

## What is Salvation?

### Sermon 2- The healing of our ears

Passages: Psalm 65  
Romans 8:1-11  
Matthew 13:1-25

Last week, we started a new series of sermons entitled, “**What is salvation?**”

As I said last week, the Bible talks a lot about salvation. It tells us that we all need to be ‘*saved*’. Indeed, it tells us that there is only one name given under heaven by which we can be *saved*...the name of Jesus. He is ‘our *Saviour*’!

But what does He save us from? What is the object of His salvation?

For many evangelicals, the primary focus is on the future—We say that Jesus saves us from death and hell. And that’s true! But, throughout the Bible, salvation is (more often than not) spoken of as a present reality... something that we experience in the ‘here and now’. This is borne out by the fact that the Greek word for salvation (*sozo*) is the exact same word used for healing! In the ancient mind, *salvation and healing were strongly connected to each other*. The early church was aware that Christ’s salvation was at work in them in the ‘here and now’, healing them from the brokenness of their present life.

And that’s where I think we need to go in this series of sermons—we need to look at the *present* power of Jesus to save us and heal us. And so, in my first sermon last week, I focused on fact that **Jesus came to save us from our blindness**. He came to heal our eyes. Today, we move from eyes to ears. What I want to show you today is that **Jesus came to save us from deafness!**

**Let’s pray.**

Turn with me to today’s Gospel reading—**Matthew 13**. This parable (often called the ‘Parable of the Sower’, or the ‘Parable of the Four Soils’) is really a parable about **listening**. In fact, it might be more helpful to call it

the 'Parable of Four Types of Hearing'. Indeed, if you skip down to verse 18 of the chapter, you'll see that this is exactly how Jesus explains 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 away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."***

As you can see, the four types of soil are really four ways that people hear God's Word. As a matter of fact, I've got a strong suspicion that Jesus was actually telling this parable as a way of describing the scene that was going on before Him as He preached from a boat to a huge crowd on the shoreline. Each type of soil simply reflected the people in front of Him! He was literally saying to them, *"I know who you are! I know what's going on inside of you...and I also know what will happen when you all go home! Some of you will simply forget what I said. Others will get excited but do nothing about it. Some of you will really want to follow Me but find the burden of life too hard and quit. And, then, there will be some of you who really will follow Me as true disciples, bearing the fruit of the Kingdom in all you do."*

When you read the parable in this way, not only does it help you to imagine what was going on inside all those people as Jesus spoke, but it also helps you to see that this same *problem of hearing* is found all throughout Matthew's Gospel. I mean, in almost every chapter you'll find someone coming to Jesus saying things like, ***"Master, I will follow you wherever you go."*** ...only for Jesus to respond, ***"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. You, come, follow Me."*** Indeed, Jesus looks incredibly callous at times! But the point is, He was simply testing their hearing! Like a good farmer, He wanted to find out exactly what type of soil he was dealing with.

Another man came to Jesus saying, ***“I will follow you, Jesus, but first, let me go and bury my father.”*** Again, Jesus’ response sounds harsh: ***“Follow Me and let the dead bury the dead.”*** But if you see this as a hearing test, you begin to understand that this man hadn’t really heard what Jesus was saying about the kingdom of God. He couldn’t have really heard the message if he thought that respecting the dead was more important than being truly alive! I mean, what could be more important than following the One who reveals the Kingdom of God?

On another occasion (Matthew 19), a man came to Jesus saying, ***“Good teacher, tell me what I must do to have eternal life?”*** Obviously, he wanted a simple list of things to do for God in the comfort of his own home. In the end, however, all Jesus could say to him was, ***“Get rid of the things that stop you from hearing the message of the Kingdom. Then, come, follow Me”***. If we have truly heard the Gospel, then we can no longer stay in our comfort zones, with God in a box. No! The Kingdom of God is alive and dynamic... and costly. In the end, this rich young man didn’t want to hear Jesus’ call of discipleship.

I’ve recently purchased a pair of ‘noise-cancelling headphones’. Somehow, they block out all extraneous noise and let you cocoon yourself in your own little world, content with your own choice of music, without anyone hassling you. I think this is another metaphor for what’s going on in the world in relation to the Gospel. We cocoon ourselves in our own worlds so that we cannot hear the message of the Kingdom! We are deaf!

That’s what’s happening throughout Matthew’s Gospel-- we have quite a long sequence of people who are so caught up in their own worlds that they respond **negatively** to Jesus’ call. (The Pharisees, of course, are at the top of the list of those who refuse to hear!) And yet, at the same time, Matthew’s Gospel contains a colourful parade of people who respond **positively** to Jesus—people who have good ears! The amazing thing is that they’re not who we might expect! They are the outcasts and the foreigners, the sick, the poor, the blind and the lame! Even the little children seem to have ‘ears to hear’!

And that's, essentially, the whole point, isn't it?! I mean, **proud human beings have no natural ability to listen to Jesus and receive His Word.** Only those who have been humbled or broken seem to be ready and willing to listen to Jesus. Mary said it in her Magnificat: "***He has brought down rulers from their thrones and the rich he has sent empty away. But He has raised up the meek and the lowly!***" That, my friends, is the Gospel!

