

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 21 July 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:18-23

Those of you who have known me for a while have heard me mention the fact that in my childhood, I grew up in the country. Now, my parents were not farmers, or even gardeners; but every now and then, they did randomly plant seeds for some particular vegetable that they wished to have. They didn't put much maintenance into it; but they would let it grow if it *would* grow. I particularly remember one summer, when I was eight years old, when my dad planted some pumpkin seeds, so that we could have some nice pumpkin pies to eat when Thanksgiving and Christmas time rolled around.

Now, there were a couple spots in my parents' three acres of grass where my dad planted those pumpkin seeds. The first spot was near the house; and the other spot was in a lower part of the yard, near the edge of the woods. As the weeks went by, I eagerly watched the two pumpkin patches, to see how they would fare; and I soon discovered that there was a marked difference in their growth. The pumpkins that were planted near the house did *not* grow very big at all. In fact, they withered and died (despite our watering them). On the other hand, the pumpkins near the woods grew like weeds on Miracle-Gro! They grew to be very big and ripe, and made excellent pies. What was the difference? The soil and moisture (as well as the exposure to sunlight)! The soil near the house was much shallower and rockier; but the soil near the woods was very soft and moist, on account of the water which trickled down into that part of the yard from a spring farther up in the woods. Also, the trees provided cool shade through much of the day, so that the pumpkins got enough sunlight, yet did not have the hot, scorching sun beating down on them all day long. The conditions were just right for the pumpkin seeds to bring forth much fruit.

So it is with the hearts of men. Some hearts are soft and tender, and are prepared to receive the truth of the Gospel, and bring forth spiritual fruit; but most people's hearts are either too hard, too shallow, or too thorny, to bring forth any fruit for God. This morning, we will examine these four kinds of hearts; and as we study them, I want you to ask yourself: "Which heart do *I* have?" The title of this message is ***The Parable of the Sower***.

Read Matthew 13:18-23.

I. The hard heart (v. 20)

In last week's message, we saw that Jesus had reached an important turning point in His ministry. No longer was Jesus preaching that "***The kingdom of heaven is at hand,***" as He had done before. And why not? Because most of the people of Israel had rejected Jesus as their Messiah; and therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven was now being set aside, and postponed until a future date. Christ will not return to set up the 1,000-year Kingdom until the future day when *all* Israel will repent and believe on Him, and receive Him as their King.

Now, if you were here last week, you will also remember that from this point in Jesus' ministry, there was a distinct change in the *way* that Christ presented truth to the people. Christ was now preaching in such a way as to *conceal* truth from those who didn't really want to understand it, and, at the same time, *reveal* truth to those who *did* wish to understand it. In particular, Jesus was now illustrating truth by using **parables** (little stories with spiritual meanings). To those who didn't really care to understand the truth, these little stories went right over their heads; and they walked away puzzled, yet not overly concerned, or driven to find out the meaning. However, to those who truly had ears to hear, Jesus was available to explain the meaning to them. Because they grasped onto the little bit of truth that they had, and sincerely desired to know more, Jesus gladly revealed it to them. That is exactly what we see happening here in **verses 10-23**. In these verses, we find Jesus with His disciples, in Peter's house, after the multitudes had been sent away; and He is explaining the meaning of the parable of the sower to His disciples. The disciples had *asked* Jesus to explain the meaning of the four parables that He had taught them by the seaside; and because they *asked*, He freely and graciously explained it to them.

Now, the four parables that Jesus had taught them that day all illustrate truth about **"the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven."** And what is a "mystery"? Well, if you were here last week, you'll remember that a "mystery" is a truth that was once hidden, but which is now revealed. Through these parables, Jesus was revealing truth about the Kingdom, which had not been known before. And what *was* the main truth about the Kingdom, which Christ was now revealing to them? In a nutshell, it was this: First, that the Kingdom was now being postponed until an unknown future date; and, secondly, that in the meantime, there were certain things that God would be doing to prepare Israel (and the world) for the Kingdom. (By the way, we are still living in that period of time leading up to the establishment of the Kingdom. This church age that we are now living in, as well as the seven-year Tribulation period, which will follow this church age, are all part of this "interim" period between the time of Israel's *rejection* of Jesus, and their *acceptance* of Jesus.) Now, what kind of things did Jesus say would happen during this interim period? Well, through these parables, Christ indicated that the Gospel would be proclaimed far and wide, and that multitudes of people would be enlisted as citizens for the future Kingdom of Heaven. Yet, He also indicated that during this same period of time, most people would *reject* the Gospel message; and He foretold that a great *apostasy* would grow up alongside the Gospel. In fact, Jesus said that many people will *look* like His followers, yet not be His followers at all; and when He returns to set up His Kingdom, these fake "disciples" will be separated from the real ones, and cast into hell. These are the kinds of things that the Kingdom Parables illustrate; and in the coming weeks, we will be examining these Kingdom parables one by one.

