



# Hear & Retain the Word!

Psalm 29    Hebrews 4:12-16    Luke 4:4-15

January 21, 2024

Pastor Dave Bolte

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus sets people free by the power of His **Word**. And to prove that His Word is true, Jesus also sets people free through His **miracles**. The **miracles** you can see prove that the **Word of God** that you hear is true, and that you can believe and trust His Word. Jesus uses His mighty and powerful **Word** to set you free from sin, guilt, shame, and death<sup>1</sup>.

In order to teach us the power and the importance of the **Word of God**, Jesus gave us the parable<sup>2</sup> of the Sower and the Seed. The Sower is Jesus Himself; the seed is His Holy Word. In the parable Jesus says that **His Word** effects people differently.

- ➔ Some seed falls on the hard path, and has no effect on the person.
- ➔ Some seed falls in amongst the rocks, but never grows into a plant
- ➔ some seed falls into thorns, but the thorns choke it out and it never grows
- ➔ and finally some seed falls on good soil, and it takes root, and grows strong, and produces all kinds of fruit -- even 100x what was sown.

The Word of God affects us differently, depending on what's going on in our lives. Sometimes we need to hear the Law of God. Sometimes we need to hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Word is powerful, and it will achieve its purposes: both to convict us of sin or to comfort us with forgiveness.

---

<sup>1</sup> Remember that the Word of God comes to you in three ways, the spoken **Word** (preached, taught, read, etc. --- this is the Bible), the Word and water of Holy **Baptism**, and the Word and bread and wine of Holy **Communion**. We call these the "Means of Grace" or oftentimes the "Word and Sacraments." The Word of God (i.e.: the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ) is the power behind the Sacraments. These Means of Grace all are mighty and powerful to set you free from sin, guilt, shame, and death!

<sup>2</sup> A "parable" is an illustrative story to teach a spiritual truth, and only by faith will it be productive and effective in a person's life. Parables divide people into two groups; those who believe and understand the truth of the parable; and those who do not believe and ignore the parable. Those who do not believe and ignore the parable harden their own hearts. God's will is that you hear, believe, and understand His parables!

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
Isaiah 55:10-11

God's Word is powerful, and it will achieve its purposes. God's Word comes to us as Law and as Gospel; the distinction between *the Law and the Gospel* must be clearly defined and always separated from each other<sup>3</sup>. *It's hard to imagine two other words that are more important in theology!*

The **Law of God** is powerful and its primary purpose is to expose your sin and to convict you in your rebellion and disobedience. The Law of God is crystal clear in the **10 Commandments**; the Commandments teach you what is right and wrong, good from evil, truth from error. The Law of God, the 10 Commandments, shows you your sins. They show you how you have sinned against God and against others. The Law of God reveals the depth and the corruption of sin in your life. It creates guilt, it always condemns, and it declares that you will die in your sin. The Law of God is extremely powerful; the Bible describes it as a *fire that consumes* and a *hammer that crushes rocks*. The Law of God has the power to convict you of sin, but it has **no power whatsoever** to heal you, forgive you, or give you life.

For healing, forgiveness, and life, you need the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ**. *The Gospel is the good news that your sins are forgiven because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* The Son of God came into the world to do the work of salvation that you were unable to do. He lived a perfect life for you under the Ten Commandments; He perfectly obeyed the 10 Commandments every moment of every day. He then took the judgment and condemnation of the Law *that you deserve* upon Himself when He died on the cross. Everything Jesus did He did for you and in your place<sup>4</sup>. That's good news, that is the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

---

<sup>3</sup> These two fundamental words -- LAW and GOSPEL -- are critical to understand in your pursuit of being ever more Biblically literate and Doctrinally sound. The Lutheran Confessions capture this importance in this insightful quote: "The distinction between the Law and the Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly."  
"Formula of Concord", Article V.1, [Book of Concord](#)

<sup>4</sup> This doctrine is called the "Perfect Obedience of Christ." Jesus perfectly obeyed God the Father **in life** (Jesus fully obeyed the Commandments of God at all points every moment of His life) and He perfectly obeyed God the

The Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation; it is the power of God that forgives sins, creates faith, and gives eternal life. It is the power that creates a harvest; even a 100x what was sown!

God's Word comes to you as **Law and Gospel**. This parable teaches us that Jesus is *continually sowing* the seed of His Word in your life.

