

Those Who Hear God's Word and Do It
Luke 8:16-25
Key Verse: 8:21

"He replied, 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.'"

In the previous passage we learned that the word of God has tremendous power to grow and bear fruit in a person's life. However, we must have a right heart attitude toward the word. Today's passages reveal more about how the word works in us to grow and bear the fruit of the kingdom. When the word grows in us, we grow in Jesus. When we grow in Jesus we feel alive; our hearts and minds are fresh, the world is new and dynamic, and every day is special. When fall semester comes, we realize it is a new season and that God will do new things among us. So we look for them eagerly and work with faith. Growing people are happy people. Do you want to grow? Let's learn how to grow in Jesus through today's study.

I. Consider carefully how you listen (16-18)

Look at verse 16. "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light." Why does Jesus tell this obvious truth? It is to make a spiritual point. Here, the "lamp" is the word of Jesus. Jesus' word is Jesus himself, and it is the good news of the kingdom of God. When Jesus comes into our hearts, he restores God's reign in us and in the world. Without Jesus, we are ruled by the power of sin and death and the devil. But Jesus drives out these powers and reigns over us with freedom and joy. Jesus had already demonstrated his authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic with the word of his mouth. Jesus had already demonstrated his authority over death by raising a widow's son back to life. Jesus had already healed all kinds of diseases to show that he restores creation to the good, beautiful and healthy state God intended in the beginning. Jesus restores paradise, the kingdom of God. Those who repent and believe the good news receive the kingdom of God in their hearts.

We experience the kingdom in real ways the moment we believe. However, we do not experience the fullness of the kingdom. Theologians call this the "already/not yet" nature of the kingdom. We are already righteous by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for us, but we are not yet perfect. We still sin every day. But Jesus' grace is greater than our sins. When we confess our sins and ask mercy, Jesus forgives us and purifies us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9). Jesus enables us to walk in victory over sin, and this victory shines like a beacon in this dark world. We already have

eternal life by faith in Jesus. But we are not yet in our glorious spiritual bodies. We are still groaning with the power of death every day. Loved ones die. We ourselves get wrinkles and gray hair, and we cannot run as fast as we once did. But we have a glorious hope that we will be raised with Christ and dwell in the kingdom of God forever. This hope sparkles in a world overcome by death. The world we live in is not yet paradise. We hear of tragic events every day; the world is groaning. But when Jesus comes again he will defeat all evil and unrighteousness and rule the world with justice and mercy forever. At that time there will be no health care problem because no one will be sick. There will be no more war. Isaiah foretold, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isa 2:4). Nations will not have any defense budget, but can use all their resources to feed the hungry and there will be no more hunger or poverty. God will rule the world in his love. This hope shines in the dark world.

The gospel of Jesus is really good news. Why then, would anyone not shine this glorious light to the fullest extent? There is still a spiritual battle going on with the powers of darkness. For example, the Pharisees, in their pride, had rejected the message of repentance. When a woman came to Jesus and repented her sins very sincerely, a Pharisee despised her, and even Jesus, in his mind. Jesus courageously defended the woman by rebuking his host's loveless lifestyle. Then the light of truth shone into that deceptive web of darkness. In our times, the pressure of peers to make young people conform to the world's norms is very strong. The rich despise the poor. The beautiful despise the plain. The strong despise the weak. The well educated despise those less learned. Sometimes people enjoy their petty self-exaltation to the degree that they do not want change to come. Jesus' gospel cuts through all kinds of human prejudices with simple and clear truths: all men are sinners, and Christ died for all who will accept him in repentance and faith. Before these truths, prejudices are exposed as arrogant folly. However, some people hold onto them tenaciously. That is why shining the light is a battle. The darkness is real. Recently, we have heard of Rifqa Bary, a teenager from Ohio in a Muslim family. Through Bible study, she confessed Jesus as Lord and became a Christian. She said that her father was so upset that he threatened to kill her. He was pressured by militant Muslims from his mosque. The darkness hates and resists the light (Jn 3:19-21). To proclaim the kingdom of God is to challenge the darkness of our society. God sent Jesus precisely to shine his light into this dark world. Jesus' light drives out the darkness and brings the kingdom of God. Jesus wants to shine his light through us, even now. So we must not hide the gospel in fear and shame, but shine the gospel with boldness and courage. There is a child's song about this. It goes like this: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine; this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine; let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

Look at verse 17. "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open." Jesus promises us that the gospel truth wins final victory in the end. All darkness will be exposed and driven out by the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven; every knee will bow before Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord.