With all this in mind, let's now examine the meaning of the very first Kingdom parable—the **parable of the sower**. In this parable, Christ says that there was a man who went out to sow seed in a field. And what does this **"seed"** represent? Let's look again at **verse 19** for the answer. (**Read Matthew 13:19.**) Jesus says that the **"seed"** that the sower cast into the field

represents ***“the word of the kingdom.”*** In other words, the Seed is God’s Word (the Scriptures).

Now, think about that comparison for a minute! A seed is a living thing, which is able to reproduce life. Sometimes, even after a seed has lain dormant in an urn for hundreds, or thousands of years, it is still able to take root, and bring forth life. Likewise, God’s Word is an eternal, living, powerful thing, which produces *spiritual* life in the hearts of men. Because the Scriptures are *God’s* words, and not merely men’s words, they are indestructible. They cannot be corrupted, destroyed, or lost. God has promised to *preserve* His words throughout the course of this world, and throughout eternity, so that men might always have access to His truth, and the knowledge of salvation. **Psalm 12:6-7** says, ***“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”*** Jesus confirmed this promise, as well.

Read Matthew 5:17-18.

Folks, do you realise what Jesus is saying here? That word ***“jot”*** comes from the word *iota*, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *yod*; and *yod* is the smallest consonant of the Hebrew alphabet (the equivalent of our letter “y”). And what is a ***“tittle”***? The word ***“tittle”*** simply means “a tiny dot”; and it is translated from the word *charia*, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *chireq*. And what is a *chireq*? It is the smallest *vowel* of the Hebrew language! (It is a single, tiny dot, which is equivalent to our letter “i.”) What is Jesus saying, then? He’s saying that until Heaven and earth pass away, neither the smallest consonant nor vowel of Scripture will ever be destroyed! The same God who was powerful enough to *give* His exact words to His prophets to write down is also powerful enough to *preserve* His words for all time. Yes, many men have made corrupted copies of Scripture, to suit their own heretical ideas; but the *true* copies of Scripture have always been preserved by God’s people down through the ages. His Word is eternal; and because it will never pass away, it is *guaranteed* to continue to transform hearts and lives until the end of time!

Read Isaiah 40:6-8.

Read 1 Peter 1:22-25.

Did you notice what Peter said about believers there in **verse 23**? He said, ***“Being born again...by the word of God.”*** God’s Word produces a “new birth” in sinners, by creating *faith* in their hearts, so that they might be saved. **Romans 10:17** says, ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** When God’s Word takes root in the heart of a

sinner, understanding of the things of God begins to spring up in that person's mind and heart. That person begins to understand that he is a sinner in need of salvation. He begins to realise that Jesus is the one who paid the price for his sins on the cross in full, so that he might be saved. He also begins to realise that he now has a choice before him: will he personally *respond* to God's offer of salvation? Will he repent of his sin, and place his trust in Christ, so that Christ might produce spiritual *fruit* through his life, for God's glory? Or will he walk away from the truth that he has heard, and wither away, like a small sapling that had started to spring up, but then died? This is what God's Word does, my friends. Like a root, it pierces down into our hearts, and convicts and woos us to *respond* to the Gospel. Have *you* responded to the Gospel message? Have *you* repented of your sin and believed on Jesus?

