

JESUS TELLS A GOOD STORY

LUKE 8:1-15

M.I. GOD IS CONTINUALLY TELLING HIS STORY IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE PERSON OF HIS SON JESUS. DO PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO HEAR IT?

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Jesus Tells A Good Story

Luke 8:1-15

I was going to title this sermon, "Can you hear now?" because it deals with the receptivity we get on our cell phones. However, that wouldn't work because the problem lies with the provider not the user. In today's passage, there is nothing wrong with the provider. The quality of reception depends totally on the hearer. In other words, Jesus is going to tell a story in this morning's text. Some will receive the message and some will not. Let me just remind us as we study through this morning's passage that God is continuously speaking to people. He speaks through the Bible. He speaks through faithful believers who tell others about Jesus' love for them. He speaks through nature and the everyday events in human lives. Again, the issue is not if God is speaking or not. The question is whether we are hearing His message or not. As we study through the text, let's test our own personal hearing.

As a pastor, I'm not always sure I understand what's going on around me. I listen and I hear what people are saying. However, I'm finding more and more that I don't always know how to interpret things. Let me give you an example. I was invited to the 25th anniversary of a couple that I had married. The party seemed to be going well. I thought everyone was really happy. The couple asked me to get up and say a few words. Now all of you who really know me, know that instead of keeping my mouth shut or just saying a few words, I have this need to be clever or funny. I looked at the couple and said to the wife, "Does your husband live up to all the promises he made during his courtship days?"

She shot a dirty look at me and snapped, "He sure does. In those days, he kept saying he wasn't good enough for me, ... and he has been proving it true ever since."

One of these days I'm going to learn to keep my mouth shut, stick to the script, and quit trying to be clever or funny.

This morning, we will see that it is not that the Christian message is confusing or unclear. The problem is that people don't often want to hear what God is saying. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **GOD IS CONTINUALLY TELLING HIS STORY IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE PERSON OF HIS SON JESUS. DO PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO HEAR?** This really confuses me. Why wouldn't people want to hear the story that God has told through Jesus? It is an incredible story of love, sacrifice, forgiveness, mercy, and reconciliation. It has all the elements of the best love story the world has ever heard. And yet, there are people who do not want to hear it. However, we must never forget that there are many people who desperately need to hear this story and indeed do hear it, receive it, and find all that they have been looking for in their newfound relationship with God. I'm wondering what kind of hearing we have.

JESUS' ENTOURAGE (VS 1-4a)

In verses 1 through the first half of verse 4, we are introduced to a sample of His entourage. PEOPLE OF ALL DIFFERENT COMMITMENT LEVELS FOLLOWED JESUS. There were both men and women in Jesus' discipleship circle. There were rich people, poor people, upright people, and people of questionable character. People that wouldn't even have met during the course of their everyday lives and would probably hated one another if they had, are now traveling companions with Jesus. Let me just throw this aside comment out here. That should be the description of us here at Devon Church. We should be united in our journeys through life because we are journeying with the same Lord, Jesus Christ.

In verse 1, we are reminded that the Twelve are with Jesus. One thing that becomes evident as we proceed through the Gospel is that Jesus has taken these twelve under His wing as a very special project. They will become the future leaders of the church. The number twelve is no accident. Jesus is building the new Israel on these twelve. The number is meant to correspond to the Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. There is to be both continuity and contrast between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. Jesus is the completion of the promises made to Old Testament Israel and He will now complete the rest of the promises through the New Testament Church. Jesus will build the Church from the bottom up. He is the foundation and His Gospel message will be the next layer added. On this He will lay the next course of foundation on top of the Gospel. This layer will consist of the Twelve and then onto that, the rest of the church. Paul describes the care in which we the church must build on the foundation that Christ laid:

"10Because of God's special favor to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. 11For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have—Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:10-11 / NLT).

