

Mark 4:13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? **14** The sower sows the word. **15** And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. **16** These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; **17** and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. **18** Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, **19** and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. **20** But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." (NKJV)

Now it is vitally important that we keep in mind the context. Those guilty of committing the unpardonable sin had just accused Christ of being **of Satan** in order to **cast out** Satan. Christ had just said this in the Matthew account:

Matthew 12:33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. **34** Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **35** A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. (NKJV)

So the topic of **what people are** was put on the table soon before Christ spoke the parable of this morning. The issue is not so much about **what people do** or **what they say** as it is about **what they are**.

The one thing we see in this parable is the constant. The seed is always the same. Every soil has the same seed cast upon it. The Gospel is the Gospel. People all over the world hear it. The parable assumes that it is the true Gospel of the kingdom of God that is being preached. We really don't know what kind of soil people are until that true Gospel is preached. So when the Word is watered down to the place that it is not truly the Word, we will not get the true status of that heart, of that soil. But when the true Word is presented, then what we see is a natural outcome or a supernatural outcome.

I deal with a lot of pcs at work. And I get calls all day long by people who need me to make their computers work. Over time I have learned that is malware living on some people's pcs. It doesn't show itself in obvious ways. It doesn't say, hey, I just downloaded some really bad stuff that you must get rid of. No, normally it just starts behaving badly. But there is a program I run on every pc I have odd

problems with. And within 10 minutes it will show whether that pc has malware or not.

Well that is sort of what the Word does. It will show, by a person's response to it, what they are. It will show what kind of heart that person displays.

The Pharisees would have shown up very badly in this parable. It would have been obvious quickly. But some of the other soils will show what they are over time.

Also note that this parable does not tell us how hearts respond to false gospels.

More is said about this in other places.

So this is the context.

When we covered this parable in the past, Mike made the point that we should look at the responses. You can't take this as a prophetic percentage of people who will reject the Gospel, but the parable does show us that the odds are against us. In the story, 75% of the soils will not respond appropriately to the seed. Only 25% will. So when we are spreading that seed, when we are sowing the Gospel, when we are sharing with our associates and families the word of God, we should not expect anything other than what Christ predicted. We are likely to need to sow a lot of seed to gather a good harvest. If we don't, we won't.

Notice too that the seed does not change the kind of soil. It just reveals what that soil is. It is easy for us to believe that if we were just **better at presenting the seed** that the **listener's responses** would be better. That is not true. If we present the real seed, if what we are saying is truly the way of life through Christ, the most skilled orator could not change the outcome. And anything won by the skill of the orator will be shown to be a false result in the long run.

What Christ explains here should help us to understand why He was never impressed by the size of the crowds that gathered around Him. He knew their hearts. He knew that there was only **one kind of person** out of the 4 kinds he described that were really following for the right reasons. And the initial responses were never proof of how they would end up. So he wasn't quick to be impressed. He knew that most of his labor would bear no fruit. But he never stopped working because of it. He just kept sowing and watching.

So, what kinds of soil are there? And really, what we are really asking is what kinds of hearts are there? The interpretation Christ gives is that "**This is he** who received seed" when he talks about the seed on the soil. So we know that the soil is different kinds of people. And he talks about **what was sown in their hearts**. So the soil really is the different kinds of hearts.

So the seed is the Gospel, the message of how a person becomes right with God through Christ. And the soil is the heart of the hearer.

What we are about to see are 4 kinds of hearts that respond to the Gospel 4 different ways.

I will be borrowing a good bit from Warren Wiersbe

First we have the **HARD HEART**

From Mark- 15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

From Matt- 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Farmer's fields would often have foot paths that would run alongside their fields. People would walk on them **often** and trample down the dirt. So the soil would be very hard. It would not allow the seed to penetrate it. This is the wayside soil. So what does that look like in a human heart? Well Matthew gives us a clue. This is the person who hears the Word and does not understand it.

The word for understand is the Greek word sue-nee'-ay-me. It means to put the perception with the thing perceived; to set or join together in the mind, to understand"

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

This is the same word Christ used earlier when He said, "Hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." That was Christ's reason for using parables. Romans 3:11 also uses this word where Paul says there is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks after God. Eph 5:17 compels readers to **understand** what the will of the Lord is.

The hard hearts are hearts that have a lot of foot traffic. But there is not a lot of consideration of meaningful things.