Now, let's talk about the **sower** of the seed. Let's read again **Matthew 13:3-4. (Read Matthew 13:3-4 again.)** Who is **the sower** in this parable? Well, he's not just one person: he is *many* people. The "sower" represents John the Baptist; the Lord Jesus Himself; His Apostles; and *every* true follower of Jesus throughout this church age, and throughout the coming Tribulation period, right up to the time of Christ's return. We who know Christ as Saviour, and who are endeavouring to share the Gospel with others, are the "sowers" of the Seed of God's Word. Our job is to "broadcast" the good news of salvation. By the way, that word "broadcast" is an old farming term; and it refers to spreading seeds in a field by throwing them out anywhere and everywhere, with a "broad cast." In modern farming, seeds are planted in nice, neat rows, with spades or drills; but in Jesus' day, they simply threw the seeds *everywhere*. So it is with spreading the Gospel. Christ doesn't command us to take His Gospel to certain kinds of people. The Gospel isn't for people of certain wealth, or societal status, or education level, or moral character, or ethnicity, or age, or gender: it is for *everyone*. Jesus commands us to go into the highways and hedges, and into the streets and lanes of the cities, and invite *all* people—whether they be poor, maimed, halt, blind, bad, or good—to come to His marriage supper. God has given us the charge to **"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."** Christian, this is *your* responsibility! How seriously do you take it? Spreading the good news of salvation isn't a nice virtue to "tack on" to your life *if* you have time, and *if* it suit you; it is the central commission that Christ has given to us until He returns! Spreading the Gospel is simply part and parcel of what a Christian does, and of who he is! Christ saved us so that we might bring forth much fruit for Him.

Now, let's talk about the soil. In this parable, Jesus spoke of four different types of ground. There is the **wayside ground**; the **stony ground**; the **thorny ground**; and the **good ground**. These four soils represent four different kinds of hearts, and the four different ways that these hearts receive the Gospel. We won't have time this morning to talk about all four of these hearts; but we *will* talk about the first two. We will begin with the **wayside ground. (Read Matthew 13:4 and 19.)**

The people of Jesus' day would have been very familiar with the sight of "**wayside ground**." The "**wayside ground**" was the ground on the edges of the field, next to the roads, which became very hardened by the constant foot-traffic of travellers and passers-by. Seed that fell on this ground didn't even begin to sink into the soil: and being totally exposed, it was quickly eaten by the birds. This "wayside" ground represents the hearts of most people in our world. God's Word doesn't even begin to penetrate their hearts; and thus, the thought of their sinfulness, or of their need of salvation, is easily stolen away. Just as birds quickly snatch up seeds from that hard wayside ground, so Satan and his demons quickly snatch away the "seed" of the Gospel from the "ground" of their hearts. They have hardened themselves in pride, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and sinful living. They couldn't care less about the truth they have heard; and they forget it almost as quickly as they've heard it. When someone attempts to hand them a tract, or to tell them about the Lord Jesus Christ, they disgustedly roll their eyes, put out the palm, and scornfully say, "No thanks, lads. I'm grand." Because they will not hear the truth, the little truth that they might have been exposed to in the past is quickly whisked away by the enemy; and God does not force them to retain that truth, because they did not *wish* to have it. Because they do not like to "**retain God in their knowledge**," God gives them "**over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable,**" and "**unmerciful.**" Furthermore, not only do they love their sin, but they love to get others to sin with them. Many "**wayside ground**" hearts are hostile toward the Gospel; others are simply indifferent: but either way, God's Word does not make any impression on them.

I fear that this kind of "soil" represents the hearts of most people in this country. For many centuries, men who claimed to be "priests" or "ministers" of Jesus Christ extorted and robbed the poor, committed gross immorality behind closed doors, and perpetrated murder and violence in the name of Jesus Christ; and this false "Christianity" (regardless of which religion it happened to be) has caused the name of Christ to be evil spoken of, and hearts to be hardened against God. In recent times, people's hearts have been hardened by humanistic teaching from every corner of society; by materialism, hedonism, and moral filthiness; and by the love and pursuit of wealth. These things have caused people to rebel against the voice of their own God-given conscience, and to reject the Word of God out of hand. And there is no excuse! **Romans 2:1** says, "**Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man.**" *No one* will be able to stand before a holy God one day and say, "It was those phony priests or pastors that turned me off to you, God. It's *their* fault." No, my friend: *everyone* is responsible before God for his own sin. We *all* have the duty to respond to the seed of God's Word in repentance and faith.

