

Wayside Hearts

This morning we return to perhaps the greatest story Jesus ever told.

The depths of the message of these few words, is astounding.

Christ's insight into human nature is piercing. His analysis of human responsibility is sobering. And His explanation of life around us should make us pay much closer attention to our spiritual condition. All this because He was and is--the Greatest Doctor of the Human Heart.

This week with the three days of tornadoes many of us were listening to the radio more than normal. Have you noticed all the Heart Hospital ads. We have complete heart care, we have the best facilities, we have the best staff, and so on. Each of our different medical centers is promoting the fact that their team can deal better than anyone else with your heart.

If you want help preserving and protecting the 80 year rated, submerged pump in your chest (your physical heart) – those doctors and hospitals probably can really help. But if you are concerned about the real you, the spiritual, immortal heart that lives within you – Jesus says listen to my ad this morning. If you want to prepare to live forever with Me, Jesus says, Listen up!

That is what Mark 4 is all about. The Supreme Doctor of the Human heart lets us in for the first and only time, on one of His 35 plus parables. Jesus does the complete heart check up an.

Mark 4 and the parallel passages in Matthew 13 and Luke 8 are an incredible treasure. We started on this treasure hunt last week and continue this week as we open again to the first 20 verses.

The Scene

Every passage in the Bible has a setting, or a scene that the Author (God the Spirit) has chosen. Last time we saw that setting.

- This day is the longest recorded day of Christ's ministry.

- This day had a hard start with family fallout (said He was off His rocker and needed help) and official rejection (the delegation from Jerusalem just about told Him to go back to Hell).

But now He is just where He loved to be, in front of a group of hungry hearts. And for a moment he gives a short story. Short is no exaggeration. The entire parable is made up of only 99 words in Greek. Our English translation of those words numbers only 120 words. Now by any measure that is a short story. Half a page in a typical double spaced, typed sheet.

So Jesus begins by saying, "Look!". Pointing off in the distance where a farmer is out working his field, "The sower went out to sow." As He spoke their eyes followed the action of that farmer sowing. Their minds were engaged; they knew what He said was true. This is the essence of the parabolic method. And Christ's goal was always to take people from the *here and now* to transport them to *the there and then*. Listen again as we hear Him tell this story.

Mark 4:3-9 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred." And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (NKJV = 132 words)

The Story

So, Jesus gives a very familiar scene in story form. Everyone captures exactly what He described. They all saw the farmer walking; they saw the seed being spread. They all understood what the wayside pathway looked like; the submerged rock was also common, and the thorn briars a constant fixture along the pathways as they are to this day.

1. *The Soil under the Path:* In v. 4 Jesus points to the land covered with small plots of land that were farmed. Fields were not fenced or walled, just marked off by the narrow paths and dirt roads that formed boundaries. To cross the land meant following these roads; travelers had used them to crisscross the land for

- centuries. The rich soil under these paths were trampled regularly by many feet and became a hard packed pavement. Seeds would bounce along and rest atop this hard surface until trampled or eaten by birds.
2. *The Soil over the Rocks:* Verse 5 describes the shallow soil, also common in the land. Farmers always cleared their land, picking up any rocks that lay in the dirt. But this is no small rock in the dirt, this was a slab of limestone just below the surface of the soil too big to moved. The rich soil covered the slab but not to any depth. Plants would germinate in the sun's warmth held by the slab and thus grow rapidly. It would appear for a while that this section of the field had the best plants until hot weather came, and the surface moisture was drawn out of the soil. Then the roots tried to find the deeper sources of water to feed the plants growth. But the limestone stopped the root; the shallow root system failed; the plants withered and died; and the farmer's hope of harvest ended.
 3. *The Soil around the Thorn roots:* Verse 7 continues with the same rich soil, the same farmer, the same seed. The only difference is again below the surface. This time lurking unseen were the fibrous roots of the strong local weeds – thistles or brambles as the Greek word *akantha* denotes. The tops of these plants may have been cut off by the plowing of the field, but the roots remained spread around and alive. Here the newly sprouted seeds were never able to out pace the strength of these roots that also sprouted anew and grew. The seeds were the outsiders, the thorns were the residents, and the seeds lost out the battle for life. Sunlight was taken by the rapid growth of the weeds, water was soaked up, and space was gone – the tender plants were choked and died.
 4. *The Soil that was Good:* In verse 8 Jesus points out the last condition of the soil: "But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred."
 - Remember it is the very same soil in all four pictures. It is rich agricultural dirt. The same farmer, the same seed, the same sun, the same rainfall – the only difference is in the conditioning.
 - The path or wayside area of the field had become hardened and packed down soil. The rocky area of the field had submerged rocks that were never removed. The weedy area of the field contained roots that were poised to burst back to life. But here the soil is good

because it is not hardened, not shallow, and not infested with weeds.

