not listened to a piece of wisdom someone shared? And after it's too late you realize your mistake? Well Jesus tells the crowds, and us, that they need to consider carefully how we listen, because we may have heard, but not understood his word.

Let's read Mark 4

The Parable of the Sower

4 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. ² And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: ³ "Listen!

Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹ And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, ¹² so that

*“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”*

¹³ And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. ¹⁶ And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. ¹⁷ And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.^[a] ¹⁸ And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²⁰ But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

A Lamp Under a Basket

²¹ And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” ²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to

you. ²⁵ For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Verses 3, 9, 12, and 23, tell us that this is a problem of hearing!

We are given four examples of how we might listen. In the first one in verse 4, it is the hard path, and the devil comes and snatches the word away after they hear it and they miss God's plan for salvation! The image that is provided here is two parts: the path where the seed lands on and would be trampled and the birds coming and snatching it up. Now the paths would be dirt, but it would be packed so hard that there would be no way for the seed to take root. It would remain in the open, and eventually get trampled and devoured by the birds of the air. This is the person who does not make the connection between the claims of the gospel and their own life. Perhaps they are calloused and cold towards the things of God and refuse to hear. Maybe they are uninterested and have been hardening their hearts for years against the call of the gospel, just like the hard paths trampled underfoot. They are hardened to it by their own choice! Then when the seed of God's word can't penetrate their heart, the devil comes and distracts them, or does whatever it takes to steal that seed.

The second and third ones, the person received God's word with Joy at first, but they respond with a superficial enthusiasm. It's not true faith. It looks real, it sounds real, and they may say and do all the right things, but it only lasts until things get difficult, or life throws a curve ball, or there is some other distraction that comes up, and their faith is tested. Then they fall away. They failed to really listen and understand God's word! And it's a big deal because they miss God's plan for salvation! In Luke's account he states that clearly. The difficult truth is that this means that there are people, probably even people here that will call themselves a disciple of Christ, yet they do not really believe his word. They are like the soil that has received God's word, even with joy, but will fall away when trials come. They have never truly believed, and have never been saved. We see this illustration again in John 6:60. Here Jesus has been teaching his many disciples, and they are not comfortable with what he said. Verse 60 reads: ⁶⁰*On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*

⁶¹*Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"*

⁶²*What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!* ⁶³*The Spirit gives life; the flesh*

counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

These were people who called themselves disciples, followers of Christ. They are a perfect illustration of this soil. And some of you may be like these disciples, following Christ until it gets too difficult, or the questions get too hard. This person will miss out on what God has in store. Anecdotally, I see these two soils in students in high school and after they graduate. Their friends start really pushing them on what they believe, challenging their worldviews. I've seen a few who just didn't like the answers to their questions. They are ridiculed and conflicted, and their faith withers. I also see the third soil, when students begin to experiment with alcohol, drugs, sex, and things of the world. They start making money and relationships as their pursuit, and they are choked out of their faith. At worst, their faith dies, and at best they may look like grain but produce zero fruit.

I believe these soils represent the same type of people who Mathew says will cry "Lord, Lord!" and not enter the kingdom of heaven in Mathew 7:21. Now I'm not saying that every Christian who struggles in their walk with God isn't really saved, and we are not to judge the hearts of others. But God is saying here in this parable of the sower, is that individually we must be careful how we listen, because we may have heard and responded, but not truly understood. And it is sad reality that many students who grow up in the church end up walking away from their faith after they graduate, because they have not understood God's word. And when those temptations and trials come, they fall away.

However, God provides the image of the good soil, of how we should listen. It says in verse 20, "*But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.*" So how do we listen well? It says when we hear the word, we retain it and persevere. When life's trials and temptations come, the good listener has accepted what they have heard, and they persevere in His strength. And they make it through the trials, and they praise God. This is why verse 24 says "*Pay attention to what you hear*"

So how do we know if we've listened well? We are not to judge others on how they've listened, but we are to examine ourselves. One verses I that was important to me in university was 2 Corinthians 13:5. It says "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you –unless, of course, you fail the test?" And back in Mark 4 we are given a test of how we listen and hear God's word. And maybe today you identify with one of the four soils. Maybe it's the first one, and you don't think you have ever considered or understood what God is saying to you through his word or rejected it altogether. Perhaps your heart is hard. Or maybe you can identify with the second or third soils. Maybe you've received it with Joy at one time, but you've walked away from Him. Perhaps you feel like you are being choked out by all the other things in life. Maybe you attend church as much as you can, but you're busy with family, work, sports, school, and you feel like you can't balance church and your relationship with Christ as a priority. Or maybe you feel like your life does not produce any fruit for Gods kingdom. Or perhaps you are still living in that superficial enthusiasm and that time of testing or trial is still to come. For all of you it is not too late to start asking God to open the eyes of your heart, and help you listen and understand what God has been saying to you. We can pray today and ask Him to open your spiritual eyes and ears so that you might hear and understand the preaching of God's word and be saved.

And maybe today you can identify with the fourth soil. Then be reminded to retain the preaching of God's word and persevere. Rejoice in what God has been doing in and through your life, and continue steadfast in following him and being the sower that shares God's word with others! Then he will use you to produce a crop, and it will be amazing to see what God has done through you.

Wayne Friesen Story: I called him and told him. (Unseen fruit)

We need to examine ourselves, and consider carefully how we listen.

If you already know that you have not been listening well, let's ask that God would help you to truly understand his message. Then afterwards talk to somebody about what you've been hearing today. Let's pray.