

*You're Hearing Me But You're Not Listenin', Part I* – Mark 4:1-20

Series: Look and Live #14

Illustration: difference between *hearing* and *listening*.

As a preacher, I see that difference every week. As I preach (except perhaps for the *rare* occasion) I'm seeing 25% not listening at all, 25% listening energetically and enthusiastically, 25% looking my way but with such little expression that I can't tell *what* their thinking, and 25% listening with disagreement or disapproval. The question that naturally comes to mind is this: how can the same Word from the same mouth meet with such *different* responses? That's the question this text answers. **Read Mark 4:1-20.**

Up to this point, the whole story of Mark has been about two things: Jesus preaching the Kingdom of God, and all the different responses *to* Jesus preaching the Kingdom of God. We've seen some respond to Jesus enthusiastically while others have committed their entire *lives* to following him. We've seen some overwhelmed by Jesus as if he were a Hollywood celebrity, and we've seen others plot together about how they would destroy and ultimately kill him. We've seen the skeptical, puzzled, and confused. Strangers seem to love him. His earthly family thinks he's crazy. The religious leaders want him dead. Galilean fishermen have given their lives to him. All very different.

What's even stranger is that, the whole time, Jesus and his message have been the exact same. Yet, as we've seen, there was an incredible variety of responses. **Why?** How can people respond so differently? That's the question Jesus answers for us in these 20 verses.

Now here's the deal: Jesus' answer is thick. Think about the way Jesus answers like an onion. An onion has a surface layer, but you can peel that off and see that there's a deeper layer underneath. You can even peel *that* layer off and find an even *deeper* layer. That's like Jesus' answer here. This morning, we're just going to work with his outermost surface-level answer. Next week we'll come back to this text and dig deeper to see the other two layers. So just keep in mind this morning that we're on the surface.

So, to provocatively answer the question of why some hear God's Word and produce fruit and others don't, Jesus tells this parable about a farmer sowing his seed in various soils and meeting various outcomes. Jesus' point is that, just like this poor farmer's seed produces varying levels of wheat, so too the Word of God, when it is heard, has different effects on different people. And that's because different things happen to the seed depending on where it lands. And that's the answer to the question. Different things happen in different people when they hear God's Word.

Particularly, Jesus uses this seed/soil parable to show us that *three things* can happen when someone hears God's Word that will keep that Word from being effective in them. This is what we'll focus on this morning. There are three things that can happen when a person hears God's Word that will *keep* that Word from being effective in their life. Let's look at those three things together both as explanation and as a warning.

- 1) Sometimes Satan *snatches* away the Word before it has any effect. (vv. 4, 15)
  - a) The picture in the parable is of a few very fortunate birds standing there alongside the farmer sowing his seed. These birds have figured out that the farmer oftentimes unintentionally gets some of his seed on the hard walking path where they can easily come and snatch it right up. No sooner than he tosses the seeds just a little too far and they land on the path, the birds *swarm* the scattered seeds and munch them right up. And *just like* that, so Satan, as soon as someone hears God's Word, can carry away the message to keep them from being affected by it, changed by it.
  - b) The purpose of preaching and teaching God's Word is to *change* the heart of the listener. We believe that God's Word is powerful and that God *uses* the hearing of his Word to actually change our hearts, to make us love sin less, to make us look and feel less like the world and more like Christ. But Satan *hates* Christ-likeness so he loves to keep hearts from being changed by the preached Word.
  - c) The way he does that is by *snatching* away the Word as soon as it's heard. He does that in at least two ways: *distraction and ignorance*.
    - i) Distraction.
      - (1) Even right now, all of you in this room are hearing me. If you have ears to hear you hear sounds coming from the pulpit. But for some, Satan has distracted you to keep you from listening. "You're hearing me but you ain't listenin'."
      - (2) If the Word of God is going to have any affect on our hearts, it needs to *heard*, *understood*, and *abide*. We need to hear it, and you're all doing that. But it also has to be understood. It has to be thought about and grasped and you have to think through it and say, "Yes yes, I get that!" And then it has to *abide* or *remain* and it continues to bring forth fruit.
      - (3) But perhaps Satan has you thinking about the football game, dinner after church, or a snide comment made. So you're distracted. It's like I'm up here sowing the seed (the Word of God, the Bible) but as soon as it lands on you it's gobbled up by the birds. It will never germinate, produce roots, and grow up and produce fruit. It's pretty useless actually. Satan has made your hearing of God's Word useless by distraction.
    - ii) Ignorance
      - (1) Aside from distraction, Satan also uses ignorance. If he can't keep you from listening, he's going to keep you from understanding what is being said.
        - (a) Perhaps you're sitting there thinking, *What's a parable? Where's the book of Mark? Who is Satan?* Because you don't have the fundamentals, you can't keep up and understand what is being said. And if you can't understand what's being said, it won't have any legitimate impact on you. If you can't understand what's said, you won't be *changed* by what's said.
        - (b) Now if you're a brand new Christian, this is understandable and normal. As a new Christian, hearing these words and names that you don't know is supposed to encourage you to go home and say, "Hey, I need to look that up. I want to get that figured out."
        - (c) But if you've been a Christian for a couple years and you don't know these things, Satan has worked in your life to keep you from caring enough to *get* the fundamentals. Friends, he is *snatching* away your seed.
        - (d) You're never going to get the Bible, it's never going to start making sense as a whole unless you begin to study and read on your own outside of church.