Solomon told his son in Proverbs 4:19

The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble. 20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; 22 For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. 23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life. (NKJV)

Solomon told his son that he needs to fill his brain with consideration of truths that are important. And to keep those thoughts in his heart. Because they are the

things that true life is made up of. The essence of all this is to keep ones heart by guarding ones thoughts. This is done by prioritizing specific words of truth. All one needs to do to negate this is to **allow everything in**. The hearts on the wayside are those who let in all kinds of ideas but take no time to compare one against the other. No time to consider if something is important or unimportant, if something is true or false. It takes no time to compare thoughts to other thoughts. It just opens up the gates and all true thinking just gets trampled hard. So when the truth enters, it is just like everything else and is treated like everything else. It lays there, open for the taking by the devil. It won't be considered. It won't be studied. It won't be applied. But it will be taken. And then that new idea will no longer be any bother. The next idea will take its place. The application for us, I think, is pretty simple. Don't be that soil. When your mind hears the truth of God, give it priority. Give it attention. Compare it to everything else you know. Incorporate it. Drop everything else that you were thinking about if you must, but do not allow the truth to go to the wayside. I think all of us here have been guilty of this from time to time. We have all heard truth that we did not show the proper priority. We have all had things that pierced our souls in this very building, but we left this building and allowed other thoughts to take the place of those convictions. And then they are gone. And it is very likely that God will need to cause us to face circumstances where we will finally do business with those truths. But for a person who does not know God, this is the greatest disaster. To not do business with the truth when God is pulling at your heart is the greatest danger you could ever face. You can rest assured that the devil will be ever so eager to ease your burden. He wants to swipe that truth right out of your awareness. And if you give him half a chance, I can assure you he will try. The point is, we must respond to truth when we see it. When you learn a truth, when it is laid on your heart, right now is the time you must respond to it. Move on it. Don't waste this opportunity because you do not know how many you will have. So this is the hard heart that Jesus warned about. Do you have a hard heart? What does it take for God's truth to move you? Hard hearts must be plowed up before they are prepared for use. They must experience true repentance.

Hosea 10:11 Ephraim is a trained heifer That loves to thresh *grain*; But I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull *a plow*. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods." 12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you. (NKJV)

Breaking our fallow ground is rarely pleasant. It means uncovering those areas that have not seen introspection lately. They have not seen the sun. They are places we would prefer to leave hidden. But we must dig them up so we can apply the truth of God to them. Then we will be able to think about **God's truth** and the **truth about ourselves** properly and accurately. And we can receive the forgiveness and the healing that our souls need. We will then be able to receive the seed of the truth and it will bear fruit in our lives.

Where are you afraid to plow in your life? What truth do you refuse to deal with?

Next we find the **shallow heart**.

Mark- 16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; **17** and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

Matt 20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; **21** yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

From what I read, Palestine has a lot of soil that has a layer of stone just a little below the surface. This means that the roots of any plant will not grow deep. Now any plant will grow fast in good moist soil when it is little. But there is a point where the nutrients the plant needs will be substantial and there must be a good root system for it to stay alive. If that root structure can't grow, the plant will starve to death.

That is what Christ is describing in this passage.

The heart in this passage appears ready for the Word. It appears to be longing for the seed. It appears to be a prepared soil. So when they hear it, they respond. Sometimes they respond dramatically. They respond in such a way that you would be convinced that salvation has happened. They are genuinely happy. It is not fake. Their gladness is real. They perceive the value of the message. They contemplate it and evaluate it and it comes up accepted and approved in their evaluation. They are likely to tell others about it. They will look like the text book convert. These are the kind of people who greatly encourage an evangelist. They are able to give an amazing testimony. And they are just full of what appears to be the joy of the Lord. But over time it is just proven to be a human happiness based on positive circumstances.

That is the problem. Positive circumstances. They are happy because their situation is positive. Who does not want to feel the forgiveness of sins? Who does not want to feel accepted by God? Who does not want to be included in the fellowship of generous and good hearted believers? Many people would find that

appealing. And they truly believe that is what has happened. These people are not pretending. They are real. But they are shallow. They are making decisions based on feelings.

