

“Do You Have Ears to Hear?”  
(Mark 4:9-12)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation: Last time we were in Mark’s Gospel, we considered the parable of the Sower; there were two things we wanted to see.

1. The first was the four possible responses you can have to the Gospel:
  - a. You can have a hard heart that simply rejects it.
  - b. You can have a superficial heart that is willing to follow Jesus until it becomes too hard.
  - c. You can have a divided heart that isn’t able to let go of the world and so never gets serious about following Jesus.
  - d. Or you can have a whole and good heart – prepared by the Spirit – that listens, believes and submits to what Jesus says from the heart.
  - e. Remember you are only a true believer and will see heaven if you have the last kind of heart – a hard, superficial or worldly heart never will.
  - f. If the first three describe your experience, seek the Lord for His mercy to change it.
  
2. The second thing we looked at had to do with using this information in evangelism. We saw two things:
  - a. That many people will fall into the first category. When that happens, realize,
    - (i) That doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with the message or how you communicated the message.
    - (ii) The whole world hates the true Jesus and His Gospel and won’t respond well to it unless the Lord changes their hearts.
    - (iii) Knowing this upfront may keep you from being discouraged.
  
  - b. The rest of the people will fall into the last three categories. The thing you need to be wary of here is that they will all look the same at the start.
    - (i) They will all “believe” the Gospel and begin to follow Jesus.
    - (ii) But there will soon be a parting of the ways:
      - (a) Some will leave when it gets too tough.
      - (b) And others won’t bear any fruit because they can’t let go of the world.
      - (c) But there will be true believers that bear fruit, because God will be faithful to gather His children through the Gospel.

B. Preview:

1. This morning, let’s consider what Jesus said in the middle of this parable and how this bears on the condition of the heart: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
  - a. Jesus wasn’t implying there were only some in the crowd that could hear in the sense that they weren’t deaf.

- b. He was saying there were some who could truly understand what He was saying and some who could not; and this had to do with God's will.
2. Let's consider two things:
- a. First, why only some could understand what Jesus was saying.
  - b. And second, that this is still true today.

## II. Sermon.

A. First, why could only some understand what Jesus said? It's because the Lord only opened the ears of some.

1. Jesus' use of parables was really an act of judgment on Israel.
  - a. Many believe that Jesus used parables to make things clearer – and that we would be wise to follow His example when teaching others about spiritual truth.
  - b. Using analogies and concrete images can help in teaching, but that isn't why Jesus used parables.
    - (i) When His disciples couldn't understand them either, they asked Jesus, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10).
    - (ii) He answered, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (vv. 11-13).
    - (iii) He didn't use parables to reveal truth, but to hide it.
    - (iv) Have you ever noticed that Jesus only used parables when He was preaching publicly, and not when He was alone with His disciples?
  - c. Why would Jesus keep the truth from His Old Covenant people? Wasn't He trying to lead all Israel to salvation?
    - (i) Not really. He was seeking only to reach His elect – those who are called "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).
    - (ii) The rest were under God's judgment. Jesus said about them, "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM'" (13:14-15).
    - (iii) Notice it wasn't God's fault they couldn't see or hear or understand – it was their own.
    - (iv) The Lord was judging them by withholding His truth – the end result of this judgment would be 70 AD.

- d. Jesus didn't use parables to make what He said easier to understand: He used them to conceal the truth from those who had already rejected it.
2. But don't overlook the fact that the Lord didn't withhold His truth from everyone.
    - a. There were those the Father had given ears to hear by His Spirit.
    - b. Jesus explained the parables to them in secret.
    - c. He didn't withhold the truth from everyone – only from those who had heard it and consistently rejected it.
- B. Second, is the same still true today? Yes.
1. The Lord no longer hides His truth by speaking in parables.
    - a. This was something He did against Israel because of their rejection.
    - b. The Lord has recorded both the parables and their explanations – for the most part – in Scripture for anyone to read.
    - c. He doesn't need to hide it, because the world, for the most part, is blind.
      - (i) They're not absolutely blind.
        - (a) They can read and understand what the Bible says.
        - (b) They can even believe it's true and do most of what the Lord commands.
      - (ii) But they are blind in this sense: they can't see its beauty and the glory.
        - (a) *That will always be a mystery to them – why anyone would give up the world to follow what's in this book.*
        - (b) If they saw God's glory, they would be willing.
  2. But here is the point: the Lord still gives sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf – He still gives spiritual understanding through the illuminating work of His Holy Spirit. The question He asks you this morning is, Can you hear His voice? Here are a few questions you can use to examine yourself?
    - a. First, if your ears are open, you will certainly want to read God's Word and listen to what it says – is that what you're doing?
      - (i) Do you read the Bible? Do you read it every day? Do you read it often because you want to hear what God says?
      - (ii) Do you listen at family devotions, when it's read, explained and applied?
      - (iii) Do come to the services to listen to what the Lord has to say through His Word?
      - (iv) It doesn't matter if He has given you ears to hear, if you don't listen, it won't make any difference.
    - b. Second, if your ears are open, you will also want to submit to what God says – is this what you are doing?
      - (i) When Jesus asked whether those who heard Him had ears to hear, every one of them – except for the deaf – could have said, yes. *But how many really heard?*

- (a) You don't really hear in the way Jesus means unless you do what He tells you.
  - (b) If you hear and don't do, you're still turning a deaf ear to Him.
- (ii) Are you submitting to the Lord?
- (a) Are you doing your best to put what you hear into practice?
  - (b) Or do you simply forget? If you forget, what's the difference between you and the seed that fell by the wayside?
  - (c) Jesus says it's only those who "hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:15) that will be blessed.
- c. Finally, when you hear the Lord, do you submit to Him willingly?
- (i) Do you obey because you want to, not because you have to?
  - (ii) This is something else that will be true of you if your ears are open.
    - (a) Jesus says in Luke 8:15, "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word *in an honest and good heart*, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."
    - (b) Do you submit to the Word because you love it, because you see God's beauty and glory in it? And not because you think by keeping it you will keep your soul out of hell?
    - (c) If so, then God has given you ears to hear.
      - (1) If He has, give Him all the glory – this is the gift of His grace, as we'll see further this evening.
      - (2) If He has, then listen to what He says and do it with all your might from the heart.
    - (d) If this isn't true of you, then listen carefully.
      - (1) Merely reading the Bible won't save you.
      - (2) Merely listening to sermons won't convert you.
      - (3) Going through the motions of obedience won't keep your soul out of hell.
      - (4) You must submit to the Lord from your heart or you will be lost.
      - (5) The only One who can change your heart is God.
      - (6) So in your reading, pray that He would open your eyes; in your listening, pray that He would open your ears; in your "obedience" pray that He would break your heart and convert you.
      - (7) Look to the Lord in prayer and keep on looking until He gives you His grace. Amen.