

REVOLUTIONARY STORIES OF JESUS

Parable of the Sower

Bottom Line: If we do not take the responsibility of preparing our hearts to receive God's Word, then we shouldn't expect to receive anything at all.

Have you ever been accused of not listening to something someone was saying?

What is the difference between merely *hearing* something and actually *listening* to something? Why do you think listening well is such a difficult skill in today's culture?

Probably the biggest difference between *hearing* something compared to only *listening* to something has to do with comprehension and understanding. Listening is a lost art in our culture. We are constantly bombarded with noise from every direction—our spouses, our kids, our bosses, our televisions, our radios, our phones, etc. It is impossible for us to deeply process everything that is thrown at us each day, so in an attempt to quell all the noise we tend to only try and process what is quickly and easily digestible; our minds are too tired and overwhelmed to do much else. This results in a lack of understanding and we don't actually listen to what is really important. This affects every area of our lives, but especially our relationships, where listening well is crucial to demonstrating a heart that is open and receptive to the other person and what they have to say.

How important is listening well to our relationship with Jesus? How do we hear Jesus?

The biggest way we hear Jesus today is through the Bible, which (amazingly!) records some of the very words of Jesus Himself. Jesus frequently taught in parables. A parable is a story with a deeper spiritual meaning. In His parables, Jesus takes things that are commonly understood and uses them to point to and illustrate greater, deeper, more mysterious truths.

Read Matthew 13:10-17. Why do you think Jesus spoke in parables?

Jesus explains that the reason He speaks in parables is to weed out those whose hearts weren't truly receptive to the truth He was trying to convey to them (vv. 13-15). Jesus frequently drew large crowds and knew that a lot of people, although they may say the right things, wouldn't genuinely receive Him or His teachings in their hearts (**Read John 2:23-25**). So, to those who had been faithful to listen well, who proved in their hearts that they were actually receptive to Jesus and His message, they would be blessed with deeper insight and knowledge (v. 12; 16), while those whose hearts weren't truly open to Him would gain nothing.

In what ways do you see people hearing the words of Jesus but not listening to them?

Keeping in mind what we've learned so far, read Matthew 13:1-10 and discuss the following questions:

What do we learn about the sower? What do we learn about the seed? What do we learn about the soil? Is the focus in this parable on the sower, the seeds, or the soil?

REVOLUTIONARY STORIES OF JESUS

Out of the sower, the seed, and the soil, where does the problem lie? What does this tell us about Jesus, His word, and our hearts?

What is the problem with the first soil the seeds were thrown onto? How does this relate to our hearts? What about the second soil? The third?

What is the result of the fourth soil? What does this soil do differently than the others? (It produces fruit). How does this translate and relate to salvation?

Now read Matthew 13:18-23. How close were your interpretations to Jesus' explanation?

In Jesus' explanation here, which outcome shocks or surprises you the most? Why?

According to verse 15, what are the characteristics of a person who has been born again?

Jesus says that the disciples are blessed because their eyes truly see, their ears truly hear, and because of this the seed of the Gospel that the Sower planted landed on good soil—their hearts truly understand the message of the Gospel, and they will bear good fruit.

Why is it not enough to just hear the word of God? What does putting it into practice reveal about our trust in Him? (See James 1:22-25)

What ways can we till the soil of our hearts to make us ready to receive the word of God? How can we actively fight against each distraction that Jesus mentions—temptation by Satan (v. 19), overwhelming persecution (v. 20-21), the worries of life and deceitfulness of wealth (v. 22)?

Reflection

Which soil best describes the tendencies of your heart? Do you give in too easily to sin and temptation without putting up much of a fight or feeling any conviction? Is the strength of your faith dictated by how easy or hard your current circumstances are? Is your heart given to material possessions and worldly concerns more than Jesus and heavenly matters? How are these orientations and patterns preventing you from truly hearing God?

Are you listening well to the sermons on Sunday mornings? In group? In your personal time with the Lord? Do you go into each of these environments committed to put what you hear from God's word into practice? If not, what can you do to help you listen better? Do you need to take notes/journal? Do you need to discuss the sermon, the lesson, or your bible reading with others for accountability? What can you do next Sunday service, next group session, next Bible study, next quiet time, etc., to help you listen better?