

## The Eyes of Faith

Luke 8:1-21

### Introduction

**Who is Jesus?:** A few weeks ago we looked at John the Baptist's important question (Lk 7). Maybe **the** most important question: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (7:20). In the ensuing chapters (7-9) Luke is building a case for the identity of Jesus before his journey takes them to Jerusalem. It leads to Peter's famous confession: Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God" (9:20). Lit: God's Messiah.

- This is the central question for each of us: **Who do you say I am? Who do you say Jesus is?**
  - **The wrong answer leads us astray:** Getting Jesus' identity wrong sets us on a trajectory of **misunderstanding, misbelief,** and ultimately **missing out** on the fullness of life He offers.
    - If we see him as merely a great teacher, prophet, or moral example, we miss His true purpose and power.
    - An incorrect perspective leads to superficial faith that doesn't transform our lives or align us with God's kingdom.
  - **The right answer changes everything:** Recognizing and confessing Jesus as Christ, God's Messiah, fundamentally transforms our lives. This revelation **opens our eyes** to His kingdom, **redefines** our purpose, and **realigns** our values and actions with his will.

**Varied Responses:** The Pharisees (in particular) seem to do everything they can to **skirt the claims, deny the identity,** and **downplay the authority** of Jesus. **How many of us do the same?** The challenge for each of us is to submit to Jesus, not to harden our hearts, or lessen our guilt, but to come to Jesus in trust and follow him.

- The brokenness of the world, the sin inside of you, and the temptations of the evil one will threaten to harden your heart to the invitation of Jesus. "My [goal] in preaching is to break the hard heart, and heal the broken one." Our world, today, is full of **hard hearts** (rebellion), **broken hearts** (despair), and **distracted hearts** (apathy). The gospel offers a different way.

We must strive to make our hearts receptive to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Redefining God's Family (vv. 1-3, 19-21)

**People Sandwich:** This passage has a group of people at the beginning (vv. 1-3) and a group of people at the end (vv. 19-21), with a lesson in the middle. **The people are the bread, the lesson is the meat.** The comparison between these two groups of people is instructive.

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically his identity and his word.

**(a) Surprising Disciples (vv. 1-3):** <sup>1</sup> Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup> and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

- Jesus was doing his thing, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God (κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). The proclamation (message) and posse (the twelve) seem familiar (initially), but then it lists by name three women (and implies others).
  - The Bible is unusually **progressive** regarding women. We comfortably and happily believe in God-ordained roles for men and women, partially because they are not limiting but uplifting.
    - Women play a major role in the story of Jesus and the church! Scripture elevates them; it doesn't demean them. These women support Jesus's ministry and are also seen **traveling** with him.
  - This is a shockingly **diverse** group of women. We might expect women from lower classes to follow Jesus, but here, it also includes Joanna, someone from the upper echelon, the world of the powerful.
- Most importantly, these women are models of discipleship, providing for Jesus and his disciples by their own means. Their faith impacted their **checking account**. They weren't just **fans** of Jesus, they were **followers**, literally walking with him where he went!

**(b) Expected Priority (vv. 19-21)** <sup>19</sup> Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup> And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." <sup>21</sup> But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

- Everyone expects Jesus to cosign traditional family values. The Bible gives lots of clarity about how we are to honor our parents and care for our children. **Jesus never diminishes these relationships, but he elevates other ones.** Jesus is not undermining the familial bond *per se*, he is using that common knowledge to show that the bond of the spiritual family is greater than even that of the earthly family ("the church is a family" isn't something we invented as a catchy slogan).

**Faith Not Lineage:** Our participation in the family of God is not a result of our earthly family. We are not Christians because mommy and daddy are Christians or because grandma went to church (though some of us act that way). **You do not get into the family of God by birth, only by rebirth through saving faith in Jesus.** Nepotism has no place in the kingdom of God. You cannot bequeath your salvation to your family. You cannot inherit the faith of your parents as your own. They can teach and train you, but **you have to be born again.** The Pharisees often missed this point, thinking their religious tradition and ethnicity guaranteed them a place at God's table.

**Jesus Our Brother:** <sup>21</sup> But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." This means, if you are **born again** you are a member of God's

family. “For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11). “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29).

- You are more closely united to Christ via adoption by faith than if you were born into Jesus’ biological family! Also, this means anyone *can* become a child of God, but everyone is not a child of God (we are not “all God’s children”).<sup>2</sup>

**Identity:** If I’m going to claim the identity of a Christian and expect the benefits of a Christian, then I am called to live according to my heavenly identity (e.g., surname, “Turner,” want my kids to reflect a “good name”).

- “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and **so we are**. The reason why **the world does not know us is that it did not know him**. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:1-2).

**Obedience:** How do you spot a Christian? They look like Christ. Those who hear the word of God and do it. <sup>21</sup> “Not everyone **who says** to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one **who does** the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, **did we** not prophesy **in your name**, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I **never knew you**; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt 7:21-23).

