

A Prepared, Listening Heart

3/20/22

Matthew 13:1-9 | 18-23

Sunday AM

I read a story this week about an MIT student who spent his summer going to the Harvard football field every day wearing a black/white striped shirt and walking up/down the field for 10-15 min. throwing birdseed and blowing a whistle. Well, as the summer ended, and the time arrived for Harvard's first home football game, a funny thing occurred. As the refs walked onto the field for the kick-off – and blew a whistle to start the game... Guess what happened? Birds everywhere. In fact, the game had to be delayed a ½ hr for the birds to fly away. Come to find out, this MIT student was writing his thesis on *conditioned responses* – and decided to make his point by irritating Harvard.

Now, if you'd been watching this student thru-out the summer walking up/down Harvard's football field, you likely wouldn't have understood his objective. But once football season began, his purpose would clear – he was trying to kill 2 birds w/ 1-stone.

In **Matthew 13**, Jesus was up to something that wasn't exactly obvious until He later explained it – in what has come to be known as the Parable of the Sower.

parable is an earthly lesson w/ a spiritual punchline. The word is derived from two words (*para*) alongside (*bolle*) to lay beside. Meaning – a parable is a story that compares something *familiar* w/ that which is *unfamiliar* to make an important point.

As w/ last week's lesson, this is a stand-alone teaching God has burdened me to share w/ you from my Q.T. So, today, I want to re-share a message I taught some 6 yrs ago on what I believe is arguably Jesus' most important parable that many scholars say is the autobiography of Jesus' mission/purpose. I believe tucked w/in this parable are some of the most profound teachings in Scripture pertaining to knowing/walking w/ God.

Later that day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: "Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil w/ underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly b/c the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still, other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was 30, 60, and even 100 times as much as had been planted! Anyone w/ ears to hear should listen and understand..."

Listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it w/ joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's Word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's Word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's Word and produce a harvest of 30, 60, or even 100 times as much as had been planted!"

As I consider this parable, I'm mindful that daily the Gospel is shared w/ millions. Some hear the message at a church. Some hear it on the radio/TV, online, or in print – yet we all hear the same message, and yet, not all respond the same way.

Question – How can (2) people go to the same church, hear the same message yet respond so differently? How can one person turn from sin while the other continues in sin? Well... consider this parable!

Recap: A farmer goes into his field to sow seed. The seed fell upon four types of soils. Some seed fell along a trampled path and the birds came and ate the seed. Some seed fell upon the rocky ground and was scorched by the sun. Some seed fell among the weeds and was choked out. And some seed fell w/in the good soil that germinates and it brought forth fruit.

Let's look a little deeper into this story.

I The **SOWER**

Who is the Sower? Jesus. He came into the world to seek/save the lost by speaking into the lives of people to help them discover God's love/grace thru salvation.

As the sower, b/c God wants no one to perish but all to come to repentance, Jesus indiscriminately casts the truth of the Gospel in **ALL** directions to **ALL** people – knowing that only the seed falling on fertile soil will germinate unto salvation – yet He makes His grace available to everyone so that all men are w/out excuse.

*For God so loved the **world** – He gave His only Son...*

The world is you/me and everyone else. God became a man to rescue everyone from condemnation. Yet while God's forgiveness is **available** to everyone, it's not **automatic** – it must be received by grace thru faith.

For by grace we are saved thru faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the free gift of God, not of works...

II The **SEED**

The seed is the Word of God – its God's truth invested in us that God loves us, became flesh to die for our sins – and it's the voice He uses to guide us in every life. It's a combination of *logos* and *rhema*.

Logos is the truth of Scripture applicable to everyone. It is God's truth needed for life/salvation.

rhema – is truth realized by revelation special to you. It is God-speaking logos directly into your life.

*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the **revelation** of God. Romans 10:17*

III The **SOILS**

The soils represent (2) things: the condition of a person's heart; and a person's spiritual ears.

A A **SURFACE** Heart – the Footpath

A **footpath** is a narrow pathway separating one field from the next. It's an untilled area that's been trampled down by men walking on it. Even though the soil is good, it's hard-packed making it impossible for the seed to get into the soil and germinate.

