

The First Listening Message: The Hit and the Miss

Read Luke 8:1-15.

This past Sunday, I delivered my first listening sermon, which will accompany our six-week series on idols. I felt led to emphasize the importance of listening. Our culture, while not overtly Christian, once held a collective consciousness that pointed back to Christ—something that has diminished significantly. Now, more than ever, we must cultivate the ability to hear the Spirit in a society drifting away from God.

So, how was this sermon different from my usual approach? I didn't engage in formal preparation. Instead, I prayed, read Scripture, journaled, and listened. You might think, "That sounds normal." So, what's the difference?

After 30 years of leading within evangelical communities, I've learned to value preaching and the Word deeply. We often revere those who preach well and implicitly believe that being a "good" pastor means thorough preparation and strong delivery.

Last week, when I chose not to prepare in the traditional sense, I felt nervous and anxious. This lack of preparation revealed an idol in my life.

Discussion Question: What is an idol?

An idol occurs when we take good things that God has given us and elevate them above Him. We might claim that "God is first" in our lives, but if we examine our priorities, we should ask ourselves:

- What do we devote ourselves to?
- What demands our best energy?
- What occupies our thoughts most frequently?
- What would lead to our anger or despair if it was lost or was threatened?

If anything besides God occupies that space, it's an idol.

Idols formed from negative things, like drugs or greed, are easier to identify. But recognizing idols from virtuous aspects—like love for family, service, or education—can be more challenging.

Discussion Question: How can we discern when a good thing has become an idol?

Reflecting on my sermon, I experienced both a "hit" and a "miss." The hit was when I felt aligned with the Spirit, particularly when discussing Luke 8:1-15 and the parable of the sower, this miss was going on from that. So I want to come back to focusing on the parable and especially verses 11-12:

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved."

Jesus teaches that belief begins with receiving the Word of God. Satan actively seeks to steal this seed because he knows it can lead to belief and salvation.

Initially, I thought this referred only to the first moment someone hears about Jesus. However, the Greek word “sozo” encompasses more than just salvation from sin; it also means to make whole and to heal.

Stay with me: when we receive the seed of who Jesus is and what He has done, the Logos begins to grow within us. As the logos, Christ develops in us, we come to understand who we are in Him. This belief brings salvation, but it doesn't end there.

As the Logos grows, He heals and restores us to our true identity as mature sons and daughters of God, we begin to like Jesus (1 John 2:6).

Discussion Question: What are the signs of someone becoming a whole, restored, mature child of God?

Satan, the adversary of our souls, will do anything to prevent us from receiving the seed of the Logos. He fears the emergence of mature sons and daughters of God living in Christ. He employs three primary strategies to prevent this.

1. He snatches the seed from someone's heart before it can take root.
2. He introduces trouble and hardship to provoke rejection of the Logos.
3. He chokes the Logos by filling hearts with “good things” that become idols.

The demonic realm aims not just to snatch the initial seed of belief but also to inhibit further growth. One of their key tactics is spreading lies.

Jesus refers to Satan as the “Father of Lies.” He is the deceiver, the accuser, and Paul warns that he can appear as an angel of light.

Demonic lies can be subtle. Look for repeated destructive thoughts about yourself or others. These lies operate similarly to God's Word; they can be planted within us, grow, and ultimately lead to spiritual death (James 1:14-15).

Discussion Question: How can we foster a community that identifies demonic lies and encourages the growth of the Word within us?

Combating the lies. When you identify demonic lies bring the logos of the word against them. To do this, what do we need to priorities?

Prayer:

Let's take some time to pray for one another and for those we know who have had the seed snatched from their hearts, walked away from Jesus due to persecution, or had their faith choked by good things.