

Last Sunday we began a series of lessons on some of the most prolific teachings to come from the mouth of Jesus which He expressed in the form of parables. **A parable is a story w/ a point – an earthly lesson w/ a spiritual punchline.**

parable is derived from two words (*para*) alongside of (*bolle*) to lay beside. It means to lay something alongside of another for the purpose of comparison. **So a parable is a story that compares something *unfamiliar* w/ that which is *familiar*.**

Jesus used parables to make the truth more clear to the people who were seeking it and more obscure to those who were not.

This AM I want to spend a few minutes on what is arguably Jesus' most important parable – The Parable of the Sower. This parable has long been considered the autobiography of Jesus' mission and purpose. Yet tucked w/in this parable are some of the most profound and vital teachings in Scripture. I would go so far to say that if you could only study one text for the remainder of your life and thrive w/ God – this would be that one passage you'd need. **(Read *Matthew 13:1-9*)**

Later that same 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 a 100 times as much as had been planted! Anyone w/ ears to hear should listen and understand... Now 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 a 100 times as much as had been planted!”

Daily the gospel is shared w/ millions. Some hear the message at a church. Some hear it on the radio, TV, on-line or in print. All hear the same message yet not all respond the same way.

How can two people go to the same church, hear the same message yet respond so differently? How can one person turn from sin while another continues in sin? 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.

What is this parable about? The simple answer is it is about Jesus' mission to sow the Gospel into the hearts of humanity so they can be saved. Only the Gospel seed is going to fall on (4) different kinds of hearts – w/ only one heart being truly receptive to God's grace. And while this is certainly true of this parable, there is so much more to the story.

I **The SOWER**

Who is the Sower? Jesus. He came into the world to seek and to save the lost by speaking into the lives of people to help them discover God's love and grace. As the sower, b/c He wants no one to perish but all to come to repentance, Jesus indiscriminately casts the seed in all directions to all people – knowing that only the seed falling on fertile soil will germinate unto salvation but he has cast it to everyone so that all men are w/out excuse.

II The SEED

The seed is the Word and voice of God – the Gospel. It's the message that Jesus died for our sins and it's the voice God continues to use to guide us in our daily pursuit of His will.

It's the combination of *logos* and *rhema*. As we've talked about before – logos is the general expression of God's truth applicable to everyone. It is the truth of God needed for life and salvation. It is truth for everyone.

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. Rm. 10:17*

III The SOILS

The soils represent the condition of the heart/our spiritual ears.

A A SURFACE Heart – the Footpath

A footpath is a narrow pathway separating one field from the next. It is an untilled area that's been trampled down by men walking on it. Even though the soil is good, it is 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 and unresponsive to the Gospel message not necessarily b/c they're antagonistic to it, but b/c they've no interest in it or don't understand it.

The idea is that God's truth goes in one ear and out the other never penetrating the surface. No **RECEPTION!**

B A **SHALLOW** Heart – Rocky Ground

Jesus isn't referring to loose rocks in a field, but to underlying bedrock just deep enough to escape the plow blade, but close enough to the surface to affect germination. Such stony places are common in Palestine where there's an outcropping of limestone covered by a thin layer of topsoil. The soil is fertile, but b/c there's no soil depth, as soon as the sun beats down, the plant withers and dies w/out producing fruit.

This soil represents the **IMPULSIVE** heart – people who receive God's seed but quickly fall away when persecution or a greater opportunity arises. **They have a different ambition for their life other than God's will and purpose for them.**

These are people who receive the gospel w/ enthusiasm. But it is 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*

Unfortunately, these people might be convinced they're going to Heaven b/c they *prayed the prayer, walked the aisle, or got baptized*, but none of these things save – only genuinely trusting Christ rescues us from sin. These people are counterfeit Christians b/c the Gospel never took **ROOT**.

C A **STRANGLER** Heart – Thorny Ground

This is a reference to seed sown in a soil that's unwittingly full of the seedlings of thorns/thistles – 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 to be committed to Jesus.

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

Jesus is speaking of people w/ a divided heart who make no **ROOM**. They receive the truth of God, but they welcome competing truths as well. Jesus says these people will drift away b/c they're concerned more about the worries of life and the things of the world than they are about following Him.

D A SURRENDERED Heart – Fertile Soul

This is a picture of a heart that's been plowed deeply by the Word of God and prepared by God's grace. When the Gospel seed hits this kind of heart, it germinates, grows up and bears fruit to God's glory.

This soil represents the INVOLVED Heart – people who receive God's truth by faith and whose lives mature into a fruit bearing faith b/c there is no RESISTANCE.

So we've identified the **sower** (Jesus), the **seed** (Gospel), and the **soils** (heart) – but there's one more item we have to understand to grasp this parable – the **scammers**.

Unfortunately, God's voice isn't the only voice in this world. You'll notice in the parable, for each soil condition there's also a competitor. Three competing voices (*scammers*) vying to prevent the voice of God from taking root.

IV The SCAMMERS

A The Voice of SATAN (Bird)

Jesus identifies Satan as the bird of the air who snatches away 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 would occupy your life and disengage you in the pursuit of 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

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 the sinful nature w/in us we're born w/. It's the flesh that's self-centered, self-absorbed, and self-sufficient that seeks to **STARVE** out the seed of God's voice.

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. In that instant, a war began. Battle lines were drawn b/w God and your flesh. The Spirit began speaking and the flesh began resisting.

For the flesh sets its desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, so you might not do the things you please.

C The Voice of SOCIETY (Thorns)

Everywhere we turn this voice is singing the praise of Satan while serenading the desire of self. From Hollywood to Madison Ave. to Rodeo Dr. we're being told what to wear, how to think and act, and what to pursue in life.

Jesus likens the voice of this world w/ weeds and thorns that seek to **STRANGLE** His voice of truth.

Three competing voices working together to drown out the Savior's voice – voices determined to confuse truth and cram us into their mold.

What must I do to prepare my ears/heart to hear and receive God's Word?

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. Then He said, Let us be careful that we hear.

The key to hearing God is learning how to tune our ears to His voice. Like tuning into a radio station, we have to be on the right frequency w/ nothing is blocking the signal. **(RADIO)**

You could say that your frequency w/ God helps you to tune in to the right frequency w/ God.

There are (3) things needed to get on the right frequency w/ God – focused time, purity, 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 – to be a careful listener to ensure to get the correct message. It means to grasp 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. You must seize every occasion to be exposed to truth.

B A PURITY to Hear

Equally important 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 is 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 ear drums impeding sound. **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 listen (*akroates*) to sit passively in an audience or audit a class. You pay money to sit in a class but receive no credit b/c you choose only to listen instead of participating. 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 pay close attention to what He is speaking into our lives thru His Word.

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 and 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.

If we're going to hear God, not only does it require we put ourselves in a position to hear, we also must have a willingness to live what He requires.

obey (hupoakoia) – we get the word – *acoustic*. It is a compound word meaning “to listen underneath.” The idea is obedience begins w/ submitted listening exercised underneath the Lordship of Christ.

To obey requires that we hear and respond to God's voice only. This requires we learn how to distinguish the voice of Satan, the flesh, and the world from God's voice so that we can obey His leading and experience a fruitful life in Christ.