This soil represents an **INATTENTIVE** heart – people whose hearts are hard/unresponsive to God's truth. This is not necessarily b/c they're antagonistic to it, but b/c they have no interest in it or don't understand it.

B A **SHALLOW** Heart – Rocky Ground

Jesus is referring to an underlying bedrock just deep enough to escape the plow blade, yet close enough to the surface it affects germination. Such soil is common in Israel where limestone is often covered by a thin layer of topsoil. The soil is fertile, yet b/c there's no soil depth, it makes it susceptible to harsh conditions.

This soil represents the IMPULSIVE heart – people who receive God’s seed but quickly fall away when persecution or a greater opportunity arises b/c their flesh gets in the way. Thus, they have a different ambition for their life other than God’s will/purpose.

As discussed last week. Our flesh sets its desires against the H.S. w/in us – as they’re at war w/ each other so we cannot live w/ a foot in the Word and a foot in the world. b/c they are in opposition to one another.

These are people who receive the gospel w/ enthusiasm. But it’s short-lived. When difficulty arises or when the novelty wears off – these people drift away. They have a "conversion experience" and for a while, these people seem bold in the Lord. And then one day they lose interest and drift away b/c their faith was superficial. *unknown*

C A STRANGLER Heart – Thorny Ground

This refers to seed sown in a soil that’s unwittingly full of thorn/thistle seedlings – as the seed grows, so too do the thistles, eventually choking out the good seed.

This soil represents the INDULGENT heart – people who hear and concede the truth, but never receive it b/c it’s choked out by the things of the world. Their hearts are distracted and preoccupied w/ too many things this world has to offer to be committed to Jesus.

It's like the girl who received a marriage proposal. The man said, “I love you more than anything in the world and I want to marry you, but I’m not rich Like Mr. Brown – and I don’t have a yacht or Rolls Royce, but I love you w/ all my heart.” After a moment, she replied, “I love you too, but tell me more about Mr. Brown.”

Jesus is speaking of people w/ a divided heart. They receive the truth of God, but the worries of life and the ways of the world garner a person’s attention.

D A SURRENDERED Heart – Fertile Soul

This is a picture of a heart that’s been plowed deeply by God’s Word. When the seed of God’s truth hits this kind of heart, it germinates, grows up, and bears fruit.

This soil represents the INVOLVED Heart – people who receive God’s truth by faith that matures into a fruit-bearing faith b/c there is no RESISTANCE.

My guess is that if you’re familiar w/ this parable, this is nothing new. Jesus is the **sower**, the Gospel is the **seed** (Gospel), and the human heart is the **soil** – but there’s one more. Let’s begin w/ the **scammers**.

IV The SCAMMERS

Unfortunately, God’s voice isn’t the only voice in this world. As you’ll notice in this parable, for each soil condition there’s also a competitor. Three *scammers* vying to prevent God’s voice from taking root.

A The Voice of SATAN (Bird)

Jesus identifies Satan as the bird of the air who snatches the seed on the trampled path. Satan enjoys nothing more than to whisper in your ear to turn your attention away from God’s purpose to anything that’d occupy your life and disengage you from God’s mission.

This is temptation – it’s the voice of Satan to turn our attention from God’s interest to self-interest.

The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy... Jn. 10:10

Truth – Satan’s desire is to **STEAL** the seed of God’s truth so God’s voice isn’t allowed to germinate in you.

B The Voice of **SELF** (Sun)

The voice of self is our struggle w/in. It’s wrestling w/ the desires of our flesh that’s self-centered, self-absorbed, and self-sufficient that seeks to **STARVE** out the seed of God’s voice. Our flesh craves sin, not God.

The flesh sets its desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, so you are not to do whatever you please. Galatians 5:17

When you gave your life to God, He placed His H.S. w/in you to guide your life and to wage war w/ your old nature the flesh. At that moment, a war began. Battle lines were drawn b/w God and your flesh. The H.S. began speaking and the flesh began resisting.

Story of the Old Indian Chief who became a Christian. Pastor asked, “How are you doing in your walk w/ God?” Chief replied, “Big white dog. Big black dog – always fighting.” Pastor asked, “Which one is winning?” Chief said, “Whichever one I feed the most!”