How can we be the ones who shine the light in these times? It is not by manufacturing courage through our willpower, or inventing clever tricks that make things easier. Look at verse 18. "Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him." The source of our power is Jesus' word. We can have real power when we listen to his word and accept it in our hearts. The victory is won by the power of the word of Jesus in our hearts. So Jesus taught us to consider carefully how we listen. This is so important. We live in an information age. We hear so many bits of information each day that it boggles our minds. So we listen selectively. We filter junk news and receive only what seems worthy. We tend to move from one thing to the next very quickly. However, we must not listen to the word of God in that way. To listen to the word of God properly requires devotion that enables sustained concentration. We must regard the word as the most important thing to us and allow it to occupy our minds and hearts, and sink deeply into our being. Then it reveals to us the secret of the kingdom of God. Once this secret is planted, the power of God shines through us, overcoming any darkness. Those who study the Bible with full concentration can grow endlessly in the truths of the gospel. They gain inner conviction to spread the kingdom. But those who study the word superficially will be powerless, and in the course of time, lose even their shallow head knowledge.

Chuck Templeton was a contemporary of Dr. Billy Graham and a fellow evangelist. However, he began to feel that his gospel message was too simple and that he needed something more. So he went to Princeton and studied liberal theology. He lost his absolute attitude toward the word of God. Later, when he experienced a family tragedy, he began to doubt God's love. Finally, when he saw an African woman holding a dead child that had starved to death in her arms, he thought "How could a loving God let this happen?" He publicly declared himself agnostic, and died in that condition.

Some of us know the story of Brother Yun of China. It is recorded in his book, "The Heavenly Man." As Brother Yun tells, Jesus healed his father miraculously

from cancer. Then his entire family accepted Christ. Brother Yun wanted to know Jesus better through Bible study. But it was impossible to obtain a Bible in China. Those were the days of the Cultural Revolution. Anyone with a Bible would be killed. A pastor advised Brother Yun to kneel down and pray for a Bible. So he prayed every day for a month, kneeling on a stone. But nothing happened. He asked the pastor why. The pastor told him that kneeling down prayer was not enough, and that he needed to fast and weep as he prayed. Brother Yun did this until his family members thought he was crazy. At last, God gave him a vision of being well fed, and shortly after that, two men delivered a Bible to his house. They had not met him before, but God sent them to give him the Bible. Brother Yun suffered many things in his lifetime, but he said that this suffering was the most difficult. He could suffer much because he highly valued the word of Jesus in the Bible. He listened to Jesus' words as the words of life. His personal faith grew deep and strong, and he became a warrior of faith in Chinese Christian history.

Let's read verse 18 together: "Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him." Do we listen to the word of God with a right attitude? If not, we can drift into agnosticism. The word of Jesus has been proclaimed in America for hundreds of years and we have enjoyed freedom of religion. However, many take the word of Jesus lightly. So many American Christians do not grow deep in faith. We must pray for American Christians, including us, to listen to the word of Jesus as the word of life.

II. Hear God's word and put it into practice (19-21)

While listening carefully to God's word is important, it is not enough. In order to grow spiritually, we must put it into practice in a community of believers. In this part, Jesus introduces the spiritual family. One day Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him. But they were not able to get near him because of the crowd (19). Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you" (20). They must have expected Jesus to stop what he was doing and pay immediate attention to his family. However, Jesus said, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Here Jesus teaches us two things.

First, Jesus gave first priority to God's word. In this world, our deepest loyalty and greatest affinity belongs to our family members. There is a saying that "blood is thicker than water." Most of the time, in a time of crisis, it is one's family that can be depended on. This may be true. However, Jesus did not stop what he was doing

to pay attention to his family. Jesus intentionally remained with those who were struggling to practice the word of God. Jesus emphasized that the word of God is most important and that the ministry of the word cannot be interrupted for anything, even by family members. In doing this, Jesus showed a good example in giving one's whole heart and attention to listening to the word of God. Only when we have this kind of commitment to God's word can we truly taste its spiritual depth. We must acknowledge the limitations of our human family relationships. Though we love our family members dearly, if they do not accept the gospel, our relationship will end at death. We cannot be together forever. We must not exchange the eternal word of God for what perishes.

Second, Jesus taught about the spiritual family. According to Jesus' word, those who hear and practice God's word become members of Jesus' spiritual family. They enter into a new relationship with Christ and his people. The Apostle Peter wrote, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pe 1:23). When we hear and practice the word of God, it gives birth to a new life in us, a spiritual life (Jn 3:6). This life comes from God by his one-sided grace and makes us members of God's family. We have a new identity as God's children (2 Cor 5:17). We have a new will, which is to live according to God's purpose for us (Php 2:13). We begin to participate in the divine nature (2 Pe 1:4). We share God's heart and desires. Our purpose of life fundamentally changes from living for our own glory to living for God's glory. We lose the desire to sin and begin to crave the holiness of God. When this happens, the change that takes place in us is so deep that it transfers our fundamental loyalty and affinity from our human family to God's family. The Bible calls the church "God's household" (1 Ti 3:15). In Christ, we have the great privilege of being children of God and members of God's family, his church. We should live with this clear identity and sense of community.

