

How's Your Heart?

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, for a short while, and with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Luke, a well-known parable, the parable of the sower.

Luke chapter 8, and if we could just read again at verse 4. Luke chapter 9, and when a great crowd was gathering, and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.

And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it, and some fell into good soil, and grew and yielded a hundredfold.

And as he said these things, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

How's your heart? How's your heart? My unconverted friend here today, that's the question Jesus is asking you in the parable of the sower.

[1 : 33] He's asking you, how's your heart? Of course, Jesus, he wasn't a cardiologist. He doesn't want to know how your physical heart is.

Now, Jesus, as you know, he is the physician of souls. And Dr. Jesus, he wants to know today, what condition your heart is in. Jesus wants to know, how's your heart in relation to God's word? How's your heart in relation to Jesus Christ? How's your heart in relation to being a Christian? How's your heart?

And you know, that was the same question Jesus put to the crowds who were following him. Luke tells us that there were crowds who came to him from town after town.

And they came just to hear Jesus preach. But you know, Jesus, he was never afraid of addressing people. He was never afraid of addressing them directly or speaking right into their heart.

[2 : 38] Because as J.C. Ryle often said, Jesus always knew that the heart of the problem was the problem of the heart. And so when the crowds came to hear Jesus preach, he spoke a parable to them.

And as you know, Jesus, he often spoke and he often used parables and spoke in parables. And he drew all his illustrations from incidents and situations which his listeners were very, very familiar with.

And the same is true with the parable of the sower. But you know, the parable of the sower, it's all about hearing. And it's all about how different people respond to what they hear.

And you know, when I was studying in the Free Church College, we were always encouraged to preach on the parable of the sower at least once a year.

Because in doing so, we were told that you were reminding yourself as a preacher, and you were also reminding your own congregation or the congregation you're preaching to, that you're reminding them that there will always be different responses to the message of the gospel.

[3 : 44] Because the parable of the sower, it isn't actually about the man who sowed seed. The parable is about the effect that that man's labor had.

The parable is all about the soils and onto what type of soil the seed fell. And you know, you can almost imagine the sower. As soon as you hear Jesus' words, you can imagine this sower or this crofter.

As he walks out into the middle of his field at the beginning of a working day, and he puts his hand into his bucket, which is full of seed, and he just pulls it out, and he just begins to scatter the seed as best as he can.

He just scatters the seed across his field. And the seed, that's what's precious to the sower. But what we must realize about the parable is that there's nothing wrong with the sower.

There's nothing wrong with the seed. There's nothing even wrong with the method which is being used in the sowing of the seed. Because all the efforts of the sower, they all depend upon the type of soil that the seed lands on.

[4 : 52] And so what Dr. Jesus is saying in this parable is that there are four kinds of heart in every congregation where the gospel is preached. And that's why Dr. Jesus is asking you today, how's your heart?

How is it with your own heart today? And you know, Jesus, he wants to know, is your heart a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart?

Is it a hungry heart? Or is it a healthy heart? How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? A hollow heart? A hungry heart?

Or a healthy heart? How's your heart? Well, we'll look firstly at the hardened heart. The hardened heart.

Jesus says in verse 11, Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. 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.

[6 : 03] As was Jesus gives an explanation, he explains that the first area in which the seed fell was along the path. A path that would have been, you could say, along the edge of the field, and it would have been this hardened surface that people would have walked upon day by day.

The soil would be trampled down and compressed and flattened, that there would be no possibility of seed taking root. You could say it's just like a peat root that had been hardened over many, many years.

And Jesus says that when the seed lands on this type of soil, it just becomes easy food for the birds to eat. Because when the seed lands along the path, it just lies there.

It can penetrate no deeper than the surface. And Jesus says that's the kind of person who hears the gospel, but they don't respond. And they don't respond because when they hear the gospel, their hearts are so hard that it doesn't penetrate any deeper than the surface.

And we might well ask, well, how does your heart become so hard? How does your heart harden? My friend, your heart hardens when you hear the same message, week in, week out, year by year, funeral after funeral, again and again and again.

[7 : 29] That's how your heart hardens. And it hardens so much that you don't respond. Because every time you sit under the preaching of the gospel, do you know that God is working?

And you never leave church the same way that you came in. Because you're either softening under the gospel or you're hardening under the message of the gospel. But you know, maybe for you, maybe for you there was a day in your life when your heart, it was more receptive to spiritual things. Maybe there was a time when you were moved even to tears under the preaching of the gospel. And you knew that you needed a savior and that you needed to make that commitment, take that step of faith.

But now the years, they've rolled on and you've become more comfortable in your own condition.