Then what happens? Reality sets in. This is like so many romances that start out very strong but the couples have no idea what self sacrificial love really looks like. Then it ends up in divorce courts a few years later. Christ warned against this kind of decision in Luke 14 where he says this:

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish it-- 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

Emotional decisions to the Gospel's preaching weren't created in our generation. We have many churches who appeal to them, but emotional decisions have always existed. Christ called these emotional people to use their minds. He challenged them to consider the cost that is surely to happen. **Things** will not go better with Christ. **Going to heaven** will go better with Christ, but living day to day may not. Ask Christians in any Muslim nation **how much better** things go with Christ and they will probably just pity you for being so ignorant.

Notice what our text says. When persecution or tribulation **arises for the Word's sake, immediately they stumble.**

Emotional decisions have no depth. They do not prepare a person for suffering. In fact, if a person will not think, if they will not renew their minds by the discipline of replacing lies with truth, they will not make it. And we know with good theology that, if they ever leave, they were never truly part of the Kingdom to begin with.

And notice where the persecution and tribulation arise. It comes for loyalty to the gospel of Christ. Do you realize that every single one of our brothers in Christ in Iraq could have avoided persecution by simply recanting their faith. They could have pronounced themselves Muslims and had to pay no price at all. But they would not. The cross is the center of the persecution that Christians face. And only those who are willing to take up that cross are followers. These shallow

emotional hearts, these amazing emotional testimonies, mean nothing if they will not follow.

We must be mentally prepared for this as believers. Are you willing to have Christ cost you everything? Are you willing to see your loved ones suffer for your stand with Christ? This often happens. Are we prepared to suffer? If we are not willing to, we are no different than these exuberant temporary followers. We are just shallow hearts. I want to add something here. No one is prepared to suffer if they do not have their minds and hearts fixed on eternity. The heroes of the faith in Hebrews were all looking forward to a heavenly city. There is nothing on this planet that will cause you to be faithful to Christ through suffering. In fact, there is nothing on this planet that makes suffering have any sense or value. It is only an eternal perspective that will prepare us to suffer and die for the sake of the Gospel. If your heart is fixed on here and now, you are in danger of being the Shallow heart. And you are robbing yourself of the true joy and freedom that comes when you trust that eternity will make everything suffered worthwhile.

The next soil we will see is the thorny soul.

Mark 18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, **19** and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Matt 22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

I think we must pay a great deal of attention to this soil. Of all of them, I think this is the soil that is the most dangerous to us.

This is thorny soil. This is the word growing up where it has a lot of competition. It is the **crowded heart**.

Notice that we are **not told** here that adequate consideration **was not given** about the truth of the gospel. The gospel was understood by these hearts. They gave adequate consideration. They thought about it. They made a thoughtful decision. They considered the cost. They knew it might be costly but they knew it was worth the price. So they received Lord Christ with worship. They were even prepared mentally to suffer. But what happened?

Other stuff. Other stuff.

These **aren't** the people who **never say yes** to Christ.

These **aren't** the people who say yes to Christ but suddenly and shockingly **turn away**.

These **are** the people who say yes to Christ but they **slowly and steadily decline**. The weeds don't choke out a plant in a day. It takes a growing season. If you have a garden, why do you weed it? And what happens if you don't weed it? Is it sudden?

When weeds are choking out a plant it is a slow steady decline. Sometimes the plants still look ok, but they are not. They are robbed of their fruitfulness. The problem with people like this, maybe people like us, is that we want the world **and** Christ. We want to walk on the **broad way** and the **narrow way**. And it cannot be done. We want to focus on what is **permissible** instead of what is **expedient**. We want to know what cannot be categorically proclaimed as a sin instead of asking **what would Christ have me to do?** How is the best way I can live for His kingdom?

We are not willing to weed. We are not willing to call out the distractions to our Christian lives and call them sins **for us, individually**. We are not willing to exercise personal legalisms against things that we know are hindrances to our Christian lives.

The problem with the crowded heart is that it looks too Christian. No one can call it out. No one can point to a blatant sin. Because the sins are often inward obsessions.

the cares of this world,

The word for care comes from a root meaning "to be thoughtful". It is interpreted care and anxiety, concern for things.

The cares of this world. Can't we defend all these things. Don't I need my paycheck? Don't I need a house? Don't I need a hobby? Don't I have a right to my recreation? Don't I need to please my family and neighbors? And on and on. Who can see the sin? Who can call us out?