As Jesus paused, each person who heard Him agreed mentally with what He said. They all knew from daily life that each farmer faced the same challenges when sowing a crop, hoping for a harvest. Then the moment of truth comes. Jesus continues with one final statement in verse 9: "And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Sermon

Now comes the priceless message. Jesus takes the simple story and launches into one of the clearest explanations we could ever have about the inner workings of our hearts. No one knows hearts like Jesus. No one diagnoses the condition of a heart like Christ's diagnosis. His diagnosis is complete, accurate, and exact. So what does He say? If you listen carefully, Jesus explains everything we need to know about our spiritual responsibility to respond to God. Here are the questions answered by Christ's parable:

- Why do some people never respond to the Gospel?
- Why do some people hear God's Word and immediately respond and others wait so long?
- Why do believers sometimes grow for a while and then stop growing?
- What makes us cold as believers at times, and other times feel so distant from God?

Jesus enters into the unseen world of spiritual life. The invisible realities that govern the working of God in the hearts of mankind. Jesus explains to us what sin does in both believers lives and unbelievers lives in this amazing sermon on the parable of the one soil and the four hearts!

Move down to verse 14. Here Jesus opens for us the meaning of this parable. He explains the farming picture and applies it to the individual hearts of hearers. He puts the responsibility for hearing upon each individual. And uses the four soil conditions to illustrate four different responses to God's Word.

What we see by this parable is that you can only understand spiritual truth if Jesus is your Teacher. That was the lesson they had to

learn. And that is where each of us are this morning – needing to open our hearts and receive Christ's words.

1. In v. 14a the sower is anyone spreading the message of salvation like Jesus asked us to do.
 - Romans 10:13-16 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those **who preach the gospel of peace**, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (NKJV)
2. In v. 14b the seed is God's Word (see also Luke 8.11). Only the Word that enters the heart and becomes a part of that like is real. James and then Peter later comments on that reality in their epistles.
 - James 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness **the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls.
 - 1 Peter 1:23 having been born again, not of corruptible **seed but incorruptible, through the word of God** which lives and abides forever,
3. In v. 15, the soil is the human heart.
4. In vv. 15-20, the four responses to the Word are based on the condition of the soil (or heart).
5. In v. 20, only one soil (heart) experiences what the Word is supposed to do when received – bear a crop for harvest.

Oceans of truth lay before us who have the entire Word before us to use to compare and expand the truth Jesus gave to the disciples in this explanation.

The symbol in Christ's story of God's Word being like seed is so true. We can't make seeds; they are part of God's creation. They are alive. God's Word is 'living and abiding'. So when we proclaim the Gospel it can't be our message – it must be His Word. Jesus is explaining why the same living Word makes no impact in some hearts. The condition of their heart is reflected in their response to God's Word. So what type of responses do we see? Jesus explains four.

WAYSIDE HEARTS: What happens when God's Word falls on the Wayside Heart? Jesus says that He finds it IMPENETRABLE, HARD, and INSENSITIVE.

What is a wayside heart? It is a heart that has gotten hard and resistant, living right on the edge of fruitful field. This is such a portrait of so many of the unconverted. They hear sermons but forget them. They are surrounded by God's truth, but nothing sinks in; they are resistant and unstirred by God. God's Word doesn't interest them. They have no fear of God, no faith, no experience of Christ.

In the Old Testament this type of person was called "stiff-necked":

- Proverbs 29: 1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. (NIV)

The hard hearted person in the Bible is unresponsive to spiritual things, unconcerned for the fate of their soul, unheeding of warnings from the Lord, and often opposed to the Gospel. The heart becomes hardened by a constant flow of bad thoughts and deeds. Often secret sins become welcomed and then sought after. There is never remorse, sorrow, or even guilt for sin, and so with each passing action more of the heart loses all feeling of sin consciousness. With no repentance the buildup of traffic makes the heart so calloused and stiff that even when seed is thrown directly onto that heart it just sits there until eaten off by Satan's birds of distraction.

