

“SEEING AND NOT PERCEIVING”  
Isaiah 6:1-13, Romans 11:1-10, Mark 4:9-12  
March 8 & 9, 2025

“Popcorn pops due to an explosion of moisture. Every kernel of popcorn has moisture in it. When you put popcorn in the microwave, the microwave heats up the moisture, creating steam. When the steam pressure rises inside the shell of the popcorn, it presses against the shell until the shell can’t withstand the pressure anymore and it pops open, splitting open the shell.

“What once was a small, hard little object has now increased in size and becomes soft and fluffy. In fact, when the popcorn pops, it’s hard to even find the shell. The old outward appearance is now dominated by the inside characteristics.

“God has seated deep down in your soul something that is ready to respond to the right environment. When the Holy Spirit begins to ‘cook’ your divine nature so that the steam of your new life begins to rise and press through this outer shell called the body, you begin to ‘pop.’ You will begin to look, act, talk, and walk differently because the change occurring on the inside will show up on the outside.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s God’s intent for each of us, that we experience the fire of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives so much that we are transformed by Him and end up completely different than what we first started out to be. That transformation can then be used to bring honor and glory to God as we interact in the lives of those around us.

But we have a problem. So many people today do not take the time to draw near enough to the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, so that He can warm their hearts and help the transformation take place. Just like the “old maids” left in the bottom of the popcorn bag, they have not become hot enough to pop out of their old natures to become brand new creatures in

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 306, #917)

Christ Jesus. So they stay hard, confined by their tough shells, and nothing is able to open their eyes and ears and hearts to the love of Jesus so that they might be changed.

And that's the difficulty of today's hard saying of Jesus. Listen to our Gospel text today of Mark 4:9-12. (READ Mark 4:9-12)

Jesus and His disciples were by the Sea of Galilee. This time, Jesus told the parable of the Sower, or what many call the Parable of the Soils. You remember it, that the farmer sows his seed on all the areas of his field, only to have different responses in production. Some seeds fall on hard soil, and they are quickly eaten up by the birds because they have no soil to sink their roots into. Some seeds fall onto rocky ground, and while they sprout quickly, soon they wither and die for lack of nourishment because there is no soil there. Some seeds fall into an area where thorns grow up, and they are slowly and methodically choked out, unable to complete with the stronger weeds. But then there are some seeds that land upon the good soil and they sprout, grow and produce 30, 60 and even 100 times their number to provide an abundant harvest.

Jesus gave the parable so that the people might understand that it is possible to receive the Word of the Lord God, but not have any difference made by it because of the way that we live. If our hearts are as hard as the beaten-down path, the Word will never even enter into our lives, but be stolen from us. If our hearts are surrounded by trouble and persecution, it is difficult for the seed of God's Word to do more than just germinate before it dries up and dies. And if our hearts are so focused upon the things of this world, the Word is choked out and dies because our attention is diverted by all the pleasures and desires and worries and deceitfulness that the world has. But when we prepare our hearts for the Word of God, and keep our lives ready for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and move closer to Him each day, we become very productive for the Lord.

Jesus knows the different readiness each person has to hear the Word of God, so He says, “*Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear*” (Mark 4:9). He knows that there will be some who are ready to receive His teaching and change their lives so that they become productive. But He also knows that there will be some whose hearts are prevented from hearing His Word and they will never understand it.

And it is then that we hear Jesus’ hard saying, “*“The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”*” (Mk 4:11-12).

Now, in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, the word for ‘parable’ might also mean ‘riddle.’ So Jesus spoke stories with a meaning (our understanding of the word parable), so that people who were in tune with Him could understand the meanings of God’s Word deeper. Those who are stirred by the Holy Spirit and warmed in their hearts, will hear Jesus’ words and understand them and believe them and be saved by them.

However, those who hear the parables as riddles, are confounded by the parables and never come upon their meanings. Then they are unable to understand them, or believe them and they are never changed by the Word, and never find forgiveness.

But something in Jesus’ hard saying disturbs me, and maybe you, too. Jesus says that “*to those on the outside everything is said in parables SO THAT, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving...’*” (4:11b-12a). Doesn’t Jesus want everyone to hear and understand the Word of God? Doesn’t Jesus want everyone to believe in Him and come to the point of asking Him to become their Lord and Savior? The answer is YES to both questions. However God does not force anyone to hear His word, and never forces His way into the life of any person.

So that means that it is our choice as to whether or not we will spend the time to draw closer to Jesus, be warmed by His Holy Spirit, and then get so excited that we “pop” out of gratefulness for all that He has done for us. Those who become attracted to Jesus and get close to Him and follow His ways and obey His teachings will become transformed in their lives so that they will understand the parables that He gives to us and then believe and find life.

But as we compare these words of Mark 4 with Matthew’s version of the same event (13:13), we hear a different meaning, “*This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*” Not “**so that**” they might not hear or see, but “**though**” they do not hear or see. Jesus intends for all people to hear and understand His parables so that they might be eternally changed, but He knows that many will not grow close enough to Him so that their ears and hearts will be enlightened to comprehend His words.

Now, all three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) have this account and are reflecting the words God told Isaiah long before. When Isaiah answered God’s call for him to become a prophet to the people of the land of Judah, God tells Isaiah, “*Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed’* (Is. 6:9-10).

Now, it’s not that God didn’t want the people to hear and understand, see and perceive. It’s just that God knew that their hearts had already turned away from Him and were focused on so many other things that they would not receive Isaiah’s words to them. And because they would not receive his words, they would not take the time to understand them so that their hearts might become changed and turn back to the Lord God Almighty.