And any interest that was once there, it's not there now. And you've heard the gospel so often.

And yet you remain unresponsive, unmoved, unchanged, unconverted. Call it what you will, coming to church has just become this formality. It's just a part of the routine, the weekly routine, to make an appearance.

[8 : 43] Where sermons are preached, doesn't matter. what's said or who says it or how it's said to you, you don't respond to the message of the gospel. And you know, it wouldn't matter even if you were confronted with the gates of hell itself, you don't respond to the message of the gospel.

It wouldn't matter at all. Why? Why? Well, Jesus says that the reason for this is because the devil comes and he snatches away the little seed that was sown upon your heart.

My friend, the enemy of your soul doesn't like it when the seed of God's word is being sown. The devil doesn't like it when you come to church and you sit under the preaching of the gospel.

And you know, he will try everything to prevent this seed from being sown upon your heart. Jesus says, just like a bird ready to get its dinner, the devil, he's just watching and he's waiting to see where that seed lands.

And just as the seed hits the soil, the devil comes and snatches it all away. And Luke says that the devil, he even takes the word of God out of our heart.

[10:02] Because the last thing the devil wants is for this seed to take root. The last thing the devil wants is for you to listen to the gospel. The last thing the devil wants is for you to respond in faith and obedience.

The last thing the devil wants is for you to commit your life to Jesus Christ. And do you know the frightening thing about the enemy of your own soul? He never misses church. He's always here. He never misses a service. He's always here trying to steal this seed from off your heart. Do you know?

But as he steals the seed from off your heart, he also sows his own seed. He comes with his seeds of distracting thoughts.

Thoughts about the week ahead. What am I going to do this week? He comes with seeds of doubt. I'm not good enough. I'm never good enough for this. This isn't addressed to me.

[11:06] He comes with seeds of imagination. What can I do this week? What's that person thinking? I bet you this is for them. Seeds that make us fidgety. What are they doing?

But you know, a favorite. Seeds of tiredness. You know, you've never known tiredness until you come to church. Why is church the place where people often sleep?

Why do people doze off in church? Especially when they're hearing about the best message in all the world. This glorious gospel of a savior who saves us from sin and ultimately from damnation in hell.

Why do people doze off in church? Because the voice of God has been silenced by the enemy of our soul. Do you know, I wonder how many times this seed has been sown upon your heart.

How many sermons have you heard in your lifetime? How many preachers have pleaded with your soul? How many times have people spoken to you about Christianity or Christ?

[12:12] How many times has God spoken to you through death or illness, maybe in your own family or among your friends? How many times and yet you walk away unmoved by it?

How many times has this seed been sown in your hearing? Where the word is heard but the heart is hard and you don't respond to the message of the gospel? How many times?

How many more times? How long will you go on not responding to the message of the gospel? My dear friend, will it be said of you that by the time you walk out of here today that the devil will have plucked that seed from off your heart?

You know, Jesus, he's saying to you, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart?

Or secondly, is it a hollow heart? A hollow heart. Look at verse 13. Jesus says, the ones on the rock are those who when they hear the word receive it with joy but these have no root.

[13:31] They believe for a while and in time of testing fall away. The next heart that Dr. Jesus describes is a hollow heart because Jesus says that not long after the seed is sown on the rocky ground, he says there are signs of life.

Things look good. There was a response. There were signs of growth. But Jesus is very quick to point out that this rocky soil, it's not as good as it may seem. On the surface, everything looks so promising.

There are signs of life, signs of growth, but you know, under the surface, Jesus says that there are problems hindering the seed from growing and germinating and bearing fruit.

And the problems were that the seed didn't have depth. It sprang up because it didn't have a root. And the seed that fell on the rocky soil, it didn't have any earth.

So the seed that fell upon the rocky soil, it had no depth, no root, and no earth. No depth, no root, no earth. It was a hollow heart. And what's sad is that the seed looked so promising.

[14:41] There were signs of life. Something was coming through the surface, breaking the soil towards the light. But all the time what was going on under the soil was unknown to the sower.

And maybe the sower, he thought to himself, well, it's going to be a good harvest this year. It all looked so promising, so hopeful. But you know, the closer the seed came to the surface, the more the sun revealed the true condition of the soil.

And what became apparent is that this soil had no depth, no root, and no earth. And because of all these problems with this soil, the sown seed, it burns under the hot sun and eventually withers and dies.

And Jesus says that this type of passion, when the word of God is sown upon their heart, they hear the gospel, they receive it with joy. And in those initial stages that are signs of life, there's enthusiasm, there's excitement, there's the enjoyment of coming to church and gathering for worship and being among God's people.

