



First Baptist Church Selmer

THE "HEART" OF THE MATTER • THE "WAYSIDE" HEART •
MATTHEW 13:3-4, 19; LUKE 8:5, 12; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2-4 • 11/6/2022

MAIN POINT

The person whose heart is unreceptive to the Word of God will fall victim to the schemes of the evil one, Satan.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you were growing up, were there times you knew it was best not to ask your parent(s) for something you wanted? What were your cues in knowing when your parents would be receptive or not receptive to you?

What about now? Are there times you are more receptive to what other people have to say than others? What factors contribute to your being fully engaged?

Why do you think so many of us seem to go from one message or sermon to the next, without ever practically applying those truths to our lives?

We all understand that life has a way of hardening us from receiving the truth. Whether it be a heart of pride or difficult trials, we are all prone to build walls around our own hearts.

In Matthew 8, Jesus told a parable about what is most important in determining how we'll respond to gospel truth—our hearts. Those with open hearts will receive the truth of the gospel with gladness and implement this truth in their everyday lives.

The parable of the soils can be found in three of the four Gospel accounts. Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:1-15 all give an account of Jesus speaking about the soils.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would speak in a way that was difficult for many to understand, "*Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not*

perceive." *Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*' (Isaiah 6:9-10, ESV).

Jesus too answered the disciples as to why he spoke in parables among the crowds. "... to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Matthew 13:11-13, ESV)

UNDERSTANDING

Use this section to read the Bible together and talk about it.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 13:3-4 & LUKE 8:5

Matthew 13:3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them." (ESV)

Luke 8:5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it." (ESV)

How difficult would it have been for the seeds to have found root in the hard-packed path?

What happened once the seeds made contact with the path but did not take root?

The path described in Matthew 13 and Luke 8 was a well-used road. It likely would have been hard-packed due to the traffic containing very little vegetation or loose soil. It acts a gift, of sorts, for the opportunistic birds that awaited the exposed seeds for an easy meal.

The parable was relatable to those in attendance because most knew of the importance of agriculture. Some today would ask the question, "Why didn't the sower just plow the ground first before scattering the seeds?" Interestingly enough, agriculture during these times operated differently than we do today. The seeds were scattered first prior to them being plowed into the ground. This allowed for the hardened, hard-packed road to be the perfect opportunity for hungry birds to catch a quick meal.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 13:19 & LUKE 8:12

Matthew 13:19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path." (ESV)

Luke 8:12 "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." (ESV)

We see multiple characters or objects described in Jesus' explanation. What is the seed? Who is the sower? Who is like the birds?

Why is it important to realize how opportunistic Satan is when it comes to hearing and receiving the word of God?

Jesus now explains the meaning of the parable as it relates to the message of God's kingdom. The person represented here in the passages has a heart much like that of the hardened soil. This person is not incapable of understanding God's Word but rather willingly chooses not to understand. It is not a mere lack of intelligence but a refusal to accept and obey it. The problem worsens, however, because Satan is eagerly waiting to snatch away the Word of God from the hearer.

There is a difference between hearing and listening, and between receiving and accepting. The twelve disciples and the women who supported Jesus' ministry with their finances had listened and accepted the Word of God to the point that it impacted their lives. The crowds heard and received what Jesus gave them, but their lives were largely unchanged.

How often would you say you think about your active, daily battle with Satan himself?

Why does Satan not take a break from his work?

Why is obedience to God's Word one of the greatest weapons we have to fight against the schemes of Satan?

The Bible states in 1 Peter 5:8-9, *"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."* (ESV)

Indeed, Satan is not passive. Not only does Satan wreak havoc among brothers and sisters in Christ but his first priority is to prevent the Word of God from taking root in the hearts of

unbelievers.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2-4

2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
(ESV)

How important is the truth found in God's Word alone?

How is God's Word like that of a light that is necessary to remove blindness from unbelievers?

Who works against us, day and night, to keep unbelievers from truly seeing the light of the gospel?

Charles Spurgeon says it best, "Satan is always on the watch to hinder the word... He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard & dry contact with the mind."

The reason that Satan quickly snatches the Word of God away from those who hear it is that it is still too powerful to leave lying around. Despite the hardness of the soil of our hearts, God's Word is willing and able to soften the hardest of hearts.

"The same sun that hardens the clay, softens the wax."

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What inherent warning is there for each of us from the seeds that fell by the wayside?

In what active ways can we till the soil of our hearts to make us ready to receive the Word of God? Before worship? Before our group? Before our personal time with God?

How does Christian community help till the soil of our hearts in a way that wouldn't otherwise happen?

How can we invite those not yet believing into this community?