The devil often whispers to us that God does not love us and that we don't deserve to be God's children. But the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Ro 8:16). And as God's children, we are heirs of God's everlasting kingdom and are even co-heirs with Christ (Ro 8:17). The devil also whispers to us that no one loves or understands us, and that we are not wanted. That is not true. In Christ, the members of his church are one body. We have a bond of love that is deeper and more powerful than any other. We have brothers and sisters who love us dearly and are willing to sacrifice for us in this community, throughout the world, and throughout the generations. We also have the privilege of practicing God's love for our dear brothers and sisters and sacrificing for them. In this way, we can all grow in the love of God. God provided this spiritual family for our

good. As Jesus set the example, we must honor our spiritual family members. We must love and serve one another with great affection. This gives us great joy and strength and we can win victory over the devil and the dark world.

However, we must remember that this great blessing is given only to those who hear God's word and put it into practice. When Abraham was told to leave his country and people and father's household, he did so even though it was painful. His act of obedience brought forth eternal blessing, and he became the spiritual father of all who believe in Christ (Ro 4:17). Now he has countless descendants, as numerous as the stars in the sky. When I met Christ personally through Bible study, the Lord called me out of the darkness of my sins. He also called me out of my parent's house to live a new life. As an only son with three younger sisters, I was precious to my family. To follow God's call, I struggled with confusion and emotional pain. But as my faith grew, the Lord opened my eyes to the family members I have in Christ. They love me and understand me and pray for me from their hearts. Now, with God's children around the world, I share the same direction, heart's desire, hope and sufferings, as we struggle to advance God's kingdom in our times. In the end, we will be together forever in God's kingdom. Jesus blesses those who hear and practice God's word, and makes us members of his glorious spiritual family. When we act on that faith, we experience spiritual fellowship in the body of Christ, and we can grow to maturity.

III. We must practice our faith during the storms (22-25)

The event recorded in verses 22-25 illustrates how God uses the storms of life to help us mature in faith. One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. It is important to note that they entered the boat at Jesus' invitation. They were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do. Then, as they sailed, Jesus fell asleep. Jesus was tired after hard work and he slept deeply. Suddenly, a squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. Some of the disciples had been fishermen, who were used to sailing in the Sea of Galilee. However, this storm was so sudden and strong that they could not control the boat. Despite their best efforts the boat was sinking. In a panic, they woke Jesus, saying, "Master, master, we're going to drown!" Jesus was suddenly awakened from deep sleep by fearful disciples in the midst of a serious storm. What did he do? Look at verse 24b. "He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm." With one word of his mouth, Jesus rebuked the wind and the waters and they immediately became calm. Jesus is the Creator God who has the power to rule nature. Jesus has the power to calm any kind of storm of life with

one word of his mouth. We face the storms of painful relationship problems, health problems, career challenges, difficult school studies, and financial problems. No matter what the problem is, Jesus can calm our storm of life with one word of his mouth. Jesus brings us peace and victory.

After calming the storm, Jesus asked his disciples, "Where is your faith?" Jesus was most concerned about their faith. Jesus wanted them to trust in him during the storm. They had spoken out in fear, fear that they would drown. In truth, all people suffer from fear, and at the root of it is the fear of death (Heb 2:15). Satan torments people with fear until they become powerless. During ordinary times, it is not so difficult to talk the talk of faith. But during the life-threatening storms, our deep hearts are revealed. Jesus wants us to trust him absolutely in the midst of the storms. This faith pleases Jesus. Jesus is God, the Author of life. Jesus is the Christ, who rose victorious over death. When Jesus rules our hearts, we can have assurance of life and peace. So, we must remember Jesus' words and his presence with us during life's storms and depend on him. Through exercising our faith, it becomes strong, and we become powerful children of God.

Jesus' disciples were amazed. They completely forgot about the storm and were filled with awe for Jesus. They said, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." The storm became the opportunity for Jesus to display his glory as the Son of God and for the disciples to learn deep trust in Jesus. When we follow Jesus, he sometimes leads us through storms. But he uses these storms to help us grow in faith and to take deeper root in our relationship with him.

In this passage we have learned how to grow to bear the fruit of the kingdom as Jesus' disciples. We must consider carefully how we hear the word of God. We must put what we hear into practice and live in community with God's family members. We must go through storms of life by looking at Jesus all the more. Then we will grow strong, firm and steadfast in the reality of the kingdom. May God bless us all to grow in Christ.