One thing I also want to remind us about the Twelve. They were men that would never have interacted well with each other had they not been called together by Jesus. They are composed of tax collectors, ranchers, fishermen, zealots, and others. The chances are they avoided each other, stayed away from each other, and no doubt hated each other before meeting Jesus. However, they were brought together by Jesus. They would now have to get along with one another, and Jesus is going to build the Christian church with them. How successful was Jesus and successful were they? Here we are two thousand years later worshiping in a Christian church. I'd say that Jesus' plans were pretty successful. In fact, as we quickly approach the end times, we can see that the world is increasingly persecuting both Jews and Christians. Perhaps Jesus is also bringing Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church together just by the mere events that are unfolding in history.

Next we see in verses 2 and 3 part of the group known as disciples. The women described in these two verses are highly committed disciples. Luke mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna by name. What is interesting to me is that these women's names are mentioned in the Gospels and their names have been preserved down through history together with the record of Jesus. That is quite an honor. But again, we see that at least two of the women were as different as could be. Mary was an outcast at best and Joanna was part of the upper class culture. The difference between Mary and Joanna was the difference between the palace and the street. What could they possibly have in common? They had Jesus in common. Jesus cast out 7 demons from Mary. Perhaps He cured Joanna or her children. At any rate, Jesus cured many women from all sorts of illnesses and cast out demons from many. These women were helping to support Jesus and His ministry out of their own pockets. No doubt some women had much money and others had little money. However, they supported the ministry with their prayers, their loyalty, their service, and their money.

It seems to me that true disciples of Jesus give not because we must, but because we want to. People often ask me what they should give. Even though Jesus makes the point over and over again that 100% of what we have belongs to God, a good place to start is how the Hebrews did it. Again, let me say that this is only for people interested in doing this. The Hebrews learned to give a tithe to God's work. For the Hebrews the tithe was given to the temple. For us it should be to support the ministry that is our primary place of being fed the Gospel. For some people giving a tenth of what they make may be an incredible sacrifice. For others, a tenth may be nothing. I'm not sure the Bible sets a hard and fast rule. In my own life, I try and remember to give according to how God has given me. That's usually the rule that I use. Of course there will be good times where I can give way above my 10% and there will be difficult times where I can barely give my 10%. However, as far back as I can remember, my wife and I have always tried to give 10% no matter how poor we were or how difficult times were. It's just something that we have done. And I'm sure we never looked at it as some religious rule or compulsion.

It was nothing to be commended for or to be looked at as extraordinary. It was just something that we have done. I have made this point before. I am not asking for money or making any appeal for money. As you heard at the midyear report, we ended the first half of our year about \$32,000 down. If the last half goes the same, we will end up \$64k down. We only report that so everyone knows what our needs are. I am confident if God wants our ministry to go forward, He will continue to provide for us. He doesn't need me and He doesn't need you. He can provide in all sorts of ways. We have actually seen that at work here. What you give is between you and God. It is absolutely none of my business. But what I do need to tell you in order to be faithful to this text and Jesus' other teachings on money is this. Jesus does say that where our treasures are, there also lies our hearts. We tend to spend our time, money, energies, and thoughts on things we value. Jesus always invites us to check where our values are. And one of the ways He invites us

to check our values is to look at where and how we spend our money. Jesus was supported by people who were grateful for His ministry.

And then the multitudes are described in the first half of verse 4. There were always people following Jesus for various reasons. Some were curious. Some wanted to see a good show. Some came to be healed. Some came to hear His teachings. But they came from all walks of life. We have seen men and women come to Jesus. We have seen Jews and Gentiles come to Jesus. We have seen the religious and political elite come to Jesus and every class down to the social outcast come to Jesus. And in verse 1 Luke informs us that Jesus went throughout Israel to the towns and villages to make sure all had a chance to see and hear Him. The point Luke makes here is that **PEOPLE OF ALL DIFFERENT COMMITMENT LEVELS FOLLOWED JESUS.**

JESUS TELLS STORIES (VS 4b-10)

