

Listen Up

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2020

Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 0 0] This evening's reading is taken from the book of Matthew and it's in chapter 13 and we're reading from verse 1 through to 23. It's on page 978 of the Church Bibles.

Matthew chapter 13. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables saying, A man went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, but the soil was shallow. Because the soil was shallow, but when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.

Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

[1 : 0 9] Whoever has ears, let them hear. The disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables? He replied, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables.

Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. You will be ever hearing, but never understanding.

You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn.

And I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, but did not see it.

[2 : 2 4] And to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. Listen then to what the parable of the sower means. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches it away what was sown in their heart.

This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word.

But the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. This is the word of the Lord. Great. Great.

[3 : 31] Thanks, Aileen, for reading. Robbie, for leading. And everyone else. And for you guys, for being here. Well done for making it out on this Glasgow evening. My name is James. I'm on staff team here at St. Silas.

And let me pray for us as we begin. So, Father, we pray that we would listen, hear, and understand what you have to say to us tonight.

Amen. Amen. Well, it was a day very much like Glasgow today. A beautiful sunshine day. And there was a magnificent lake.

And the sun was shimmering across the lake. And Jesus, the great miracle worker, the great preacher, had come to the Lake of Galilee. And the crowds had heard about him, so they gathered around him to hear what he would say.

And so much so, that he had to climb into a little boat and row out onto the lake to form a little amphitheater, so that he could speak to all the crowds and they could hear him.

[4 : 37] And he begins to tell them a story about a farmer. But apparently, this farmer's not very good, because he sows his seed and it goes everywhere.

And most of it doesn't produce any fruit at all. And then Jesus finishes off the story and he says, Whoever has ears, let them hear.

And he closes the preaching for the day. And I wonder how you might have felt had you listened to that sermon then.

And I wonder how you might have felt coming here tonight for the first time. Maybe for the first time if you're new to church. Maybe you're a regular. Maybe church is something quite different for you.

You might be feeling, well, church is just a bit boring. Isn't it a bit irrelevant? Maybe everything's confusing. Why do we read stuff off a screen?

[5 : 38] Why is someone preaching at us? And you might be, like them, long ago, quite confused as to what is going on and what Jesus is saying.

And the reason they might have been confused was because before this, Jesus had spoken with such authority in Matthew. So we remember those great words, those favorite words of Jesus that we know in Matthew 5.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they will inherit the kingdom of God. And then Matthew in chapter 7, he writes that the crowds are amazed because of Jesus.

Because he spoke with authority, not like any of the teachers. But here, in verses 1 to 9, he seems quite rambly all over the show.

And you wonder what is going on. And the point of this parable and the point of this reading tonight is for us to listen up.

[6 : 42] And so Jesus says, in verse number 9, And then Jesus gives us some warnings against not listening well.

So I thought we might look at this parable, the story tonight, in three ways. So our first point will be the frustration of listening, verses 1 to 9. Then we're going to consider the secret that comes from listening, verses 10 to 17.

And then finally, we're going to look at the hope that comes from listening, in verses 18 to 23. So we're on our first point, the frustration of listening, verses 1 to 9.

And I wonder if you've ever had the experience of not being able to hear what others are saying. Maybe you've spoken and someone hasn't been able to hear you very well.

And I remember that it can be quite a frustrating experience. So when I was a young child, I only learned to speak properly when I was six. The issue was my ears were blocked.

