

Hearing With the Heart
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Opening Illustration

A hearing aid helped my friend hear his wife better.

Introduction

How we hear is critically important and in this parable of the sower, we discover that our hearts preparation and receptivity to the Word of God can be measured in one of four ways shown by four kinds of soil.

Our spiritual preparation affects how we hear

1. A hardened heart hears the Word and forgets.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. Matthew 13:19

This first way of hearing is with a hardened heart. The foot path along the edge of a field was where anyone could walk who was traveling through an area. It served as a property boundary.

As the sower cast the seed with a swinging motion, some landed on the path. After years of people traveling along the path the ground became hard in the dry arid season. The birds would come and eat the seed, so the path was unproductive.

The pathway symbolizes the person whose heart is unwilling or unable to hear the Word of God. The heart has been made impenetrable to the truth by the traffic of many things. One of those things is the constant hearing of the Word of God. The person may be so familiar with the Bible that they become calloused to the truth of the Bible. Many have learned the answers intellectually but are not allowing the word to penetrate and change their hearts spiritually.

A second way that the heart becomes hardened is through continual sin. When sin becomes habitual with no repentance, then that heart becomes resistant to God's prodding and eventually refuses to turn back to God.

Illustration

Wood putty is soft, but it dries hard.

1. A Superficial heart hears the Word and flees.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Matt. 13:20-21

The seed in shallow soil grows quickly, but as the sun bakes the soil, the plant quickly withers and dies. The man or woman of shallow nature makes a great show at first. He is full of enthusiasm and seems like he has really embraced Jesus and the Christian faith but when trouble comes he quickly falls away.

Every person who turns to Jesus will sooner or later face a time of temptation. The Greek word for temptation can also refer to a trial or a test. The person with a shallow heart lacks a depth of character, so he deserts when trials come.

Jesus spoke about counting the cost to His followers.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him...Luke 14:27-29

Illustration

When P gave her life to Christ there was no proof of it.

2. A divided heart hears the Word and fights it.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. Matthew 13:22

The third kind of soil that leads to an unproductive life is the divided heart. This is the heart that is preoccupied with other interests. It is an unclean soil filled with weeds that eventually outgrow the good seed that has been sown and choke it out. In looking at all three gospels that record this parable we get a more complete picture of this weed-infested soil.

Matthew describes these weeds as the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Mark's calls them the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. Luke says, they are life's worries, riches, and pleasures. Putting them all together, we get four things that are symbolized by the thorns: worries, riches, ambition, and pleasure.

A person with this kind of heart may start well in their Christian life but when these weeds take root in their heart, the kingdom of God is pushed farther and farther in the past as

one's interest in prosperity, security ambition and pleasure become more important. Jesus encounter with the rich young man reveals the sad picture of a life choked out by weeds.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Mark 10:21-22

His disheartenment is indicative of so many who allow the weeds to choke out God's rightful rule in their hearts.

Illustration

Free compost from the region has led to 20 years of weeds.

3. A noble heart hears the Word and fulfills it.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."
Matthew 13:23

The heart that has been well prepared to receive the Word of God is the noble and good heart. This person has considered the cost, has taken up the cross of Christ and is carrying it in good times and bad. Cornelius had this heart when he sent for Peter on behalf of his family.

Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.” Acts 10:33

In Matthew 13:23 we discover three qualities of a noble heart.

1. Attention. They hear.

The noble hearer listens attentively and won't allow their mind to be distracted away from the truth that comes from God's Word.

2. Meditation: They keep.

The noble heart takes the time to reflect on what they hear. It takes in what is heard to grow more complete in Christ.

3. Obedience: They bring forth fruit with patience.

Attention and meditation must lead to obedience. Once we've heard and meditated, we need to obey.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock... And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Matthew 7:24, 26

If you and I will be faithful to the task of sowing the Word of God into the hearts of those we meet, some of the seed will find well cultivated soil, and the result will be abundant fruit that leads to an abundant harvest. My friends, keep sowing.

Closing Illustration

The good soil in the heart of a man named James.