In the second half of verse 4 through verse 10, we can see that Jesus tells stories in order to illustrate His teachings. But what we find out is this. **JESUS TESTS THE SINCERITY OF PEOPLE THROUGH DIFFICULTIES.** In other words, these stories are sometimes meant to test people's hearts. In the second half of verse 4 through the first half of verse 8 Jesus tells the story. Verse 4 starts out the section with Luke informing us that Jesus told a parable. The point of Luke stating that this is a parable is this. Jesus is going to tell a story that seems relatively straightforward but actually has a meaning that points to a parallel truth. The story is meant to be an illustration. The problem with our getting the full force of the incident is that we already know the meaning of the parable but the audience that heard this story didn't hear it before. Please keep in mind that there are different levels of commitment of the people hearing this story. We have simply described the multitudes, the disciples, and the Twelve who for our purposes in this section we will lump together with the disciples.

The story is pretty simple and everybody would easily recognize the setting. The story is about a farmer planting seeds in his field. The fields would be readily familiar and probably visually present to the people. There would be well worn paths between the fields, separating one field from another. At the edge surrounding each field would be the debris that was cleared away. The farmer would have cleared out rocks and other debris from the field and thrown it around the edge. That would leave the field with only good dirt that could be plowed, planted, plowed again, and then harvested. So the farmer had a sack tied around his waist with a shoulder strap holding it in place. He would then scatter the seed by hand. As he threw the seed, some would undoubtedly spill on the road, some would land in the rocks, and other seed would land among weeds. But the majority of the seed landed on the field where it was intended.

Jesus then went on to describe what happened to the seed. Obviously, the seed that fell on the road was easily seen by birds. The birds immediately descended and ate up the seeds. The seed that landed in the rocks came up but because it

wasn't able to put down roots, it died because of lack of moisture. The seed that fell in among the thorns were choked out by the weeds. And the seed that fell properly in the field produced a great crop.

This story is not difficult to understand. Everyone had seen it a hundred times. Farmers in Jesus' audience lived this cycle every year. The thing is, the story is relatively mundane. In fact, the story is boring. If people had walked a couple of hours to hear Jesus speak, no doubt they would have been disappointed.

But in the second half of verse 8 through verse 9 we see that some people indeed hear. Jesus has just told a relatively boring story. But then He ends it by calling out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Now everybody's got to be confused. What does He mean? The story is pretty clear. It wasn't very interesting.

Verse 9 says, "His disciples asked Him what this parable meant." Now the group is divided into only two groups; disciples and non disciples, true followers of Jesus and unbelievers. When Jesus challenged everyone to hear, only the disciples put the effort forward to come and understand what the parable meant. They were interested in learning from Jesus. They want to learn exactly what Jesus was trying to teach. It took them extra effort to follow and understand Jesus. They demonstrated a real love for, and an interest in Jesus. They made the effort.

However, we see in verse 10 that some don't hear. The rest of the people had no interest in finding out what Jesus was talking about. Perhaps they weren't interested in what He had to say. Perhaps they were too lazy or too busy with life to stop and find out. Perhaps they wrote Jesus off as a boring teacher.

Look at verse 10 because I think that we often miss what Jesus is saying. He is now addressing those who were interested enough to come and learn what the meaning of the parable. The fact is this. No one understood what Jesus was trying to get at when He told that story. Try and think about this story without knowing ahead of time what it was about. Go back and read the story putting aside what you already know about it. Try to hear it for the first time. There is no way you could get anything out of it.

Now Jesus says, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."

It sounds like Jesus is just randomly selecting who He wants to give the truth to and who He wants to simply keep in the dark. The quote is from the book of Isaiah. God commissioned Isaiah to preach the message of repentance to wayward Israel. And then he informs Isaiah that his message will fall on deaf ears for the most part.

Now I said that none of the crowd understood Jesus' message. There was no way they could. But here Jesus is telling the disciples that they will understand the

parable. Jesus will give it to them. Why? Because they took the effort to pursue the meaning of the parable simply by asking Jesus.

Anyone in the crowd could have come to ask Jesus. Those who had the determination to learn could be in the group known as disciples. Jesus was open to all. Some came and some didn't. However, it was available to all. Some chose not to come. They would not hear the meaning of the parable. They saw Jesus and they heard the story. But they would not get the real meaning. They heard but did not hear. They saw but did not see.