There certainly is nothing new about "wayside ground" hearts. Most of the people in Jesus' day had "wayside ground" hearts; and such is still the case today. We who know the Lord needn't be discouraged by the indifference of the multitudes: instead, we should keep working away for the Lord. Small numbers of converts do not necessarily indicate that a church is doing something wrong--unless, of course, its members *are not* praying for the lost, and

witnessing, and giving, and labouring for the Lord. If we are not willing to sacrifice and agonise in our labour for the Lord, we cannot expect to see any fruit for our labours.

Take **Adoniram Judson**, for example. Judson was converted to Christ in 1809, and went to Burma as a missionary with his new bride, Ann, in 1812. His time in Burma was often discouraging, to say the least. He met with tremendous persecution, as well as with frequent sickness and death in his family. His first two wives died in Burma; and only his third wife outlived him. He also lost several children in infancy, due to the fierce climate and diseases of Burma. He laboured hard to learn the Burmese language; and in time, he produced the first English-Burmese dictionary, and translated the whole of Scripture into Burmese. Yet, despite his excellent knowledge of languages, and all his hard work, it took 6 years for him to see his first convert; and it took 12 years to see 18 converts. The people were extremely indifferent, and looked at his beliefs as a mere curiosity. However, Judson kept working away, despite frequent tragedy, loss, and deprivation. It took a long time to break through the hard ground of people's hearts; but by the end of his life, the Lord had blessed his labours in a much greater way than he had expected. He lived to see the establishment of 100 churches, with a total of 8,000 members between them! Most Christians in Myanmar today are in God's family because of the labour of Adoniram and Ann Judson!

The Apostle Paul wrote, "*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*" Christian, don't be discouraged by hard hearts! Keep breaking up the hard ground of people's hearts with the "plough" of God's Law, which convicts men of their sin. Keep throwing out the seed of the Gospel; keep watering the seed with fasting, prayers, and tears; and keep waiting for the Lord to give you a harvest!

II. The shallow heart

(Read Matthew 13:20-21 again.) As we have seen, the "wayside ground" represents the hearts of those who are completely indifferent to God's Word. However, the "stony ground" is notably different from the wayside ground, in that the seed *does* begin to penetrate the "soil" of this person's heart. The "stony ground" represents the heart of someone who *begins* to listen to God's Word for a little while, and who even gets excited about what he has heard. He actually *likes* what he hears; and at first, he receives it "*with joy.*" He even begins to read the Bible, and starts attending Bible studies and church services. He gets emotional about the things of God—at first. However, his seeming sincerity is only superficial. As soon as this person realises that people will *persecute* him for being a Christian, he turns away from his profession, and never looks back. The reality is that he was never truly a child of God to begin with. He was not truly willing to follow Christ, because he did not count the cost of being Christ's disciple. He never truly repented and turned his heart and life over to Christ. There were *many* such people who followed Jesus for a time during His earthly ministry: but sooner or later, they were offended, and turned back, never to walk with Him again.

Read John 6:60-71.

Jesus knew that there were always “stony ground” people in His audience; and that is why He solemnly warned them to **“Strive to enter in at the strait gate.”** Let’s look at that Scripture.

Read Luke 13:24-30.

What does Jesus mean when He says, **“Strive to enter in at the strait gate”**? Is He saying that we must work hard to do good works in order to earn our salvation? Not on your life! The Bible says, again and again, that salvation is a free gift, which Christ purchased in full with His blood; and it is freely given to anyone who will simply receive it by faith! However, there is a *cost in this world* for those who have chosen to follow Christ: and that is why those who would receive the gift of salvation, and follow Christ, must first *count* that cost, and decide that having Jesus is really worth it. *This* is what Jesus means by the word “strive.” To **“strive”** simply means “not to allow any opposing force to keep you from receiving Christ’s invitation to salvation.” To “strive” means to “make every effort to accept the invitation.” To receive God’s gift of salvation, you must be *willing* to die to your sin, to die to yourself, and to live your life for Jesus from henceforth. Being “willing” to die to self and sin isn’t some meritorious deed that *earns* you salvation: it is simple *surrender* of your life to Christ. To *live*...you must *die*. Jesus said, **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”**

Read Luke 14:25-33.