But our minds can be absorbed with those thoughts. There is little room for anything else. Our emotions can be measured by our circumstances. We worry just like the world worries. We obsess just like the world obsesses. We act like we have no Father in Heaven. We **make** no difference because we **ARE** no different.

the deceitfulness of riches,

Deceitfulness is just that. They are lies that riches tell. They say, having me will make you happy. Having me will make you safe. Having me will make you secure. Having me will make you significant. But they are all lies.

The deceitfulness of riches. Can't we hide all monetary pursuits in a cloak of legitimacy? Shouldn't I work for a living? Shouldn't I try to get ahead? Surely I will have more to give then won't I? And should I not prepare for retirement. And on and on. We can hide our true first love. We can hide the idols of our hearts. And again, no one can call us out on these things. It is true that Christians have monetary responsibilities. But what we are talking about here is a competing love.

and the desires for other things entering

And the desire for other things. The word for desire just means a desire, a craving, a longing. So this is a longing for other things.

What other things? Any other things.

You know, sometimes we hear of a believer having an affair or doing some other blatant sin that they had kept hidden. And that is truly a horrible thing. But the good thing about something like this is it is clear. It is a sin. It is a wrong thing. And it requires repentance. The person can either repent or renounce Christ.

The danger of having a crowded heart is that it is even more dangerous than a blatant sin. Because we can hide it for a lifetime and no one will be the wiser. We can place all kinds of things on the throne only Christ should have, and we can come up with all kind of reasons for our unfruitfulness. In fact, over time we don't even expect fruitfulness. We don't even expect to have victory over our lusts and our fears. We accept them. We don't expect to be used by Christ. We limit our expectations to meet our behavior. Instead of allowing our expectations **to exceed our behavior** based on the word of God.

We refuse to leave our comfort zones. We talk about spiritual concerns but we do nothing throughout the week **to be Christ in** those situations.

I cannot think of a greater danger than thinking ourselves spiritual but ignoring all the evidence in our lives that says that we are not.

We need to ask these questions. We don't want to, but we must. How does my spiritual walk compare to what it was 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago? Is my mind and time more full of Christ, or less? What do I fill my time with? How do my spiritual pursuits compare with my entertainment pursuits? What do I obsess about most, whether in lusts or cravings or fear and anxiety? Are those things growing or subsiding? Are we finding eternity to be **winning our hearts** from those things, or are those things **stealing our attention** from eternity?

These are fair questions. Do we not think God is watching? What does our time say is important to us? Do we think God cannot figure that out?

Scripture says that time is short. We don't have much time in our lives. What will we use it for? Will we allow those things that matter to be crowded out with things that don't? What matters most to us? Our comfort? Our pleasure? Our escape? How can we allow those things to have such worship of time knowing how much Christ paid for our lives? This isn't meant to be an appeal to some kind of legalism. It is an appeal to all of us, including me, to evaluate our loves. Where is Christ in our loves? Where is Christ in our schedules? Where is Christ in those things we are passionate about? I am not talking about intentions or emotions. I am talking about action. About doing.

Is Christ preeminent in our lives? Or is He being crowded out?

Mark 20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

Matt 23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

We see from this that every true believer truly hears the word, he takes the time to prioritize it and understand it. And better still He puts it into practice. And that practice results in fruit. We aren't sure what the fruit is. Maybe the fruit is a changed life.

Maybe it is the change in heart temptations we all have with the things in the prior verses. Maybe the fruit is becoming so obsessed with Christ that our other fears and anxieties and lusts have less and less room in our lives. Maybe it is in the change of being sold out to Christ and His Will and the expense of everything else in our lives. This is fruit that is used to describe a true believer in other passages of scripture.

Maybe the fruit is people who are won to Christ. We find in other scriptures that new disciples are fruit.

Maybe the fruit is referring to that same Gospel seed being disbursed in the lives of others. So the one who is won shares the word with 100, 60, or 30.

But whatever the case, if Christ is in a person, it makes a difference. They bear fruit. There is a change. And that person cannot deny it. They may be tempted by the failures of the other soils, the other hearts, but they are not abiding in that world. They are overcoming. There is a difference in their hearts that will not quit following God. They will not quit adjusting their lives according to Christ's Lordship.

What kind of soil are we? Is Christ in us? Are we obeying Him? Is he at the core of all we do? Do we love Him? May God reveal to us what we need to know to best serve Him this week.