- (e) If you're just thinking you're supposed to get all of this by coming Sunday mornings, you're still going to be a babe in another five or even twenty years.
  - (f) This is God's Word. Don't let Satan keep you dispassionate about understanding it and knowing it. Read it! Study it! Read other good books that will help you understand it better. Look up words that you don't know.
- d) If this preaching in worship is going to be helpful, then we need to understand that all of us have work to do.
- i) I can't walk up here unprepared, and neither can you.
  - ii) You need to come in here and say, "Okay self, it's time to focus now. Never mind where we're going to eat. Never mind who's playing who this afternoon. I must concentrate. I must be ready to listen and to use my mental faculties to understand and process what is being said."
  - iii) Listening to God's Word is *different* from watching TV.
  - iv) There's work to do on the part of the listener! Your heart depends on it. Come in with the mentality that you're going to not just *hear* this Word, but you're going to work to understand it, to remember it, and by God's grace, to be changed *by it*.
  - v) If we're not doing that, Satan has us distracted and/or ignorant! All of our hearing and listening to God's Word will be *useless*.
- 2) The second thing that can happen to someone when they hear God's Word is in verses 16-17. They can keep the Word of God from penetrating their crusty outer shell and from going deep. They can keep it on the surface.
- a) Jesus tells us something shocking here: it is possible for a person to sit under God's Word week after week nodding their head with the preacher with joy saying, "Yes, amen to that brother," and because they are shallow, they soon fall away and prove that they were not a true Christian at all.
  - b) Those are "surface Christians." They don't want/let the Word of God *penetrate* their surface. They don't go deep with the Word. They won't let the Word of God deep into their *thinking* or deep into their *feeling*.
  - c) Like a plant without roots shriveling under the noon-day heat, this surface Christian will disappear from the church scene like a vapor, and people will be left saying, "Hey Pastor, whatever happened to so and so?"
  - d) This church has lost so many people over the years like this. It leaves me wondering, who are the rootless people here today?
  - e) Remember, when asking the question, what happens to the Word of God in some people that keeps the Word from being effective in their lives? Answer: they never develop roots! They only allow the Word to touch their surface.
  - f) The "roots" in mind here are the **roots of thinking** and the **roots of feeling**. Christians are people who *go deep* with God's Word. The Word grows deep roots in their thinking and deep roots in their feeling.
  - g) First, in true Christians there is the root of ***thinking deeply*** about God and about his Word.
    - i) The Bible is a big, massive story with huge implications for our lives.
    - ii) It is wide and it is deep. No one is required to "get it" in its entirety, but if we're Christians, we're going to have a drive to jump in and *get it* as much as we can. As we do that, we are being changed by God.
  - h) The same things we've just said about "thinking deeply" are also true of "**feeling deeply**".