A tremendous example of the "wayside hearts" would be the religious leaders of Christ's day. They often came to attack Him when He was in Jerusalem. But before they came to denounce Him as false and of the Devil they still kept up their word as Scribes and Priests. Think of what that meant.

One of the most visible of the wayside hearts of Christ's time were the temple workers, or priests. As PRIESTS that means that they would be quoting the Word of God regularly during their ministry day; they would know by diligent study the prescribed rituals that Moses had laid down. Serving in the Temple they would perform the sacrifices, the offerings, and the cleansings. Thus all day long they were doing all the activities that demanded recognition of sin, confession of sin, offering of substitutionary sacrifices, and proclaiming the glorious Name of the Lord.

Isaiah 29: 13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. (NIV)

Their hands were stained by the blood of lambs sacrificed for others -- that they never applied to themselves. That is a wayside heart, the truth of God surrounds them but never enters them.

A second group of wayside hearts were the scribes known as the premier Bible scholars of Christ's day. As SCRIBES they were in the Word daily. Did you ever think of that? You can spend your life in the Word of God and it can never get past the surface of your life! A Scribe's days were filled with copying the Sacred Word of God. They guarded, cared for, and produced scrolls of Scripture. They copied the words, counted the words, read the words, studied the words, held the words, and heard the words. But only with their physical ears. They did not feel the fire of God's Word in their hearts. The hammer of His Spirit never broke up their sin hardness.

Jeremiah 23:29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? (NIV)

Their minds and mouths were filled with God's Word prepared for others -- that they never applied to themselves. More important than being in the Word is that the Word be in you!

So Jesus makes His first diagnosis. Some hearts are so traveled with sin, so filled with the traffic of life, so trampled by everything but God – that He can't find a spot to get into that life. A heart that persists in hardness is lost. A heart that never gets plowed up and softened is lost and hell bound. A heart that can't take in the Word of God is hopeless. Listen He says to you this morning. Stop this trampling of His truth in your life; seek the Lord while He may be found. **Christ's prescription:** break up that unplowed, hard soil and let God's Word in!

This first heart was often faced by the Lord in the Old Testament times with the people of Israel. It is so hard that nothing penetrates it, yet that hardness can be broken up. Listen to what the Lord said through His prophets earlier:

Jeremiah 4:3 This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: "**Break up your unplowed ground** and do not sow among thorns. (NIV)

Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailling love, and **break up your unplowed ground**; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. (NIV)

This morning if you heard Christ's description and say that's me. I don't have any response to Jesus from my heart. I am cold and indifferent to spiritual things. That probably means you are unregenerated, unconverted, unsaved, without a personal relationship with God, and not born again.

If you have never met the Lord then the response He seeks is for you to receive His implanted Word. Make room for Him in your life. Turn to Him in faith. Believe in Him for salvation. Ask Him to come in. Open your heart to Him and receive His forgiveness as you confess and forsake your sins. In an instant of faith Jesus does the miraculous surgery of the spiritual heart. He removes the old one dead in the cancer of sin, and transplants a new one that is alive and filled with the Spirit of God.

If you have begun in Christ, you have that relationship with Him but something just isn't right. Did you hear His story this morning? You are becoming like that wayside again. You are getting away from Him and you know it. This morning, have the things of God gotten so familiar to you that that don't really affect you any more? Does God feel distant? If so it may be that the traffic of life has slowly hardened you to the Lord. Was there a time that the Word used to thrill your heart and you just couldn't get enough of it? Has that changed? Then it is time to ask God to plow through your life. Ask Him now to break up that trampled ground in your heart. Ask Him to make you soft and responsive to His Word, His Will, and His Spirit's work.

Have you any room for Jesus? (Hymn # 328)

Words: Anonymous; adapted by [Daniel W. Whittle](#), 1878.

Have you any room for Jesus,
He who bore your load of sin?
As He knocks and asks admission,
Sinners, will you let Him in?

Refrain

*Room for Jesus, King of Glory!
Hasten now His Word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open,
Bid Him enter while you may.*

Room for pleasure, room for business,
But for Christ the Crucified,
Not a place that He can enter,
In the heart for which He died?

Have you any room for Jesus,
As in grace He calls again?
O today is time accepted,
Tomorrow you may call in vain.

Room and time now give to Jesus,
Soon will pass God's day of grace;
Soon thy heart left cold and silent,
And thy Savior's pleading cease.