- Notice the connection between “doing” and “being known”, they “did” a lot and “did it” in the name of the Lord,” but they didn’t do the will of the Father! A Christian isn’t just one who **claims** Christ or does a lot of **activity** (even ostensibly for Christ), but someone whose life is marked in word and deed by alignment with the will of Christ. “There are people who claim to follow Jesus as ‘Lord’ and who do good works and think they are doing them in Jesus’ name who are nonetheless on” the road to destruction (France).
- Think about it: a lot of people claim the name of Jesus, but all they’re doing is slapping Jesus’ name onto what they want to do. They’re not in a relationship with God. They’re not known by God. Obedience is not following a checklist of behaviors; it consists of the actions and attitudes that flow out of a deep intimacy with Christ.

## 2. Seeing Beyond the Surface (vv. 4-18)

**The Parable (vv. 4-8):** Maybe Jesus’ best-known parable. <sup>4</sup> And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, <sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup> 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.”

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<sup>2</sup> Everyone is made in the image of God.

- The story is pretty **straightforward** and would make a lot of sense in an agrarian society where farming, planting, and harvesting were regular parts of life. There's a sower and seed. Various settings prevent the seed from growing (in three of the scenes), but in the last scene, the soil is good, resulting in an abundant harvest. The challenge of a parable is not what it says on the surface but what it is intended to represent.
- But the point of the parable is not about farming; it's an extended metaphor trying to explain a spiritual lesson.
  - Hence, do you have "ears to hear." Do you have eyes of faith to understand what Jesus is teaching by using this story?

**The Confusion (vv. 9-10):** <sup>9</sup> And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, <sup>10</sup> 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.'"

- This parable is unique in that it explains the nature of the gospel and also serves as a parable about parables, explaining how parables work.
- Parables aren't just sermon illustrations (e.g., Jesus used illustrations; you should, too, "preacher boy"), or they'd be bad ones because the disciples understood that parables seem to confuse as much as illuminate.
- They're asking: Why are they so cryptic? Why not spell it out more clearly? The disciples notice something common in the people's responses: some people hear Jesus' words and respond with joy, while others hear the words and respond with dismissal.
- Parables are not simply "earthly stories with heavenly meanings." While they are metaphors of the KoG, they also serve as ciphers, separating those who understand from those who don't.
- How can two people hear the Bible, listen to the same sermon, etc., and come away with completely different understandings? I was talking to someone who told me something about *my* sermon that I didn't mean or say. How do I know? **I said it.** They heard what they *wanted* to hear. "I believe every word they said because it's exactly what I wanted to hear." "Suspicion often creates what it suspects" (Lewis).
  - "What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing. It also depends on what sort of person you are" (C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*).
  - "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else" (Lewis).
- Perspective impacts understanding. In the early 16th century, the widely accepted geocentric model, which placed the Earth at the center of the universe, was challenged by Nicolaus Copernicus, who proposed the heliocentric model with the Sun at the center. This radical idea, published in 1543, faced skepticism and resistance because it required a fundamental shift in perspective. It was only after accepting this new truth that people could understand the true nature of the universe, as the Copernican Revolution revealed the cosmos more accurately, leaving those who held onto the geocentric view unable to see the universe as it truly was.

**Knowledge via Trust:** Knowledge usually comes via trust. In fact, until you trust (the person, the authority, the process), you're not able to learn (e.g., trust the teacher). Even though you've forgotten, you didn't wake up one day and realize  $1+1=2$ . Someone (your parent or a Count puppet on Sesame Street) taught you. Think about it, even science is based on a "trust" of a particular history of thought and method of inquiry. The Bible sometimes speaks of the "knowledge of salvation" but how do you gain that knowledge without first trusting in God? Faith in Jesus opens up a whole world of truth.

- **Thinking** is essential to the Christian faith. But it is essential as a **response of worship** to the revelation of God's character and salvation (e.g., "love God with your mind"). **Theology** is essential to the Christian faith as an **act of discipleship**, as we "think God's thoughts after him." But we don't "think" ourselves into faith. We "faith" ourselves into correct thinking (e.g., faith is the pair of glasses that allows you to see clearly). "Faith seeking understanding" (Anselm).<sup>3</sup>
- This is how the gospel is so clear to those who see Jesus clearly and so confusing to those who reject him. It builds up the believer and confounds the unbeliever.
  - Parables **reveal** to those who trust Christ and **conceal** to those who resist him because they require submission to his revelation when most of us prefer him to conform to our reality.
- So, Jesus says, <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear." The parables create a paradox. They explain more clearly the KoG to those who understand it, but they confuse those who don't believe.
  - Believe = parables illuminate
  - Reject = parables obscure
- If you approach the gospel with skepticism (you'll find a frustrating puzzle), if you approach it with trust (not avoiding challenging issues) you'll find treasures of life and joy.