- [7 : 50] And so I'd only ever hear the ends of words. My vocabulary consisted of the ends of words. So yellow became low. Hello became low.
- Fudge became udge. T became E. Incredibly frustrating. And so I'd go to primary school and I'd speak to my peers and they'd just look at me.
- And they'd give me this blank expression. They wouldn't understand. And I'd say something and they'd just look at me and they wouldn't understand me. And I wouldn't understand there. And it would be incredibly frustrating.
- And so normally a fight would break out. And then I'd have to go and find another school. And when we come to verse 1 to 9, it's incredibly frustrating.
- And you wonder what on earth is going on here. It's okay if I'm a bit confusing and a bit boring. But what happens if it's someone who's really important to you?
- [8 : 52] And they can't make themselves understood. And you can't understand them. And they can't speak to you. Someone whose words you particularly value.
- Can you imagine how traumatic that would be? Of not being able to communicate to someone who's near and dear. And it's so frustrating that Jesus' disciples come up to him in verse 10.
- If you've got your Bibles open, keep them open. And they ask Jesus, Jesus, why do you speak to the people in parables? And Jesus answers them in verse 11.
- And he says, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you and not to them. And this brings us to our second point.
- The secrets that come from listening well. Verses 10 to 17. And by secret there, I really mean some benefit or some good that we can get and obtain from listening well.
- [9 : 57] So a couple of years ago, it was a little while ago, I met with this random relative. I don't know if he was a relative. He was married to a second cousin about three times removed.
- Are they a relation? I'm not sure. I can't figure it out. It's one of those relations you meet and then you forget about. And you may meet them again in 20 years' time. And we were having tea and Richard was telling me this story.
- He was telling me about how he trained as an architect in London. And one day he had newly qualified and he was working in his office. And some chap walked into his office and said, Richard, I've got some land available.
- Would you like to buy it? The price is 50,000 pounds. And you can have it. And you can develop it. And Richard was on the app. He was quite busy. He didn't really value what this chap was saying.
- And he wasn't listening carefully. And so he forgot about it as soon as the chap had left the room. And the land turned out to be Canary Wharf, which became enormously valuable.
- [11 : 00] And you could, as I was listening to the story, I could hear the regret in Richard's voice from not listening well at that time. And in this section, we get a warning against not listening well and the promise of what we do gain if we do listen well.
- And so Jesus goes on to explain what he said in verse 11 and verse 12. And he says, What's Jesus going on about there?
- And it sounds a bit confusing until you realize he's talking about listening and understanding what you're hearing. So I was at Bible College before coming to Oko.
- And I have this friend at Bible College. He's one of those friends who's incredibly frustrating to have as a friend. Because Graham would go to class. He would put his pencil down to one side.

And he would sit there. And he would simply listen. And as he was listening, he would check out the cricket. And then he would check out the soccer. And all the time, he would be listening, taking stuff in.

[12 : 21] And the rest of us would be furiously taking notes, trying to catch every word. And if we missed the word, well, that was it. Even what we did remember would be gone. Graham would simply sit there listening.

And he would understand more and more and more. He had a fantastic brain. He had a fantastic brain. He would just absorb it. And he would understand it simply by listening.

And then Jesus says, This is why I speak to them in parables. And he gives them a quotation from the Old Testament. And the reason that Jesus gives them for why he speaks in parables from the Old Testament is that the people have stopped listening.

Just look down at verse 15 in our passage. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears.

And they have closed their eyes. And therefore, Jesus says, He speaks to them in parables which they don't understand. So even the little bit that they might have understood is taken away from them.

[13 : 32] And they won't remember. And this passage is really the turning point in Matthew's account of the life of Jesus.

You see, up until this point in Matthew, Jesus has been doing the most incredible things. And he's been speaking of himself as something greater.

That's the phrase that he uses. So he talks about Solomon, the greatest king that the Israelites ever had. And then he says of himself, something greater is here. And then he speaks of Jonah, who got swallowed by a whale for three days.

And then he says of his work, something greater is here. And then Jesus makes the most extraordinary claim in chapter 11.

I'll just read it for us. We don't have to turn there. 11.27. He says, All things have been committed to be my father. No one knows the son. That's Jesus.

[14 : 33] Except the father. That's God. And no one knows the father except the son, Jesus. And those to whom the son chooses to reveal them.

So what's he saying? You can only know God through Jesus. Despite Jesus' great words and despite his great miracles, the people and their religious leaders of the day, they reject Jesus.

So we read that the Pharisees went out in chapter 12 and they plotted how they might kill Jesus.

And so Jesus says he'll stop speaking and stop showing them God the Father.

I wonder if you can remember how tragic it is when you fall out with a friend and you stop speaking. And you stop speaking. The pain that you might have in that.

[15 : 39] Maybe you can think of a situation when you've stopped speaking to your parents. Or if you have children, you've stopped speaking to your children.

They've stopped speaking to you. And then I wonder if you can feel what it would be like if God stopped speaking to us.

The absolute horror of it. And how pointless life would be. How empty it would be. No meaning if God stopped speaking to us.

But the wonder and the secret of the gospel is that Jesus still speaks to us tonight. to all of those who trust in him.

And we see this in our reading, don't we? So at the end of verse 15, Jesus gives us the promise that if we turn to him, I would heal them. And then he goes on in verse 16.