So, who are we? Which camp do we reside within? Are we proud? Are our ears blocked because we would prefer to stay inside our comfort zones? Or, have we been brought low and humbled enough to hear what the Spirit is saying? Have we allowed God to take off our headphones???

You see, the sad fact is that, ever since the Fall, all human beings have chosen to cocoon themselves in their self-made worlds. We wrongly think that it's easier to live that way! Hence, we've become deaf to Jesus' call to follow in His Way of Discipleship. We are all like the first three types of soil-- we either refuse to listen or get distracted by the things we deem are more important. And that's the reason why we all need to have our ears healed...progressively and continuously! Clearly, it's only by a miracle of God's grace that we can become (and remain) fertile soil...soil that stays soft and receptive to God's Word about the Kingdom!

The miracle that we all need, of course, is the miracle of Pentecost! The miracle of the Holy Spirit! We often think that the miracle of Pentecost was about **speaking... speaking in tongues**. But, you know, that's only half the story! The other half of the miracle of Pentecost was about **hearing**! We're told in Acts 2 that the foreign visitors who had come to Jerusalem that day were miraculously empowered to **hear** the Good News of the Gospel! Their ears had been healed! (Acts 2:11-- "***We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!***" ) In fact, it was this miracle of hearing that caused 3000 people on the dangerous journey of accepting Jesus' call on their lives. (Acts 2:41 says that "***Those who accepted Peter's message were baptised, and about three thousand souls were added to their number that day.***") Let me say, here, that getting baptised was/is the divinely chosen way of saying to Jesus, "***I'm ready to listen to you! I'm ready to follow***

***You! I'm ready to pay the price to listen to Your voice above all else!"***

As I said, half the miracle of Pentecost was the miracle of hearing, as the Spirit fell on the multitudes and turned their 'hardened', 'rocky' or 'thorn-infested' soil into 'fertile' ground. Only then could they actually hear Jesus' call and willingly obey His Word: "***Come, follow Me!***"

Pentecost, of course, continues today...every day! If you have trouble hearing Jesus; if you have trouble believing or trusting in His Word; if you have reluctance to follow Him despite the cost...maybe it's time to humbly ask the Holy Spirit to open your ears!

I think this is basically what Romans 8 is all about. You see, the first (and most important) truth, to which the Holy Spirit opens our ears, is the Word of God's grace in Christ: "***There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***" (Romans 8:1) By the Spirit, we finally can *hear* the ancient truth that Jesus has died to take away our sin and the associated feelings of guilt. Indeed, Paul goes on to say in verse 15 that, by the Holy Spirit, we can finally *hear* (God's Spirit to our spirit) that we are God's children. It is this truth that causes us to burst out in praise; '***Abba, Father!***' The Holy Spirit has healed our ears so that we can, for the first time in our lives, *hear* that we are loved and forgiven!

Have you heard this truth? Are your ears opened to this fact that Jesus has taken away your sin and guilt? If not, then let's ask the Holy Spirit, right now, to heal your ears—that you might receive the Word of God's love and forgiveness. (Pause to pray?)

Now, for those of us who have the ears to hear that we are loved, let us be assured that God's *healing of our ears* doesn't stop there. In fact, it's only the beginning! Once we've heard the truth of God's love, we are ready to hear His call to follow Him in discipleship!

Indeed, phase two of the '*healing of our ears*' happens in the deep waters we call **prayer**. Now, I know that many of us may not spend much time in prayer. That's sad, because praying is, first and foremost, *God's gift to us*

for the unburdening our souls! Through the Spirit, we are encouraged to groan over the things that hinder us from hearing God's voice: the hardness of our heart, the rocks of shallowness and the thorns of worry and fear. Particularly in today's world, when we all lead such busy, overwhelmed lives, how much more do we need to remember that Jesus says, "***Come to Me and I will give you rest***". This is prayer! We come to unburden ourselves so that we might be able to hear 'the sound of a different drummer'...the voice of our Lord, Jesus, who speaks heavenly wisdom about true life and true living.

Paul concurs with this idea in Romans 8, verse 5, when he says, "***...those who live by the Spirit of God have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.***" And what does the Spirit desire? Nothing less than that we live this life on earth with our ears constantly opened to the voice of Jesus... the voice of life...speaking to us through the Scriptures, in the voices of His people, in the circumstances of life, and in dreams and visions.

Of course, everything is predicated on this one assumption—that we will not only hear His voice, but that we will obey what we hear. Spirit-induced listening must lead to Spirit-empowered obedience. If it doesn't, then we haven't been truly listening. As James was so fond of saying, "***Faith without works is dead.***"

This is exactly what Jesus talked about back in Matthew 7, at the end of His Sermon on the Mount. After spending so much time speaking to them of the ever-present Kingdom of God, He His teaching with these words: "***Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock.***" But... "***Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.***"

Listening is meant to lead us to action. Hearing without obeying is foolishness!

As I said at the start, Jesus has come to give us the Spirit who can heal our ears. Because the Spirit now lives in us, not only can we hear Jesus' voice

but, by the same Spirit, we can also obey His Word and live fully in the life of His kingdom.

It's exactly what Paul said in Romans 8!

***Ro 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.***

To listen is to live!

Let's pray.