PRAYER

Thank God that He loves us enough to continue teaching us and that He longs for us to hear Him. Invite Him to speak to you and let you hear Him like never before. Ask Him to help you be faithful in sowing seeds of his Word to those around you this week.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 13

Jesus' disciples formed a logical question in Matthew 13, "What will happen to the kingdom about which we have been preaching?" Jesus would answer the question in a series of parables. He first explained the truth concerning the kingdom, and then later explained to them the facts about the cross.

Our Lord's use of parables puzzled the disciples. He had used some parables in His teaching already, but on that day He gave a series of seven interrelated parables, then added an eighth. The word *parable* means "to cast alongside." It is a story, or comparison, that is put alongside something else to help make the lesson clear. But these are not ordinary parables; Jesus called them "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). In the New Testament, a "mystery" is a spiritual truth understood only by divine revelation. It is a "sacred secret" known only to those "on the inside" who learn from the Lord and obey Him.

In this series of parables, Jesus explained the course of the gospel in the world. If Israel had received Him as King, the blessings would have flowed out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But the nation rejected Him, and God had to institute a new program on earth. During this present age, "the kingdom of heaven" is a mixture of true and false, good and bad, as pictured in these parables. It is "Christendom," professing allegiance to the King, and yet containing much that is contrary to the principles of the King.

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Two reasons were given: because of the sluggishness of the people (Matt. 13:10-17) and because it was prophesied in Psalm 78:2 (Matt. 13:34-35). Jesus did not teach in parables to confuse or condemn the people. Rather, He sought to excite their interest and arouse their curiosity. These parables would give light to those with trusting, searching hearts. But they would bring darkness to the unconcerned and unrepentant.

| MATTHEW 13:1-9; 18-23

The parable of the sower does not begin with "The kingdom of heaven is like" because it describes how the kingdom begins. It begins with the preaching of the Word, the planting of the seed in the hearts of people. When we say, "Let me plant this thought in your..." we express the idea of this parable. The seed is God's Word; the various soils represent different kinds of hearts; the varied results show the different responses to the Word of God. Jesus explained this parable so there is no doubt of its meaning.

Why compare God's Word to seed? Because the Word is "living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12). Unlike the words of men, the Word of God has life in it, and that life can be imparted to those who will believe. The truth of God must take root in the heart, be cultivated, and be permitted to bear fruit. It is shocking to realize that three-fourths of the seed did not bear fruit. Jesus did not describe an age of great harvest, but one in which the Word would be rejected. He was not impressed with the "great multitudes" that followed Him, for He knew that most of the people would not receive His Word within and bear fruit.

Fruit is the test of true salvation (Matt. 7:16). This would include holiness (Rom. 6:22), Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23), good works (Col. 1:10), winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), sharing what we have (Rom. 15:25-28), and praising God (Heb. 13:15). If a plant is to bear fruit, it must be rooted in the soil and exposed to sunshine.

In the parable, the sun represents persecution that comes because of the Word. *Persecution helps believers grow*. But the sunshine will kill a plant with no roots. This explains why some "believers" do not last: Their faith was weak, their understanding was meager, and their decision was not sincere. It is possible to "believe" and yet not be saved (John 2:23-25). Unless there is fruit in the life, there is not saving faith in the heart.

Nineteen times in Matthew 13 we find the word "hear." The parable of the sower is found in the first three Gospels, and in each one, the closing admonition is different. It is important that we hear God's Word, because "*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Rom. 10:17). Jesus said, "*He who has ears, let him hear*" (Matt. 13:9), "*Pay attention to what you hear*" (Mark 4:24), and "*Take care then how you hear*" (Luke 8:18).

| 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2-4

Paul was certainly alluding to the Judaizers when he wrote these words. Many false teachers today claim to base their doctrine on the Word of God, but false teachers handle God's Word in

deceptive ways. You can prove anything by the Bible, provided you twist the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of your own conscience. The Bible is a book of literature, and it must be interpreted according to the fundamental rules of interpretation. If people treated other books the way they treat the Bible, they would never learn anything.

Paul had nothing to hide, either in his personal life or in his preaching of the Word. Everything was open and honest; there was no deception or distortion of the Word. The Judaizers were guilty of twisting the Scriptures to fit their own preconceived interpretations, and ignorant people were willing to follow them.

If Paul was such a faithful teacher of the Word, then why did not more people believe his message? Why were false teachers so successful in winning converts? Because the mind of the lost sinner is blinded by Satan, and fallen man finds it easier to believe lies than to believe truth.

Paul had already explained that the minds of the Jews were "veiled" because of the blindness of their hearts (Rom. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:14-16). The minds of the Gentiles are also blinded! Those who are lost ("perishing") cannot understand the message of the gospel. Satan does not want the glorious light of salvation to shine into their hearts. As the god of this age and the prince of the world (John 12:31), Satan keeps lost sinners in the dark. The sad thing is that Satan used *religious* teachers (like the Judaizers) to deceive people.

(The Wiersbe Bible Commentary by Warren W. Wiersbe)