So when Jesus said, "He who has ears, let him hear," He was inviting people to come to Him for the meaning. When I was in high school, I was on the swimming team. It was a team that had the reputation that it was a hard team to make. However, the coach was like no other coach. On all the other teams, during tryouts, the students would check to see the list every day to see if they had been cut from the team or if they were still in the running to make the team. But for the swimming team, there were no lists. Nobody was cut from the team. Anyone who wanted to make the team could make the team. During the preseason, an interesting thing would happen. Each week, the number of swimmers would decrease. Even though the coach didn't cut one person from the team, many would drop out because they thought it too tough or required too much of a commitment. Every season, by the first day of the season, there would be the right amount of swimmers to fill the events. Every one that wanted to be on the team could be on the team as long as they met all the requirements of attending practices and keeping their grades up.

Jesus said that whosoever wanted to come to follow Him could follow Him. He would not cut anyone from the team. However, as we see in this morning's text, many simply dropped out for various reasons. We have seen some people commit themselves to following Jesus and others simply deciding it wasn't worth it. **JESUS TESTS THE SINCERITY OF PEOPLE THROUGH DIFFICULTIES.** Where are you this morning? Would you say that you are willing to put the work in that it takes to be a disciple of Jesus? If you are, then I promise you that you will not be disappointed. In verses 11-15 Jesus explains the story. What is sad about this story is that it illustrates that **ALTHOUGH JESUS DESIRES TO SAVE EVERY PERSON, NOT ALL DESIRE TO BE SAVED.** This is one of the truths that both saddens me and confuses me. First of all, I have a lot of friends and family who are not Christians nor do they desire to become Christians.

I have told them about Christ. I have given them good Christian books. I have lived out my faith before them. I pray for them. And yet, they choose to remain apart from Jesus and salvation. Secondly, there may be some of you here that are not believers. I don't know if you can feel it, but I preach my heart out week after week trying to convince you that God's way is the best way. And there are people in this neighborhood that I want to be saved. I agonize over these things. They sadden me because I don't know what more that I can say or do.

It confuses me because I wonder who wouldn't want the love, the joy, the peace, the salvation and contentment that Jesus promises. Why wouldn't people want this? Jesus kind of explains it here.

JESUS EXPLAINS THE STORY (VS 11-15)

In verse 11 He explains that the seed being planted by the farmer is actually the Word of God. This is unique during the time of Jesus because in the Gospel of John, Jesus is identified as the living Word of God. And Jesus claims that His teaching is uniquely the Word of God. Jesus in referring to His person and His message put it like this:

"6... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 / NLT). Jesus presented Himself throughout all of Israel as the Promised Jewish Messiah. He did this by preaching and teaching. He did this by healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, giving the deaf hearing, casting out demons, and raising the dead. Jesus forgave sins and restored people's dignity to them. Ultimately He died for them. What more could Jesus do?

Today, many people hear the Word of God. It is available to all who want to hear. I preach. I teach. There is Christian radio. Bibles are readily available. God is still planting the seed of His words in the hearts of people today.

Although God is scattering His Word throughout the world, some won't hear because they are described as hard hearted in verse 12. The seed that fell on the road was quickly eaten up by the birds because the ground was just too hard to receive the seed. Some people are hardened because they have been deeply wounded. Many children have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. It's not just their minds and bodies that have been broken, their spirits have been wounded. When people have been betrayed, they often harden themselves in order to survive and not to be hurt again.

Others have hard hearts because they enjoy doing evil. People get involved in drugs and alcohol abuse. People give themselves over to making money, getting rich, and becoming powerful. Still others give themselves over to sexual immorality and other worldly vices. They have no interest in hearing what God has to say.

And further, pride hardens people's hearts. They have the world figured out according to their terms and have no interest in hearing what Jesus has to say. Remember, Jesus had His most heated exchanges with religious people. For whatever reason, this group of people has a hard cover. God's Word does not penetrate it. The Devil is right there to gobble it up and right there to gobble up their souls.

