

The parable of the Sower / The Parable of the Four Soils

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the Sower marks a turning point in our Lord's ministry. He is no longer welcome in the synagogue! And for that reason he has to find somewhere else to teach the people. And so he heads down to the lakeside and teaches the people there. And unlike in church where the preacher stands and the people sit, Jesus sits and the people stand. And the first parable he uses to teach them about the Kingdom of Heaven is the parable of the Sower.

Now you may ask, why does he begin with this parable? Well, if you are going to teach the people about the Coming Kingdom, well why not start with a parable about how that message is received!

So the parable of the Sower is about HOW the human heart responds to the Word of God. The Sower is God, the seed is the message, and the four soils are the four different ways the Word of God is received in the hearts of men. And as we read the explanation of the 'Parable of the Sower', also known as the 'Parable of the Four Soils' given by Jesus, it becomes apparent that four conditions of the human heart are evident:

There is the **deceiving** heart, there is the **demonstrative** heart, there is the **distracted** heart, and lastly there is the **discerning** heart.

And wherever the word of God is expounded the sayings of the Parable of the Sower hold true. You see, the Parable of the Sower describes what happens in church congregations the world over, where the word of God is proclaimed. Wherever the word of God is preached the human heart will be challenged. And we tend to fall into one of these four categories that our Lord mentions.

So Firstly, there is the scattering of the seed onto the path (verse 19). Paths are typically hard, bare, and unprotected. And so the seed that falls on the path are those who hear the word - but do not understand its importance. They **deceive** themselves into thinking that the word of God is unimportant.

So why does the human heart act in this way? Well, Jesus seems to imply that the mind is the great battleground. Evil is at work here, we are told. And there

are those who fall into the mind-set that they do not need God. God is an irrelevance. God barely registers on their radar. And so when they hear the word of God they simply don't get it – or as Jesus says, 'they don't understand'. The great tragedy of this type of person is that one day they will need God, but they are unable to see this. They have been deceived.

And not unlike those who think God is an irrelevance, where God only appears as a fading blip on their radar. There are those who simply switch off their radar. It may be that the cravings of this life, shut their mind to the truth. They close their ears to God and their hearts become hardened to God's word, a bit like the dusty path that Jesus likens them to. There is none so blind as those who do not want to see. So these are the people who do not understand the message, and the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in their hearts. This is the seed sown along the path.

Secondly there is the seed that falls on the rocky ground. This ground only has a little amount of soil. This points to a superficial person, the shallow-minded person. They may be very **demonstrative** in their new found faith. Jesus tells us that they 'hear the word with joy' (verse 20), but they have no root, and so this joy only lasts a short time. And so once the excitement declines, so does the enthusiasm. There are people whose lives are littered with things they begin with such gusto, but never finish, because they have no root. And a man can be like that with God's word. When he first hears it he may be swept off his feet by a great sermon, or the choral music or the worship songs, or some saying of Jesus. But no one can live on an emotion.

There is a worship song, by Britain's most famous Worship Song composer, Matt Redman. And he has been involved in contemporary worship for many years. And sometimes these young peoples' services can end up like a pop concert. I have to say that these contemporary services are a great way of encouraging young people to come to church - but there is the danger that people can be swept along by the emotion of the occasion. And so Matt Redman wrote a song called 'the Heart of Worship' which reminded those attending the service that what is more important is your heart for the Lord.

These are the words.

When the music fades
All is stripped away
And I simply come,

I'll bring You more than a song,
for a song in itself Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
You're looking into my heart

So a demonstrative heart is not enough. Christianity has its demands, the call to serve, the call to give, the call to go the extra mile, and not to count the cost. All these must be faced before the Word can be accepted in the human heart. So the seed that falls on rocky ground is the man who may have the demonstrative heart, he may have received the word with joy and enthusiasm, but there is no root to carry forth that passion for God's word.

Thirdly, there is the seed that was sown among the thorns. This is the hearer who has so many interests in life that the most important thing gets crowded out, by something else. We are by nature busy people. We live busy lives and there are many distractions. And so we become preoccupied with the many things around us, and we forget that which is most important. God no longer takes precedence. He is no longer first in our lives. It is true that we can become so involved in things, the committees, all sorts of ministries, youth, outreach, schools, good things that they are, but then we leave no time for the one **for whom all love and service flows**.

The Bible is adamant that if God is to make the best use of our lives, we must come to him. 'I am the vine and you are the branches.' He feeds us. He prunes anything that is not productive in our lives. And so we must come to him **FIRST!** We must be careful not to substitute what is best with what is second best - 'the second best, is always the worst enemy of the best!'

Fourthly, and lastly there is the seed that falls on the good soil. This refers to the person who hears the word and understand it. This is the woman or man with the **discerning** heart. This is the person who is sensitive to God's Word and treasures it. It is like the person who when they find the treasure hidden in the field, sells all that they own to buy that field (Matt. 13:44). The Word of God is something that they will give everything else up for. The Word of God

is precious in the discerning heart. This is the heart that takes everything to the Lord in prayer. They seek God's advice first. They are at all times willing to learn. It is the person who is never too proud or too busy to listen. ` And I think you would agree, that many of us would have been saved from all kinds of heartbreak, if we had simply stopped to listen to the advice of a wise friend. And Jesus is our best friend. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And so we must listen to him. And so the seed develops in the heart of the discerning person and it bears fruit yielding a hundredfold, sixty and thirty times what was sown.

So my prayer for you this morning is that you be like the seed that was sown on the good soil. That we be the one who listens, understands and obeys the Word of God. **AMEN**