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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“EARS TO HEAR”

Luke 8:1-15

Do we have ears? Do we hear?

☑ I served as a short-term missionary in Japan for two years, from 1988-1990. While I was there I took Japanese lessons and acquired some skill with the language.

One day a boy stopped me on the street, spoke a phrase, and waited for my reply.

I did not catch what he said, so I asked him to please repeat it: “Mou ichi do onegaishimasu.”

He did. But to my surprise I could not understand him, so I asked him to say it again: “Mou ichi do itte kudasai.”

The boy repeated himself a third time. To my embarrassment I could not comprehend a single word, and I told him so: “Wakariamsen.” “Rikai dekimasen.”

He turned and walked away, visibly frustrated. I felt a bit shook up. Was my Japanese that bad? Were my friends just being polite when they said I was doing well for an American?

About five minutes later it hit me so hard I nearly fell over: I had not understood the boy’s Japanese because he was speaking *English!*

All the components necessary for communication were present: there was a speaker (the boy) and an audience (me); the boy’s lungs produced airflow to vibrate his vocal cords, and his tongue, palate, cheeks and lips did

their part; he had a message, and he made a valiant effort to convey it; my outer, middle, and inner ears were operating at peak efficiency, as were my auditory nerves.

Still, although I wanted to hear him and thought I did, I did not. It was as though I did not have ears.

❓ *Do we have spiritual ears? Do we hear?*

■ Please turn to Luke 8. In verses 5-8 Christ Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than what was sown.”

Immediately after he finishes the story Messiah calls out in a loud voice, so that his words carry to every corner of the gathering crowd: **“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”**

(Or, as some other translations render it: {CEV} **“If you have ears, pay attention!”** {NCV} **“You people who can hear me, listen!”** {TEV} **“Listen, then, if you have ears!”**) It is a fitting follow-up, for beneath the farming imagery **this parable all about hearing.**

■ Messiah begins to explain in verse 11: **“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.”**

📖 **“The word of God”** is the means by which the Living God reveals himself. It includes his spoken word, his written word (the Holy Scriptures, which are {2 Ti 3:16} **“God-breathed”**), and his incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth ({Jn 1:14} **“the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”**).

○ **“The”** spoken **“word of God”** is powerful and effective. {Ge 1:3; 1:6-7} In the first chapter of Genesis the LORD YHWH says: **“Let there be light,’ and there [is] light,” “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.’And it [is] so,”** and so forth, a total of eight times in 27 verses.

“The” written **“word of God”** is powerful and effective. In Isaiah 55:10-11 he declares:

**“As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which
I sent it.**

○ **“The”** incarnate **“word of God”** is powerful and effective. {Jn 1:4} **“In him [is] life, and that life [is] the light**

of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Human enemies tried to silence Jesus, but they could not. Satan pulled out all the stops in his efforts to corrupt Jesus, but he could not. Death thought it could keep Jesus in the grave, but it could not.

○ **“The word of God”** *will* fulfill its purpose on a cosmic scale when the Risen Christ {1 Co 15:24} **“has destroyed all [worldly] dominion, authority and power”** and {Rev 21:1-2} **“the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, [comes] down out of heaven”** and is integrated into the **“new earth.”** It *will* fulfill its purpose on a small scale in those who are {Ro 5:29-30} **“[being] conformed to the image of his Son,”** on that great day when our predestination will be fully realized as our justification is translated into glorification.

Even so, the word does not bring this about in every life. God does not communicate in order to compel silent submission, but to inspire genuine love and obedience. God seeks conversation rather than monologue, and that kind of give-and-take always entails the risk of failure.

■ In verses 12-14 Christ Jesus explains how this happens:

“Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root.

They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who *hear*, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”

★ Some people are like packed-down soil along the path. They literally hear God’s word – maybe once, maybe hundreds of times. It is possible that they read Scripture, study it, and hear it preached week after week. {1 Co 8:1} Yet their knowledge does not build them up, it just “**puffs [them] up.**” Their hard hearts are impervious to the message. The word cannot penetrate to the soul, and they are not saved.

★ Some people are like rocky soil.

As physical stones absorb the sun’s heat and warm the soil, hastening the growth of the seeds, so they respond quickly and emotionally to God’s word. It fires up their enthusiasm and they receive it with joy.

Those same stones also prevent the seeds from putting down deep roots, and they quickly succumb to the summer heat. So these hearers do not grow past the shallowness of their infant faith. They are all about feeling good, and when God allows them to feel the heat of hardship and loss their faith shrivels and dies. The word cannot take good root, and they do not endure to receive salvation in the end.

★ Some people are like weedy soil full of thorns. They hear God’s word and receive it, in part. They confess faith and mean it, in part. They devote themselves to Jesus *and* themselves, Jesus *and* success, Jesus *and* reputation,

Jesus *and* pleasure, Jesus *and* money, Jesus *and* possessions, and so on. Their divided hearts do not have enough room for the word, and they do not bear the fruit of salvation.

Those who are packed-down soil, or rocky soil, or weedy soil literally “**hear**” the word, and many of them receive it on some level – but not in a way that allows it to transform them into the likeness of Christ and give them abundant, eternal life. In effect, they do not really hear. They do not have spiritual ears.

■ There is a risk that, the longer a person does not really hear, the deafer they will get. For some, the word increasingly becomes sound without sense. That is the meaning of the hard words in verse 10: “**I speak in parables, to that ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’**”

This is bad news. But there is good news, too!

👂 1st, some people do have ears, do hear the word, and it does accomplish its purpose in their lives.

■ The parable ends happily in verse 8: “**Still other seed fell on good soil,**” soil that could support it from sowing through germination, through growth, all the way to the harvest. “**It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.**”

■ The Lord explains it in verse 15: “**The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who heard the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.**”

😊 These people receive the Word truly enough for it to take root in their hearts, deeply enough to persevere under hardship and pressure, and purely enough to

overcome worry, wealth and worldliness. The fruit they bear is evidence of a good and noble heart.

☛ 2nd, God is generous, even extravagant, with his word.

In his kindness God scatters seed everywhere, sending his word into the lives of the hard, shallow, and divided as well as the noble and good.

This is no accident. It reveals what is in the LORD's heart, that he does {2 P 3:9} **“not [want] anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**

It demonstrates his commitment {Lk 19:10} **“to seek and to save what was lost.”**

And because the condition of a human heart can change over time, it gives hope even for the hard, the shallow, and the divided. If their spiritual ears open up, the seed will be there to penetrate, germinate, take root, grow, and produce a harvest of eternal, abundant life. Isn't that our story? Isn't that what God has done for us?!

“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Luke 8:1-15 is the word of the Lord!