In verse 13 Jesus describes the next group of people who do not respond as the emotional. These are descriptive of the rocky soil. The seed falls into the cracks of the rocks. But because the ground under it is also rocky, the seed cannot put down

good roots. When the sun comes up, they are scorched and die. These are emotional people who when they hear about the love and joy and peace of Jesus, they receive it with joy. They close their eyes in worship service sway with the music, and are very emotional. However, when it really comes to putting their faith on the line, they give it up. There are so many Christians who are shallow. They don't study the Word of God. They don't practice the Word of God. During tough times, Jesus calls them times of testing; these emotional believers fall away because they never followed through with the rigorous demands of Christianity. It takes hard work to follow Jesus.

The next group in which the seed fails to take root is the worldly as described by Jesus in verse 14. This was illustrated by the seed that fell among the thorns. They grew for a while but there were so many weeds, that the weeds actually choked out the good plants. Jesus describes these people who hear Christianity and Jesus' call, but are really too busy with other things to give all their energy to Him. They obsess about life. They worry about things. When we worry about things and we get all concerned about the things in life, we choke out God's seed that He has planted in us. We often justify our worry by saying at least I am not pursuing worldly things like money or worldly pleasures. But Jesus puts them all in the same list. If we are all caught up in getting rich or pursuing happiness, then we don't allow God's seed to take root in us. Again, if we are not maturing in our faith, then it seems to me that we are not believers.

I think we would not do justice to the parable by pointing out that out of the four types of soil the seed falls on, the seed fails to successfully grow in three out of the four.

We must also point out though; the seed that fell on these three types of soil were accidentally thrown there. They fell there as the farmer was trying to plant the seed in the field. Those three types of soil were not the intended destination for the seed.

In verse 15 Jesus describes the real deal. It must be pointed out that the majority of the seed fell exactly where it was intended to fall, into the good, rich, fertile soil. This seed produced a good crop. The good soil stands for people with good and noble hearts. These people are humble and anxious to hear God's Word, to understand it, and to obey it. Jesus has described these people as ones who could hear. For Jesus, hearing only takes place when one hears, understands, and obeys. Look at the end of verse 15. Even though we are not saved by works, every authentic Christian should be producing good works. The intent of Jesus planting seeds of salvation in us is that we do good works. The Apostle Paul puts together these two concepts of being saved by grace through faith and God's expectation of good works on our part in his letter to the church at Ephesus:

"8God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10For we are God's masterpiece. He

has created us anew in Christ Jesus; so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:8-10 / NLT).

All throughout the Bible, it is unthinkable that someone could be a child of God and not doing good works. God gives us plenty of opportunities to minister. We can serve God with our time, our energy, our talents, resources, and money.

So while some seed fell incidentally on three types of soil, the majority of the seed found its way to its proper destination. It still remains strange to me that **ALTHOUGH JESUS DESIRES TO SAVE EVERY PERSON, NOT ALL DESIRE TO BE SAVED.**

So maybe the question Jesus wants us to examine is what type of soil are we? Are we too hardened by hurt, immorality, or pride to receive Him? Are we simply too shallow to receive Him because we are lazy or just in it because of the good feelings we get out of church? Are we so caught up in the values and things of this world that we don't have time to receive Jesus? Or like Jesus' disciples, who hang on to every word; who want to hear, understand, and obey? **GOD IS CONTINUALLY TELLING HIS STORY IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE PERSON OF HIS SON JESUS. DO PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO HEAR IT?**

I'm hoping that we have all made the commitment to hear, understand, and obey Jesus. However, I want to remind us that Jesus is still speaking today. Are we still listening?

In 1963 the Illinois senator Adlai Stevenson spoke to the students at Princeton University. He started out his lecture with these words:

"I understand I am here to speak and you are here to listen. Let's hope we both finish at the same time."

My prayer for each one of us is to keep on listening to God. He is not yet finished speaking to us. Let's be a people who hear, understand, and obey.