You see, it is a choice we have to make in our own lives as to whether or not we will receive God's words in our lives in order to understand them. To so many in our world today, the Word of the Lord makes no sense. "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44)? How ridiculous! We kill our enemies. "Do good to those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:38-42)? No, we retaliate against those who hurt us so that they will think twice about ever doing it to us again! "Pray for those who despitefully use us for their own purposes" (Matt. 6:14-15)? Are you kidding? I'd rather pray for a rock! "Give to the needy" (Matt. 6:3-4)? Don't be silly! Those folks will rob you blind! Keep what you have and get as much as you can, as fast as you can, from whomever you can, for as long as you can! Never mind that Jesus told us, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matt. 6:19-21).

The world does not understand the words of Jesus because they are completely contrary to the things of this world. So we have to make the choice of whom we will listen too. And that is what Romans 11 tells us, "*What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written: 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day.'* And David says: '*May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever*'" (11:7-10).

You see, if we harden our hearts toward God, and do not listen to the words of Jesus, we remain that hard kernel, surrounded by a tough shell that only thinks of itself. Unless we warm up by the Holy Spirit's transforming work in our lives, we remain just a single grain. But if we die to self, and receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we flourish, because we are ignited

to become something that the Lord intends us to be.

The Gospel writer John records Jesus' words in this way; *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The one who loves his life loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him”* (John 12:24-26). So as we claim Jesus Christ as our Savior, the blinders of our hearts are removed and the plugs in our ears are taken away and the dullness of our minds is eliminated so that we can see, hear and comprehend the truth of Jesus' word, and find favor with the Lord God Almighty once again.

I like the way that Tony Evans describes God's work. He says, ‘on top of my house, I have a DirectTV satellite dish. This DirectTV satellite dish links me to a satellite orbiting the Earth in outer space. That satellite in space sends a signal to my dish and to the dishes of anyone who has DirectTV. Now, you can't see the satellite, but it does send a signal to the receiver connected to my house. When my receiver, which is attached to my house, picks up the signal from the satellite that I can't see circling the Earth, I get a picture on my television.

“Before I got satellite TV, I had basic television that allowed me to get about six channels. That was the extent of my reception. I had an antenna attached to my roof that helped me to get those stations. But when I got DirectTV, something graphically changed in my TV viewing. Now I could pick up stuff I never would have seen before. Now I can get stations like USA, ESPN, CNN, and TNT. I was able to get channels I never knew existed because now I was connected to something much higher. Before I was connected to a roof antenna, but now I am connected to ‘outer space.’

“When we come to Jesus Christ, God screws a satellite receiver into our souls. He

quicken our spirits so that we can pick up the Trinitarian network. Because He hooks up a new receiver, we can pick up a new signal not available to us apart from Him. The Holy Spirit takes the dimmer switch and turns on the light so that we can see the spiritual nature of a thing, not merely the thing itself.”<sup>2</sup>

If we tune our lives in to Jesus Christ, He opens up so many new avenues for us to understand the Word of God so that our lives might be forever changed. His desire is that each one of us who claim Him as our Savior, take the time to grow closer to Him so that the Holy Spirit can excite us enough for us to get what He is saying to us and then we can make the necessary changes in our lives to become better at serving Him. On our own we are limited to what we can do. But the power of the Holy Spirit blows the doors off of our limitations and enables us to do so much more for Christ here in our world.

We become able to see the desperate needs all around us that we as the church can begin to meet. We become able to hear the longing in people’s hearts for meaning and purpose in their lives. We become open to the wickedness and evil that is taking place all around us so that we can begin to battle it and wipe it out, bringing new life to everyone. We become aware of the hardships and troubles many are forced to endure so that we can walk beside them and encourage them and lift them up to the Lord in prayer. We become bold in our witness of Jesus Christ being our Savior and begin to touch the lives of others around us as they see and hear of our transformations. We become passionate in how we worship the Lord, being filled as we honor and glorify the Lord our God.

But Jesus realizes that there are many who will not listen to His words and will continue to go their own ways, to their own destruction. Yet He calls us to continue to take His word to those around us, for the Holy Spirit continues to search the heart of each person here on the

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<sup>2</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 298, #896)

earth, and He continuously calls out for them to change their ways and turn to the Lord. So that they can be forgiven and saved.

It is amazing the accounts of peoples' lives that are being changed because they are confronted with the Word of the Lord. Individuals in Thailand are turning to the Lord Jesus as they have Christians share prayers and the Gospel with them. They have sought out healing and guidance and direction from their "gods" worshipped by the religions they practiced. But nothing happens. But when Christians come along side of them, pray with them, tell them about Jesus and invite them to put their trust in Jesus, miracles take place and new life begins.

Christians in India are so excited about being transformed by Jesus that they tell all those around them about His Saving Grace. Family members, neighbors and even whole communities come to know Jesus as they recognize that only He can save us from our sins. What once we thought as people having hard, tough shells around them, are now popping with excitement for Jesus because they are hearing and experiencing His love and grace. Love for Jesus is contagious and many all around the world are being changed because the faithful are sharing Him with those around them.

So don't stop living and teaching and professing the Word of the Lord so that those around you can also be changed. Let's pray.

Father, THANK YOU for the new lives we have in Jesus Christ! Thank You for what You have done in us to create us new creatures in Jesus. Work in us, and through us, so that those who are blind to You might see, and those who once rebelled against You can find Salvation in Jesus. Let us be like the seeds falling on good ground, that produce 30, 60, and even 100 times more as we live for Jesus. This we pray in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. AMEN.