

**Luke 8:16-21**  
**Take Care How You Listen**

We all appreciate good listeners. People who really hear what we are saying, and are not thinking of what they will say in response. We value those who truly try to hear not only our words, but the feelings behind them. A very common complaint of parents about their teenage kids is that “they don’t listen to me.” Oddly, the same complaint is said by those kids about their parents. And surely every husband knows the value of really listening to his wife and not simply grunting along as she tells him about her day!

The Bible commands us to listen. In the Old Testament, the phrase “Hear the word of the Lord” occurs early and often. God the Father continued that admonition when Jesus appeared. During the transfiguration, a voice from heaven said, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” (Mark 9:7). Sadly, during Israel’s history they too often did not listen to the word of the Lord, they were “wicked people who refuse to listen to My words” (Jeremiah 13:10). Even to Jesus people did not listen particularly well.

Jesus made it clear that those who truly heard were those who obeyed. Acting on what Jesus said, was the true test of hearing. Matthew 7:26, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand” and John 10:27, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” contrast the two groups.

As Jesus continued to teach He drew upon the illustration of the good soil that produced much fruit. They had “heard the word with an honest and good heart” (v. 15). Jesus continued in this passage by saying that the good soil who took care how they listened were those who let their light shine before men in such a way as to produce fruit. They did so by listening well, so that they not only heard, but they obeyed. As a result, those chosen few were part of the family of God.

**The Proper Use of Light**

Jesus said, “Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light” (v. 16). The lamp described had a handle on one end and a spout on the other into which a wick was inserted. A hole at the handle end was used to add the oil and to allow for airflow. It was a simple object, usually made of fired clay (terra cotta). The lampstand would be a flat stone or shelf attached to the wall. The bed referred to was one that was temporary; one that could be rolled up. It is insensible to put a lighted lamp under such an object. The lack of air would cause the lamp to go out.

Light is a common metaphor in Scripture. It is used to represent holiness, “the night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12); truth, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm 109:105); and spiritual life, “in Him was life, and the life was the Light of men” (John 1:4).

The point in this case is that we must allow God’s word to be clearly manifested in our lives as it says in Matthew 5:16. “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Notice that we do all for the glory of God. No one looks at the

light. It is not to draw attention to ourselves that we do good works. God has prepared them for us to do to bring glory to Him. We are to “prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

Also, light shines on everything. It is not our place to try to determine the spiritual condition of those in darkness and shine our light according to our perception of their receptivity. When a light goes on in a dark room, everything is lit.

Therefore, the proper use of light is twofold. First, we must use the spiritual knowledge we have been given diligently on ourselves. We ought not just to know but to do. We ought not just to profess but practice our faith. Second, we must use this gift for others. It is a very selfish person who chooses to go to heaven alone.

### **No Secrets**

As we said, light lights everything. Jesus said as much when He continued, “for nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light” (v. 17). The truth will eventually come out. We might fool others, we might even fool ourselves, but will cannot fool God.

Nothing goes unnoticed. This as true for good deeds as bad. It is as true of thoughts as well as actions. Nothing is beyond the scope of an omniscient God. Eventually God will judge, and He will judge correctly. Again there are two cautions for us here. First, we ought not to be quick to judge. We are not omniscient, and we do not have all the facts. We cannot know men’s hearts, “therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Second, we must understand that we will be held accountable for every thought, “rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things” (Ecclesiastes 11:9), and word, “but I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

It is about integrity. It is about living a life in a way that we have nothing to hide. Hypocrisy has done much to undermine the truth of the gospel. It is a shade which darkens the light in unbelievers. We ought always to be on our guard.

### **Listening Skills**

Therefore, we are to “take care how you listen” (v. 18). This is crucial. If we do not listen well, we cannot fully appreciate the gospel message, and we will not be that “good ground” (v. 15). We will neither grow nor reproduce. We will either not respond at all, or if we do, we will wither and die or be crushed under the weight of earthly desires. We must cultivate our listening skills.

Jesus emphasized the consequences. He said, “for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him” (v. 18). There will be different

levels of production for every believer, but every believer will bear good fruit. If no fruit is evident, even the faith (real as it may seem) will eventually be shown to be false.

For those whose faith is false, they are double punished. First, their self-righteous acts here prove of no avail. All of their sacrifices and good intentions are of no value. Paul understood that clearly when he wrote, “more than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). He knew that even the good works he had done as a Pharisee (learning and meditating on the Law, keeping the commandments, etc.) were useless.

Second, eternally they are damned. <sup>21</sup>Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23). These are words to heed. The appearance of faith, if it is not genuine, does not save.