[16 : 42] But blessed are your eyes, speaking to those who trust him, because they see in your ears, because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people, that's the greats of the age, those were the people who really knew God.

Those people, they longed to see what you see, but did not see it. And to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

And the secret that comes from listening well is the secret of the gospel. It's the secret of the good news about Jesus.

And it's worth more than any property in London would ever be. It's worth more than anything you could gain in this life. And it's a secret that's freely available to all of us tonight when we trust in Jesus.

And so that brings us to our third point, the hope that comes from listening, verses 18 to 23. And I wonder if we might pick up in verse 18 what Jesus says to them.

[17 : 53] He says, Listen then to what the parable of the sower means. Listen, hear, understand. And because if we miss this, if we fail to listen, then we lose everything.

And then he gives them three reasons, three poor soils as to what might cause us to fail to listen well, to hear, and to understand, and therefore give up trusting in Jesus or to not trust in Jesus.

And so the seed in this parable, in this story, is really the message or the word, the good news about Jesus. It's the gospel. And so some people fail to hear this message.

They fail to listen. They don't trust in Jesus because, verse 19, we read, the wicked one, the devil snatches the seed away.

That message that was sown in their heart. This really could happen a million of ways. We might head out the door tonight and we might get a text and we might forget everything that's said in here.

[19 : 10] Or we might head out the back door tonight and we might go home and switch on the TV and watch the latest Sunday night TV, whatever big show's on at the moment.

Or we might be scared of what our friends might think about us if we trust in Jesus. And the secret of the gospel is that when we trust in Jesus, we will be brought under spiritual attack.

And then the second reason that we might fail to listen, that we might not trust in Jesus, is because of trouble or persecution. We see that in verse 21.

When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, because of the message, because of the good news of Jesus, they quickly fall away. And I don't want to be depressing, but I can't think of a worse time to be a Christian in Britain in the last 500 years than now.

Today, if you believe the gospel, a lot of what you believe is deemed intolerant. People don't accept it. And it's not just that your view's different.

[20 : 24] What you think is bad. And if you trust the gospel, you might very well end up in prison in Britain. You might end up being arrested.

You might end up being sacked from your job. And you can go on pages like the Christian Concern page or the Christian Institute, and you can read that.

It's a tough time to be a Christian in Britain. And the promise of the gospel is that when we trust in Jesus, it will mean that we will suffer and be persecuted.

And the third reason that Jesus gives there for why people don't listen, why they give up on trusting Jesus, is the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

And you guys tonight, you're in a really privileged position. You're in a great city. You live in a great country. Many of us go to university or have been to university.

[21 : 26] We've got great jobs, great prospects ahead of us. And so this is a very real temptation. And I think of one friend of mine who turned away from Jesus because he met an heiress, a Buddhist heiress, and he thought that he could get wealthy by marrying her.

And then I was on Facebook the other day and a friend's profile picture, friend's suggestion, came up. And it was a picture of a friend of mine who had stopped going to church.

And it was a picture of them and their partner who they left the gospel behind for to be with. And so trusting in Jesus will mean saying no to yourself.

And then finally, Jesus tells us the great hope, the good news of the gospel that will be ours if we do listen to him, if we do trust him.

And that's the fourth soil. And so we look and we see in verse 23, but the seed falling on the good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

[22 : 37] And it's a picture of absolute spiritual abundance, a rich life filled with good things. A hundred times, sixty times, thirty times, where even the most, even the poorest performing of us have a life of abundance, of spiritual abundance.

abundance, then afterwards, eternal life and pleasures at Jesus' right hand. And so the challenge for us tonight is will we listen?

Will we listen? Will we hear? Will we understand? Or will we give up listening and forget everything and forget Jesus as soon as we walk out the door at the back?

And the challenge of the gospel is that Jesus is the only way that we can have our sins forgiven and be right with God.

See, Jesus died on the cross that we might be with God, that we could know God. And Jesus is the only way that we can know God.

[23 : 53] And so when we give up listening to Jesus, we give up listening to God. But the good news is that Jesus still speaks to us and he still calls us and he still wants to know us even tonight.

Let me pray for us. So Father, we pray that we'd be people who listen, who hear, who understand the good news of the gospel, that we trust Jesus, trust him to bring us to God.

In Jesus' name. Amen.