

Title: Genuine Faith
Text: Luke 8.4-15
Theme: Gospel Fruit
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Genuine faith produces genuine fruit for the long haul.

We call them life hacks when we discover a simple, simpler or happier way of accomplishing a task such as, how can I lose weight by just eating ice cream and drinking cream soda. Life hacks are great when you are trying to get a stain out of carpet, or fixing a squeaky door, but it seems to me that a lot of people view God, even the gospel and the church in a similar way. If I can just find the right hack then my life will go smooth, my kids will be potty-trained by 7 months, they will stop fighting at dinner, happily eat what I give them, and be financially independent when they are 14. Or, more seriously, what hack do I need to know, what formula do I need to follow so I can get into heaven when I die without being too committed now. For ages, people have argued over what the formula is. When is your good enough? Eternity is a long time, so what's the minimum to make the team? At the heart of this thinking is this inverted view that there is some secret sauce to working the system so that we can get God to go along with how we want to make our life go. That view is fatally flawed and completely misses the point. God is not your life hack. He is your Creator. You are not the center of your world, he is.

For thousands of years, people had a geocentric view of the universe. They thought that the sun revolved around the earth because that is what it looked like. Nicolaus Copernicus is credited with helping shift our view of astronomy to a heliocentric one by showing that the earth actually rotates around the sun. This shift is called the Copernican Revolution. We are all tempted to believe in and embrace an egocentric view of the world, meaning, everything and everyone exists for my glory and comfort. It is nothing short of revolutionary to realize that an egocentric view is wrong and destructive. Life is actually discovered in a theocentric (God-centered) view of everything. Now here is a very important point to grasp. Most religion serves an egocentric world by providing things to do, formulas to follow in order to make life go better for you. Jesus came along and blew up the egocentric world of religious people in order to replace it with the right one and that is a world that centers on and around him. Genuine Christianity cannot be reduced to praying a prayer that is a secret formula. Genuine faith is revolutionary. It is renouncing the making much of my life, for the greater cause of making much of Jesus. Following Jesus is not following a formula. It is loving, trusting, and embracing Christ. This is hard for many people to grasp. It felt like an earthquake when he taught this.

Read Text:

1. **Many people who hear God's Word, do not really hear.** (4-8)

A crowd is gathering and growing. Jesus is not impressed with the crowd. He sees the hearts. Those who really follow him, follow him with their hearts. Jesus says this to this large crowd. He is clearly not giddy or excited about his popularity because he knows that many of those who are listening to him are not listening with their hearts. So, Jesus without explanation or

interpretation, says that a sower (farmer) went out to plant his seed. Some of the seed fell along the path and was trampled underfoot by the people walking on the path and the birds got it. Some fell on the rocks where it grew up for a bit, but then died. Some fell among thorns and grew with the thorns but then got choked by the thorns. But then there was some that fell on good soil and it grew and yielded a bountiful harvest. Look at the end of v. 8. *“As he said these things, he **called out**, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”* Why did he call that out? He was making an important point by saying that.

We are tempted to think that we get points for showing up in church, as if we are doing God some sort of favor. But God is not impressed with you showing up, nor with how many show up, nor how many views the service gets on-line. How many were in church today? It really doesn't matter. The issue is, do you hear with your heart? This is why a church makes a fatal mistake when it pursues attendance numbers as the sign of success and adopts an entertainment or attractional model for ministry. Jesus deliberately kept reducing the crowds to those who were serious about following him. He told the disciples that they were given *“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.”* If you do not hear with your heart, then you do not hear. If you only hear to be entertained, to soothe your conscience, to be affirmed, to be justified in your position, to have someone make you feel better about yourself, you are not really hearing.

This text is a defining point in the ministry of Christ. Something has happened. Jesus is pivoting in his ministry. He is changing directions in his teaching style because Jesus is responding to what is going on. By teaching in parables, he is intentionally hiding truth even as he teaches it. So, what is going on? Well, there is emerging 3 kinds of people in his audience and it's a big audience. 1) Those who flat out reject him and are looking for reasons not to believe. 2) Those who like him because of his miracles and what they think he will do for them. They want him to make their life better. But, while they think they are attracted to Jesus, they are not genuine followers. 3) There are those, who are in the minority who have a heart to follow Christ. So, Jesus begins to speak in parables. A parable is an act of mercy and judgment all at the same time. Every time the Pharisees hear Jesus preach and witness his power, they add another layer of rejecting him and in so doing they add another layer of hardness to their hearts. That rejection adds to their condemnation because they are accountable to God for what they have heard. So, Jesus speaks in parables in order to hide his Word from those who reject him. This is an act of mercy on them because he is lessening the amount of condemnation that they would otherwise face. At the same time, it is an act of judgment because Christ is hiding the Word from them. I want you to see this.