Jesus told the “parable of the talents” to His disciples and emphasized this point vividly. After relating the behavior of the three servants who were given talents “each according to his own ability” (Matthew 25:15), Jesus described the response of their master. The first two slaves who had increased what they had been given were considered “good and faithful” (Matthew 25: 21, 23). But the third slave, who had done nothing was “wicked, lazy” (Matthew 25:26). As a consequence for his behavior, the master instructed his servants to “throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

Ways of listening:

Some listen hardly at all, Isaiah 40:21, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”

Some listen to be entertained, Ezekiel 33:31-32, <sup>31</sup>They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. <sup>32</sup>Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.”

Some listen to find fault Mark, 12:13, “Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement”

Some listen to obtain wisdom and put it to good use, Acts 17:11, “Now these [Bereans] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

Like repetition in prayer, simply hearing again and again if we are not listening is inadequate. Like Bible reading simply to get through a passage so hearing just to have heard is unedifying. To listen, we must take what we hear and apply ourselves to it. To do that, we must first hear by faith, “for indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Hebrews 4:2). Second we must hear with reverence, “for

this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Never think of the word of God as man’s opinion.

Remember that Judas heard virtually everything Peter and John did. In matters spiritual, there is no neutrality. We either go forward or backward. Think of learning a little guitar, or Spanish. If we do not use it, we lose it.

### **Family**

First let’s address the heresy described by some as the “perpetual virginity” of Mary. Those who follow that doctrine argue that these mentioned here are not the half-brothers of Jesus, but rather children of Joseph from a previous marriage. This would make them step-brothers. This idea first appeared in the historical record with the Christian literature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It first appeared in a work called *The Nativity of Mary* and was taught by such Church Fathers as Irenaeus and Origen. Though there was some disagreement, by the 4<sup>th</sup> century it was accepted as doctrine by Augustine and Ecumenical Councils.

Despite its long history and acceptance, the argument that these children were from a previous marriage fails in many areas. First, there is no biblical record of any such previous marriage of Joseph, and surely there would be for such an important figure in the life of Jesus. Second, if these brothers were from a previous marriage, then they, not Jesus would be the heir to the Davidic kingdom and rightful kings of Israel. Finally, since Scriptural evidence points to both Joseph and Mary being young (perhaps even teenagers) at the time of their marriage, it is very unlikely that Joseph would have had time to have been married previously and produce children.

Another argument is that these were cousins of Jesus. However, the word used, *adelphos* is always used in the New Testament to mean brother, and there is a Greek word for cousin, *anepsoos* that is never used when referring to these people. Also, the Messianic Psalm 69 says, “I have become estranged from my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s sons” (v. 8), and surely “mother’s sons” cannot mean cousins.

Finally, the implication of the passages in Matthew 1:18, 25 and Luke 2:7 that state that Joseph and Mary refrained from sexual relations until Jesus was born, imply that after He was born they did have normal sexual relations. The evidence is clear that Mary was a virgin who had a normal sexual/maternal life after giving birth to Jesus.

Luke writes that “His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd” (v. 19). We are not told why His mother and family wanted to see Him. Perhaps they had heard disturbing reports about Him and were worried, “<sup>21</sup>when His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’ <sup>22</sup>The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul,’ and ‘He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons’” (Mark 3:21-22).

The crowd was large, so large that Mary and His brothers had to send word to Jesus that they were present, “it was reported to Him, ‘Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You’” (v. 20). Apparently, since they could not get in, they simply passed their request along through the crowd.

The response of Jesus to hearing that His mother and brothers were outside can seem insensitive. “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (v. 21) was His answer. But Luke often does not give us all that Jesus says in any given instance, so there is no reason to suppose that Jesus did not either say something else, or eventually go and see His family. Luke (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit), here, is making a point.

And that point is that spiritual ties outweigh physical ties. Jesus clearly loved His mother, “<sup>25</sup>but standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ <sup>27</sup>Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ From that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:25-27). Even in His hour of agony, Jesus thought of the welfare of His mother.

As Christians, our relationships are not necessarily defined in human terms. Our “brothers and sisters” are not only flesh and blood relations. The “family of God” does not always contain all the members of our human families. To be a member of this family we must “prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (James 1:22). Our love is shown by our obedience, “if you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15).

Make no mistake, obedience is never easy. Romans 7:21-24, “<sup>21</sup>I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. <sup>22</sup>For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, <sup>23</sup>but I see a different law in]the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

The person who hears the truth and obeys it is the true Christian. A place to begin is Romans 12:9-21, <sup>9</sup>Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup>not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup>rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup>contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. <sup>17</sup>Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. <sup>19</sup>Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

It is a great privilege to obey the word of God. We are the brothers and sisters of Jesus

### **Take Aways**

The straightforward application is that we must not only hear the message of the gospel, but by faith obey it. If we listen so as to apply God’s Word to our lives, we will produce fruit and be blessed.