But God's Word does not always produce faith. People can **resist** the Word of God and turn away from it<sup>5</sup>. In the parable, 3 of the 4 “soils” failed; the Word was lost, no harvest was produced. ☹️

**It is not that the Word failed,  
but the heart of the person failed.**

**How you listen to the Word of God  
is very important.**

There are many things that can take the Word of God away from you<sup>6</sup>; many things that can distract you and cause the Word to be unproductive in your life. Jesus highlights the work of Satan and his depraved demons (*hard path*); separating yourself from Christ and His Word when you suffer trials, temptations, or persecution (*rocky path*); and being distracted by the world in its ways (*thorny path*). In all these examples, the same Word is being proclaimed, but it has different effects on different people. The Word of God is ultimately rejected and people lose their way and their faith. **They have forfeited eternal salvation.** ☹️

*Be careful that that does not happen to you!*

---

Father **in death** (God the Father's will was that His Son would die for the sins of the world). His perfect obedience in life is called “Christ's Active Obedience”; and His perfect obedience in death is called “Christ's Passive Obedience”.

<sup>5</sup> This parable clearly teaches that “once saved, always saved” is a FALSE teaching. That false teaching gives false assurance to people. This parable teaches us that intentional perseverance is essential in the Christian faith; Jesus describes that perseverance as “ongoing hearing” of the Word.

<sup>6</sup> The Bible speaks in so many ways about “apostasy”, that is, falling away from the faith. Rarely does it happen in one sudden event; rather it is usually gradual, a “drifting away” as Hebrews teaches; by separating yourself from Christ's Word and His Church. Failure to worship is almost always the first sign of apostasy.

This is a **STRONG WARNING** for you to pay careful attention to how you hear and respond to the **Law of God** and the **Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Jesus teaches us that we are to be the good soil; those that **hear the Word and to retain it**.

The “**good soil**” is the person who takes hold of the Word of God, keeps it in their heart, and puts it into practice. It means that you are eager to hear, learn and understand what God teaches you in Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit creates a desire within you to be **biblically literate** and **doctrinally sound**; the Holy Spirit creates a hunger and a thirst for the Word of God. That is the nature of faith; it draws you to Christ and His Word<sup>7</sup>. Only Satan, your sinful nature, and the world want you to stay away from Christ and His Word.

Remember how Martin Luther teaches us in the Small Catechism: *We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but **hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it***<sup>8</sup>.

This parable calls you to evaluate yourself. Take an honest look at what your attitude is towards the Word of God. Is your heart **hard or soft** when it comes to God's Law? Do you believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and know that your sins are forgiven and that you belong to God? Are you eager to **hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop?**

**Perseverance** in God's Word is what this parable is all about. **Hearing, understanding, and properly responding to the Law and the Gospel.**

Jesus is the Sower of the seed in your life.

He is continually at work bringing His Word to you; putting it in your ears and planting it in your heart. He has given you a plethora of ways to learn, study, and understand His Word.

The question today is **how** are you going to hear and retain the Word of God? Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> If Bible study is new to you, then I have two suggestions. First, read just one chapter from the Bible each day, start with either Luke, John, or Psalms. Start getting used to opening your Bible during the week. Second, come to one of my Bible studies and see how they work. It is a safe place where you will not have to talk or answer questions. Bring your Bible and just follow along. Bible study is a pillar in the Christian life.

<sup>8</sup> This is the meaning of the Third Commandment in Martin Luther's Small Catechism.

---

**Lord Jesus,**

**we thank You that You have sown the seed of Your Word into our hearts.**

**We ask for good soil, that intentionally hears and retains Your Word.**

**Allow Your Law to work in our hearts to convict us of sin.**

**Lead us to repentance and turn us away from rebellion.**

**Grant us faith in the Gospel, trusting that our sins are forgiven and that we belong to You through faith alone and by Your grace alone.**

**Help us to understand Holy Scripture, and give us a hunger and thirst to become ever more biblically literate and doctrinally sound disciples.**

**We pray this in Your Holy Name, amen!**

# Psalm 29

- 1 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the Lord, over many waters.
- 4 The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
- 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”
- 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;  
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
- 11 May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

# Hebrews 4:12-16

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. 14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

# Luke 4:4-15

And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 5 “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. 6 And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 8 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.”

9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 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.’ 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 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.