C The Voice of **SOCIETY** (Thorns)

Everywhere we turn, the voice of society is singing the praise of Satan while serenading the desire of self. From Hollywood to Madison Ave. to Rodeo Dr. and nearly every newsroom in b/w – we’re being told what to wear, how to think/act, and what to pursue in life.

Jesus says the voice of this world is weeds/thorns that seek to **STRANGLE** His voice of truth.

So, what we learn is that there are (3) competing voices working together to drown out God’s voice – always seeking to confuse truth and cram us into their mold.

Question – what must we do to prepare our ears/heart to hear and receive God’s Word so we’re not led astray?

IV The **SECRET**

Time after time, Jesus addressed the idea of **hearing**. He said things like, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” *He who has ears* reveals the capacity we have to hear. *He who has ears to hear* reveals our possibility to hear. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear,* reveals our responsibility to hear.

The key to hearing God is learning how to tune our ears to His voice. It’s learning to distinguish God’s voice from the other (3) voices. I think it’s like tuning into a radio station, we have to be on the right frequency w/ nothing is blocking the signal. (RADIO)

To get on the correct frequency w/ God – you must be frequent w/ God!

There are (4) things necessary to get on the correct frequency w/ God: focused time in God’s Word, a clean heart, a willing spirit, and accountability.

*Everyone should be **quick to listen**, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, b/c human anger doesn’t produce the righteousness God desires. Therefore, **get rid of all moral filth** and the evil that’s so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. **Don’t merely listen to the word, and deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** Anyone who listens to the Word but doesn’t do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they’ve heard, but doing it – they’ll be blessed in what they do. Jm. 1:19-25*

A A **PRIORITY** to Hear

quick to listen –It means grasping every opportunity to increase your hearing of God's Word.

If you want to hear God speak, then you have to continually put yourself in a position to hear His voice by seizing every occasion to be in/around His truth.

B A **PURITY** to Hear

Equally vital to getting into the right physical place is getting in the right spiritual place – no sin can beset us.

Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that's so prevalent...

To be properly in tune or aligned w/ God to hear His voice requires we eliminate the sin from our lives.

filth (*rhuparia*) used in (2) ways – (1) of dirty clothes needing to be stripped off; (2) of the building up of wax on your eardrums impeding sound. Why? B/c **sin muffles the voice of God.**

C A **PLAN** to Live What's Heard

*Don't merely listen to the word deceiving yourselves
– do what it says.*

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. So one day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. As each person passed thru the line to shake his hand, he whispered, "I murdered my grandmother this AM."

The guests replied w/ phrases like, "Splendid! Keep up the good work. We're proud of you. God bless you." It wasn't until the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were heard. Confused, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "Well sir, I'm sure she had it coming." Maybe I'll try this one Sunday after church to see who's listening

don't merely listen (*akroates*) to sit passively in an audience or audit a class. The idea is that you pay money to sit in a class but forgo the class credit b/c you don't want to be tested. **IOW** – you want to hear but you have no interest in being accountable.

If we're going to thrive in the Christian life and hear God speak, we can't audit Jesus; we have to pay close attention to what He is speaking into our lives.

I have long defined **the Christian life as knowing God, hearing His voice – so you can obey His leading.** Possibly nowhere in Scripture is this more evident than in this parable.

God wants us to hear His voice to help us realize that we're sinners in need of His grace and that He entered time/space to die on the cross to rescue us unto salvation. Then after we're saved, He wants us to walk by faith under His Lordship that our lives might serve as the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus to the world around us as we obey His leading.

TAKEAWAYS

There are four heart conditions and four voices in the world – whichever voice we tune our hearts will determine what we hear and how we pursue life.

To get on the correct frequency with God a person must be frequent with God.

NEXT STEPS

1 Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

G – Have you ever heard God speak? What did His voice sound like to you? How did He speak to you?

R – Re-read Matthew 13:1-13 – count the number of times Jesus refers to hearing? What was His point?

Q – Re-read James 1:19-25 – What can you do to put yourself in a position to hear God speak more clearly.

W – Make a commitment this week to spend time reading the Bible and praying.

2 Get together with 3-4 people this week to talk about hearing and responding to God's leading in your life.