But you know, when you have a hollow heart, that joy and enthusiasm, says Jesus, it only endures for a while. Jesus says they believe for a while.

[15 : 55] And in time of testing, they fall away. The hollow heart looks good on the surface, but it only endures for a while because the heat of the sun reveals the true condition of the soil.

No depth, no root, no earth. On the surface, everything looked good, so promising, so hopeful. But when the heat of temptation comes, the hollow heart quickly withers.

Because the hollow heart soon realizes that following Jesus, that requires commitment. It requires counting the cost. It requires denying yourself and taking up your cross daily.

And because the word of God has all these demands upon the Christian that they live a distinct lifestyle, you know, the hollow heart, it begins to feel it. And even though some new things, they replace the old things, it only lasts for a little while.

Because the person with the hollow heart, they have an outward love for Jesus, but inwardly, their love for the world is far greater. And that's what leaves them hollow.

[17 : 10] Because there's still a part of them that wants back to the old things, back to the world. And being separate from the world is a real challenge. And it causes such a strain because the hollow heart, it still wants to hold on to the lifestyle that they once had.

And when the heat of the sun finally reaches its peak, the hollow heart says, too much. It's too much, too much of a commitment. Too much to give up.

Too much to lose by becoming a Christian. But you know, they wouldn't say that if they had roots. They wouldn't say that if they were watering their heart with the word of God and with prayer and with fellowship, the fellowship of the Lord's people.

My friend, there's a danger in having a hollow heart. And there are so many hollow hearts in evangelical churches today. They're hollow hearts.

They're attracted by all the noise and the excitement of the crowd. They hear the gospel. They seem to fit in. And maybe they even make a profession of faith.

[18 : 17] But the hollow heart still wants the best of both worlds. And John Calvin says, that heart has temporary faith. You know, Jesus says, there's one sure sign that someone has temporary faith.

Because temporary faith doesn't like to be tested. Temporary faith, it flourishes in the summer, but it doesn't like the winter. Temporary faith loves all these nice warm days of sunlight, but it doesn't like the cold, dark nights of winter.

Temporary Christianity loves it when everything is going well. And when they can ride on this emotional high and be part of the buzz and be drawn in by the crowd, but they have no root.

But you know, what Jesus says here is, lose the emotions. Take away the excitement. Go through difficult experiences. Face illness, bereavement, face pain, heartache, and temptation, loneliness, chastenings, trial, and even persecution.

And Jesus says, then you'll see that there's no depth of earth because of all the barrenness of the soil. And all that grew upwards, it withers because it didn't grow downwards. My friend, temporary Christianity has a hollow heart.

[19 : 39] And Jesus is asking you today, how's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart? Or is it thirdly, a hungry heart?

A hungry heart. Look at verse 14. Jesus says, and as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Jesus says that the next seed to germinate was the seed which fell among the thorns. And this soil, it's different from the last two because this type of soil, it allowed the seed to grow. It wasn't hard, but it was soft ground.

It was ground that was full of moisture. There was lots of earth. It had depth. The seed was able to put down roots. And it seems that this soil, it had everything that it needed to grow, but it also had too much.

Because as soon as the seed began to put down roots, it was then that the thorns wrapped themselves around the seed and began to choke it.

[20 : 56] And as these thorns that Jesus describes, he describes them as the cares of life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of other things.

Jesus says as these things crowd in, they choke the word and they become, they make the seed unfruitful. And so Jesus says that the hungry heart is someone for whom cares have crowded in or riches have crowded in or pleasures have crowded in.

And it's all at the expense of crowding out the word of God. In other words, the hungry heart is not satisfied and secure in Jesus Christ.

They're not satisfied with the word. They're not secure in Jesus. They're not, they don't find their worth in Jesus Christ. and Jesus is not enough for them.

And because Jesus is not enough, they crowd all these other things into their life in order to try and find that security and satisfaction. They crowd all these things in in order to satisfy their hunger.

[22 : 10] My friend, the person with the hungry heart doesn't seek satisfaction and security from the word. even though they have heard the word, they continue to seek satisfaction and security from the word.

And Jesus says that when they look at the world for satisfaction and security and when they look to the world for adoration and acceptance, when they look to the world for all their wealth and even their worth, Jesus says, you'll be choked.

You'll be choked by it all. Because, you know, there's a danger in anxiety and worry. There's a danger that you can be so full of care that you forget that God is sovereign in all aspects of your life and that he has promised in his word to be with you, never to leave you, never to forsake you.

He's promised to help you and provide for all your needs according to his riches in glory. But if you look to the world, in your cares, you'll just be choked.

