LUKE ON HEARING THE WORD

Luke 8:4-21 presents a long section of teaching on hearing the word and doing it. The headings in many bibles break this section up into four parts, The Parable of the Sower, The Purpose of Parables, A Lamp Under a Jar, and Jesus’ Mother and Brothers. Obviously the headings were not in the original text, and in this case they interrupt the flow of the passage which has a larger overall point. Each of these four segments presents an important lesson about hearing the word of God.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

“And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.’ As he said these things, he called out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’” (Luke 8:4-8 ESV).

Jesus taught this parable to a large crowd of people. In an age where we value clear communication and preachers are judged on how effectively they deliver their message, it is a bit strange to see Jesus deliberately speaking obtusely, so that only ‘those with ears to hear’ would hear. This tells us something about hearing the word of God, the hearer has to be prepared to hear. The hearer has to have ‘ears to hear’. If we are not prepared to hear God speak, then we will not hear him.
THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

“...And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that “seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:9–15 ESV).

Later Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus about the parable. He made a startling comment, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables.” This indicates that God speaks clearly to those he chooses, and that is a gift of God. To others his words are strange and incomprehensible.

Jesus then explained the parable, highlighting common barriers to hearing the word; deception of the devil, lack of perseverance and love of the world (cares, riches, pleasures). In comparison, those who hear the word, and hold it fast in an honest and good heart, bear fruit with patience. In other words, the hearer has to be determined to hold on to what God has said. It takes time for the word to bear fruit in our lives, and we need to persevere and hold on until it does.

A LAMP UNDER A JAR

“...‘No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.” (Luke 8:16–18 ESV).

Jesus then goes on to explain what it looks like to hold onto the word of God. To hold onto the word is to make use of it. Like a lamp, you put it on display so it can shed light in a room. So with the word of God it must be put into action. Jesus warns his disciples that they should be careful then about how they hear, Jesus is saying to hear the word of God is to put it into use.

If we do not put the word of God to use, then it will be taken away from us. Jesus here makes a distinction between those who only hear the word and those who use it. Those who only hear it and do not hold on to it he says only thinks he has the word of God. Those who really have it are the ones who act on it, who let its light transform their “dark rooms”.

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers

“...Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.’ But he answered them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” (Luke 8:19–21).

Jesus then shows that hearing and doing the word of God implies a relationship between them and him. While it may have been quite insulting for Jesus’ mother and brothers to have been brushed off like this, it is quite comforting for those who do hear the word and do it. Jesus is saying that obeying God’s word forms a stronger bond between a person and God than their natural family connections. We have the expression blood is thicker than water. Jesus is saying here, that obedience to God’s word forms a stronger bond than blood.