My friend, if you would enter the glory of Heaven, as well as the glorious Kingdom that Jesus will establish on earth one day, you must count the cost of being Jesus’ follower, and decide that He is worth it. You must be willing to be ridiculed, or even abandoned, by friends or family, on account of your faith in Jesus. You must be willing to let go of your pride and self-righteousness, and your insistence that you are a “good person.” You must be willing to turn from your sinful ways, and to let Jesus Christ be the Ruler of your life. You must be willing to have your freedoms, goods, or even your very life taken from you, should it come to that. Even if your physical life be not at stake, you must, at the very least, be willing to give up the reins of your life, and to die to self, and let Jesus be Lord. Fear of family, fear of friends, religiosity, pride, self-righteousness, love of sin, and love of one’s own life, are like “cords” or “chains,” binding people in fear or lust, and keeping them from entering the Door of salvation. My friend, don’t let any of these things keep you from receiving the gift of eternal life!

Read Proverbs 5:21-23.

This morning’s message has been addressed mostly to those who are *not* saved: and rightly so. The wayside ground represents the heart of a **lost person**; and so does the stony ground. You’ll notice that neither the hard ground nor the stony ground *ever brought forth any fruit*; and likewise, an unsaved person *never brings forth fruit for God*. The “stony hearted” person may *look* like a Christian at first, on account of his going to church, and reading the Bible, and showing excitement about the things of God; and, to be sure, the Holy Spirit is working in that person’s heart, and wooing him to come to Christ. Yet, this person stops short of actually

bringing forth spiritual fruit, because he was never truly saved. His excitement for the Lord dies the moment that the conviction of sin begins to weigh down on his heart and make him uncomfortable, or when external persecution begins to come his way. His seeming enthusiasm dies and withers away, because the “soil” of his heart was shallow. My friend, make no mistake about it: Christ saves sinners so that they might bear spiritual fruit for Him; and He *will* get at least some fruit out of the life of every true child of God. Total fruitlessness is evidence that a person has never been saved.

And yet, there *is* a secondary *application* of this parable, even for genuine Christians. You see, if you know Christ as your Saviour, then there *will* be some measure of genuine spiritual fruit in your life. Christ *will* get glory from your life! Yet, *how much* fruit are you bringing forth? *That* is the question! How much fruit you bear for Christ depends, in part, on how deep the soil of your heart is. Simply put, *even you*, as a Christian, can have a “shallow” heart. Your heart was deep enough to receive the Gospel, and to place your faith in Jesus as Saviour; and a certain amount of spiritual fruit *has* issued forth from your life. But is your life producing a “bumper crop” of fruit for God? Or is it small and scraggly? Is your fruitfulness being stunted because of spiritual shallowness, and apathy? Does even the slightest hardship keep you from obeying Christ’s commands, because Christ is not the *centre* of your life, as He should be?

Brethren, I’m no farmer; but I *do* know that if a garden is to grow, rocks must be removed. A couple years ago when my family planted a garden, we quickly discovered that there were lots of very large rocks that needed to be removed if we would have a decent crop of potatoes. Likewise, we who are saved by God’s grace must continually “count the cost” of being Jesus’ disciples, and resolve that He is worth whatever persecution we may have to endure for His sake. Even we, as God’s blood-bought saints, are very capable of having shallow hearts; yet, by God’s grace, “stones” can be removed. If you know Christ as Saviour, yet you have some “stones” in your heart which are impeding your fruitfulness for God, ask the Lord to remove them. Allow His Word to take deep root, so that you may bear much spiritual fruit, even when the “heat” of persecution beats down upon you!

Conclusion: My friends, I have known the Lord Jesus Christ for forty years of my life; and I can testify that *He is worth it!* The things that I am telling you are not just words, or a nice “theory.” Jesus isn’t a moral philosophy. He isn’t merely a good Teacher, or even a great prophet. He is the God-Man! He is the true and living Way! He is the Giver of eternal life. Every day, He gives me peace and joy deep in my heart, and purpose for living. My life is all about serving *Him* out of a heart of love and thankfulness. He has saved my soul from eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire; and He has given me the privilege of being united in eternal fellowship with Himself, and with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And guess what? This same Jesus can be *your* Saviour, too! Don’t let the discomfort of guilt in your heart, or the fear of family or friends, keep you from receiving Christ as your Saviour! To those of you who are saved,

I would ask: is your heart shallow? What does it take to keep you from serving God whole-heartedly? Should there be anything between you and your Saviour, let Him remove it today!