There are others, says Jesus, where the snare is wealth. But money's not a problem in our wallet or in our purse. It's a good thing to have money in our wallet or in our purse.

[23 : 32] But money's only a problem in our heart. It's not money that's the root of all evil, it's the love of money that's the root of all evil. It's not wealth that's a problem, it's the love of wealth.

That's the problem, says Jesus. That's the problem with a hungry heart. It's never satisfied and it's never secure by the word of God. And even though they've heard the word and they've responded to the word, Jesus says, they continue to seek satisfaction and security in the world.

And so the issue of a hungry heart is where do you find your satisfaction and your security? Where do you find your satisfaction and your security?

You know, everyone says that having money and having a good job and having a nice house, they all say that it doesn't bring satisfaction, doesn't bring security. But the problem is it does.

It does. Wealth and the world satisfies many needs and many desires. You know, that's why there are so many people who don't see the need to come to church or worship God or hear the gospel or believe in Jesus.

[24 : 51] They have no need of these things because their satisfaction from the world has led them into a false sense of security where they feel so secure and so satisfied by what they have and what they've earned and all the empires that they've built for themselves that they just act like the rich fool who built bigger and better barns and decides to take life easy and enjoy all the pleasures that they can get their hands on.

But you know, for you, as someone who's heard this word, who knows the gospel, although your hungry heart appears secure and maybe satisfied with life and you might even seem religious, you know deep down that you have crowded in everything from this life and crowded out the one thing that will give you eternal satisfaction and security.

That is Jesus Christ. you know it. And you also know that if you continue to try and find your satisfaction and your security in all the things of the world, then you know that you're guaranteed to hear God saying to you at the end of your days, fool, tonight your soul will be required of you.

How's your heart? That's what Jesus wants to know. Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart?

Is it a hungry heart? Or is it lastly a healthy heart? Is it a healthy heart?

[26 : 48] Look at verse 15. As for that in the good soil, they are those who hearing the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

So in comparison to the hardened heart, the hollow heart and the hungry heart, Dr. Jesus says that a healthy heart hears the gospel with a good and honest heart and keeps it.

The healthy heart keeps the word. It retains the word. It holds on to the word of God tightly and trusts it. The healthy heart responds to the gospel in faith and obedience.

The healthy heart takes that step of commitment towards Jesus Christ. The healthy heart denies self, takes up their cross and follows after Jesus daily.

That's what the healthy heart does. But you know, what's interesting is the way in which Jesus tells this parable. He describes the different ways the seed landed upon each soil.

[27 : 57] He says that with the hardened heart, the seed fell by the wayside. With the hollow heart, the seed fell onto the rock. With the hungry heart, the seed fell among the thorns.

But with the healthy heart, he says, the seed fell into the good soil. And what Dr. Jesus is revealing to us is that for your heart to be healthy, he says, the seed of God's word has to fall into you.

It has to fall into you. It can't fall by the wayside or onto the rocky ground or among the thorns. The seed has to fall into your heart.

Which means that you have to respond to the word of God by faith and obedience. That's why Jesus gave this call to commitment at the end of his parable.

He said, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And what Jesus was saying was, whoever has a healthy heart, they must respond to the word of God in faith and obedience.

[29 : 06] Whoever has a healthy heart must receive the word of God, accept the word of God, keep the word of God, believe the word of God and give the word of God the primary place in their life.

My friend, the healthy heart has Jesus sitting upon the throne of their heart. Because the healthy heart says, I'm a sinner in need of a saviour.

I'm in ruin in need of a remedy. The healthy heart says, Jesus must increase. I must decrease. My friend, the healthy heart responds to the word of God by confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and committing their life to him by faith.

So how's your heart? The word of God is ignored by the hardened heart. It's undermined by the hollow heart.

It's overcrowded by the hungry heart. But the word of God is welcomed by the healthy heart.

[30 : 20] My unconverted friend, you know who you are. Jesus is asking you today, how's your heart?

Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart? Is it a hungry heart? Or is it a healthy heart? Do you know when J.C. Ryle concluded his sermon on this parable, he said, let us leave this parable with a deep sense of the danger and the responsibility of all the hearers of the gospel.

There are four ways in which we may hear. And of these four, only one is right. There are three kinds of hearers whose souls are an imminent peril.

Many of these kinds of hearers, he says, they are to be found in every congregation. But there is only one class of hearer which is right in the sight of God.

So asks Ryle, what are we? How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart?

[31 : 41] Is it a hollow heart? Is it a hungry heart? Or is it a healthy heart? How's your heart?

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. history of Utah is a healthy heart.

We are grateful to give you a hand. Let us pray. Let us pray.