**Two Types of People:** "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.' There are two types of people here, (1) the disciples who understand and (2) the those who don't. Understanding the message of the Kingdom is only accessible to those who are followers of Christ. This is a simple fact: there are those that understand the truth of the gospel and those that don't. And the understanding involved is not based on some esoteric skill or hidden meaning. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18). The key to unlocking the secrets of the kingdom is simply faith in Christ. Understanding who he is and acting accordingly.

**See But Not See:** What does it mean to "see but not see" or "hear but not hear"? A lot of people only partially see what is being said. They understand the surface point but are unable to see or submit to the reality of Jesus. **They see what they want to see, rather than what God sees.**

- When I used to take students to summer camp, I would always say as part of my pre-camp spiel "Camp is what you make it. You get out of it what you put into it." Have you ever been in a situation where you have a terrible time *because* you're determined to have a terrible time? The gospel is not true *only* if you believe it is true, *but* you can't

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<sup>3</sup> *Fides quaerens intellectum.*

see its truth and experience its power until you are willing to see it. Your attitude doesn't make it true, but it does define your relationship with it.

- Are you willing to see the truth of the gospel and allow it to transform your life, or are you holding onto your own perspective, missing the full reality of Jesus and His kingdom?

**The Explanation:** <sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.

**The Soils of the Heart:** There are a lot of circumstances that keep us from receiving the word of God and, therefore, keep us from bearing fruit for the gospel.

- **Sower** = (presumably) **Jesus** (but could be anyone who shares the word of God)
- **Seed** = **gospel** (word of God).
- **Soil** = **human heart**

**(1) A Hard Heart:** <sup>12</sup> 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.

- This is the person whose heart is hard, the seed of the gospel doesn't penetrate. As a result, the word is not hidden from the prow of the evil one (i.e., Satan (*satanos*) in Matthew; Devil (*diabolos*) in Luke).
- The word never gets through your thick skull (e.g., stubbornness is not often a virtue). The person who refused to be changed by the gospel ("I do it my way" mentality).
- **Diagnostic Q:** Do you resist the commands of God and the promises of the gospel? Does God's Word anger you or bring you comfort? Be careful not to harden your heart. Be grateful for the grace of the gospel
- This is clearly the unsaved person (who does not believe and be saved), contrary to the clearly saved person (#4, good soil; the middle two are the unclear categories).
- It is often hard to tell what Jesus is aiming for here (getting into the kingdom or being fruitful as a member of the kingdom); in reality, they both stem from the reception and growth of the gospel.

**(2) A Superficial Heart:** <sup>13</sup> 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.

- This is the person who responds with joy (often exuberant). The "talk a big game." But their joy is superficial and short-lived. The slightest amount of difficulty and they are gone (why do people feel the need to enthusiastically tell me they're coming to church?).
- There's no depth of root (e.g., planting perennials, chopping off the top, and letting the roots grow). We focus on the flowers and forget about the roots, but the health of the

plant is in the root. Focus on the roots. Flowers may wilt, but as long as the root is healthy, it'll flower again.

- Sometimes we see a dynamic response and think it's a success (I've witnessed this frequently as a pastor, someone comes forward and tells me all the things I want to hear). But then they're gone #ghosted. **As a church we focus on the roots and celebrate the fruit; don't chase the superficial.**
- **Diagnostic Q:** Does your spiritual fervor start off strong and then fade? Is your spirituality good on the surface or does it impact all areas of your life? (e.g., decorative pillows, Christian outfits, etc.). Frontrunning faith is no faith at all.

**(3) A Divided Heart:** <sup>14</sup> 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.

- This is the person who is partially committed to Jesus. They want Jesus plus comfort.
- This is the "Jesus is my copilot" mentality (he gets a seat in the car but doesn't get to drive). I.e., Other things matter more. Jesus is nice, but he isn't more valuable than material concerns (e.g., worldly achievements, goals, possessions, etc.).
- Does your faith persist only during times of ease?

**(4) A Fruitful Heart:** <sup>15</sup> 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.

- A receptive heart genuinely trusts in God, submits to his plan, and finds joy in a relationship with him. It's "satisfaction in Christ alone [that] runs so deep no pain can shake it and no pleasure can compete with it" (Piper).
- The result is a life that produces gospel fruit. The gospel multiplies.
- Your public and private persona are the same. When things get tough, you persevere in faith. Trials push you to Jesus, not away.
- **Diagnostic Q:** Do I receive the word of God joyfully, hold onto it steadfastly, and see visible evidence of its transformation in my heart and life?<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

Do you recognize Jesus' true identity?

- Or are you avoiding his claims, keeping him at arm's length, allowing surface discipleship but not heart transformation?

Do you gladly receive the word of Christ?

- Or Is your heart resistant to the life-giving path of Jesus?

What would happen if you came to Jesus with no negotiation or conditions, but simple faith and joyful obedience?

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<sup>4</sup> The same point is in vv. 16-18 when Jesus uses the light metaphor to explain that the truth will eventually come out. Jesus' teaching is light meant to expose and reveal. <sup>16</sup> "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. <sup>17</sup> For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. <sup>18</sup> 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."