- i) There is no such thing as a Christian who doesn't feel deeply about God and his Word.
  - ii) This is one of the ways God's Word changes us: it stirs within us emotions for God, love for God and for his Son, love for the Gospel, love for the people of God, and a hatred of sin, worldliness, and our old self.
- i) They're called roots because they keep us grounded.
  - j) Consider what it would be like for *tragedy* to strike your home today after church.
    - i) In the immediate aftermath, everything in life will feel pretty numb emotionally. It will be hard to feel much of anything because this tragedy has struck so deep. But because your feelings about God run *even deeper still*, because the roots of *feeling deeply about Christ* have reached deep down and touched the very core of who you are, though everything else is numb yet you know and are still moved by an abiding love for Jesus Christ. Though the world feels worthless, Christ is still infinitely valuable to you.
    - ii) In the days ahead when you begin to process what happened today, how this could have happened, why this might have happened, what you're supposed to do know that your entire life has been changed *since* it happened, because you have wrestled so deeply with the Word of God, because the very fabric of your thinking has been changed by and conformed to the Scriptures, you will sort through all of this with the wisdom of God and in a way that honors and glorifies God.
    - iii) You see, that's why these are called *roots*.
  - k) Beware of shallow rooted Christianity. Don't settle for it here at HHBC. Don't settle for shallow thinking and shallow feeling for God.
- 3) The third thing that can happen to someone when they hear God's Word is in verses 18-19. Sometimes, a love for the world keeps the Word from having any affect on someone.
- a) If we've learned *anything* so far it's this: the Scriptures are supposed to have an effect on us. But one of the final things that can keep the Word from changing us is a deep rooted love for this world.
  - b) For these people in *this* point, they're hearing the Word. They're even *listening* to the Word and comprehending it; they're getting it. God says, "Repent and believe on Jesus Christ. You cannot serve both God and money. Turn from your adulterous relationship." But in their hearts they're thinking, "I really don't want to. I *like* my money. I *like* my adulterous relationship."
  - c) Why do so many just not believe? Because they *love* their sinful life and their worldly rebellion too much to give it up. And so the Word is silenced.
  - d) We need to understand that this is a serious threat to every single one of us in here this morning.
    - i) You are fighting many battles just by coming Sunday morning, sitting in your pew, and directing your attention towards the front.
    - ii) But ultimately, most serious battle that we all fight as we sit and listen to God's Word is this: there is a love in our hearts for the things God's Word is telling us *not* to do, not to want, and to put off. We still *love those things*, at least in some measure.
    - iii) And if we love them too much, all our hearing of the Scriptures will be completely fruitless and powerless to bring about any change.
  - e) So be mindful of this battle and know that there is more going on in preaching than just "learning". Your heart is being given two options: a glorious Christ in a wonderful Gospel or the world. My task is to stand here and paint a picture of Christ to your heart that shows that he is more lovely and desirable than the world.

- i) But the craziest thing is that, on our own, if our hearts just do what comes naturally, week in and week out we will choose the world over Christ. We will decide that the world, the way of the world, the things of the world, and the glory of the world are more valuable than Jesus and we would rather have *them* than him. That's what it means to be in bondage to sin.
- ii) So you see how *desperate* we are that the Spirit of God come *in our preaching*, in our *worship*, and that he move in such a way that our hearts choose Christ instead. How desperate we are for the Holy Spirit to turn our hearts *away* from ourselves, away from the world, away from what comes so naturally, and turn them towards Christ as he is being proclaimed.
- iii) Only the Spirit of God can do that. But he has promised to use our preaching and our hearing of that preaching to do that, so let's not fail to continually pray and ask him to do that very thing right here on United Road every Sunday morning.

*Preached by:*  
*Ryan Haider*  
*Hickory Hill Baptist Church*  
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