The Word of God and the Spirit of God go hand in hand. It is the Spirit who opens up the ears of your heart so that you really hear. If you do not cooperate with the Spirit, then a point will come when he will close the ears of your heart and you won't hear. If you refuse to repent of a sin, and you try to justify something that you have done and refuse to acknowledge it, God will withdraw his Word from you. You will hear, and not really hear.

Hearing with your ears is the beginning, but not the entire package. You have to hear and take what you hear to heart. When you hear with your heart, you place yourself under the authority of God's word, all of it. You do not pick and choose what parts work for you and what parts you don't want. I want to clarify something. We hear people say, "Don't judge me." I want you to judge my sermons. I want you to listen with discernment and see if what I am saying is faithful to God's Word. However, you and I dare not judge God's Word. God's Word evaluates us. If what I am saying is faithful to God's Word, then by all means, let the sermon be used by the Spirit of God to shine brightly on your heart, particularly the areas where you are tempted to keep in the dark. If you hide parts of your heart from the light, then you are risking your entire heart being taken over in darkness.

After Jesus said this in public (vs. 4-8) his disciples asked him what it meant. Verses 9-15 are what Jesus said in private. And what he said in private is weighty.

2. **Do you realize what is at stake?** (11-12)

A. **The seed is the Word of God** (11)

The seed is the Word of God. When Jesus, or any preacher or teacher is sharing God's Word, the seed is being scattered. You and I are embarrassed by the copies of Scriptures that are available to us and to the amount of Bible teaching that we can access. There is some really bad preaching out there, but there is some really good stuff too. However, if you listen to God's Word and you do not submit yourself to it, it will harden your heart. If you do not listen with humility in order to be changed, and you assume that you do not need God's Word, then God will hide his Word from you. I want you to realize what is at stake every time you hear God's Word. The Word of God is the most precious commodity – ever.

You may think your life would be great if oil was discovered on your property, or if you hit a gold deposit. Others will tell you that time is your greatest commodity. But in reality, God's Word is the most personal, precious and powerful commodity you will ever encounter. It is, however, a double-edged sword. It will cut and it will hurt, but it will save and it will heal. But it will only save and heal those who believe it from the heart.

B. **The soil is your heart.** (12)

This is clear from v.12, when Jesus describes Satan as coming and taking "the word (seed) from their hearts (soil) so that they may not believe and be saved." Satan knows that if you hear God's Word and receive it in your heart, that you will be saved. If you are saved, that is, if you are rescued from your sin and delivered from his kingdom of darkness, he loses you and he sure as hell, does not want that to happen. That is why...

C. **Satan is in a war for your heart.**

This is what is at stake. This is where the real war happens. Satan wants to do everything he can to distract you from where the real war is going on. If he can get you to think that the war is over there, then he will be successful in distracting you from where the real war is taking place. The biggest issue that is confronting us as a church, is not the upcoming presidential election, the economy, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East or Ukraine. Those are concerns, just not the biggest. The biggest concern that you and I are to have is the war that is raging on the soil of our hearts for who you will believe, love and submit to. In other words, the biggest issue for the church is, has always been and will always be, the gospel.

I suspect that for many of you, your biggest concerns this morning are not with the war being waged on the soil of your heart, but on many lesser things. Those lesser things may be important to a degree, but ultimate importance is how you hear and respond to God's Word. Ironically, when you hear with your heart and respond with faith and love to God's Word, you are now able to address the lesser things. Now you are ready to hear the interpretation and application of this parable. Jesus is describing what following him looks like. He is helping us understand what genuine faith isn't and is.

3. **Genuine faith is fruitful and it endures.** (11-15)

The first type of soil is the heart that hears God's Word but is not the least bit affected by it. There is zero influence on this person. Why? Like the birds who snatch the seed before it has a chance to germinate in the soil, Satan snatches God's Word from the person. God's Word means nothing to that person. They have no idea what it is and they don't care. In their mind it is irrelevant, insignificant, or ridiculous. Their minds are blinded.

In 2 Corinthians 4.3-4, Paul is describing people who hear the gospel, but their minds are veiled or covered from being able to really seeing it. The Scriptures say that *"it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* Satan wants to steal the seed of God's Word from the soil of your heart so that it has no time to affect you.

Would you leave your car unlocked with your apartment or house keys in it? Would you leave your house or apartment unlocked at night while you and your child or grandchild slept? No. You go through great pains to protect your valuables. What are you doing to protect your hearing of God's Word so that it is not stolen? If we are going to keep God's Word, then we have to come to hear it and we have to come humbly and hungry to hear it. We have to cry out to the Spirit of God to help us, to give life and light to our hearts so that we receive God's Word. This is why you cannot hold on to sin and hear God's Word. James 1.21-22 – *"Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* Listen with an intention to submit and obey. Ask God to give you that intention and obedience.

The second type of soil starts out with a little more promise.

Conclusion:

- 1) This is a warning against manipulative, coercive, emotional methods to gain “conversion” statistics.
- 2) This is a warning to those who are going along for the ride.
- 3) This is a warning to those who trust “a decision for Christ” or a prayer to save them.