

The Parable Of The Sower

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 September 2022

Preacher: Duncan Murchison

[0 : 00] And if you do have a Bible with you, please turn to Matthew chapter 13, where we're going to be looking at this parable, the parable of the sower. Most of us don't learn very successfully, or at least I don't, when there's just facts spewed at us almost at record pace.

Well, the way we often learn best is through story. We remember a story that's been told, that grabs our attention, and often what we do then is we remember the point.

If it's a good story, if it's the right story, we remember the point that is being made. But it's something that needs to be relatable, something that connects with us.

And it's why all the things that we read and watch and listen to, they don't go out of fashion because they tell a story. And often as we consume that media, we're actually being taught things, even if we don't always quite realise it.

We're being taught a worldview. We're being taught the way that people should think. And Jesus, of course, understands this dimension of being human, being human himself, and being the one who created us.

[1 : 16] And amongst many things, he was a man who told stories to make his points and fundamentally to show us the gospel, to show our need of him, and also how to live as a Christian.

And these stories that Jesus told, they're what we call parables. They're the real life stories to make a point, even if the specific event didn't happen, they're real life stories.

And this is one of the most famous ones, isn't it? Maybe even if you haven't been to church before, you know at least maybe a little bit about the parable of the sower. You might be at least aware of it.

And maybe if you have been to church all your life, you think, oh, we've heard this before. But I want us to remember the gospel is needed every single day. It never goes out of fashion.

It never gets old. One of the most helpful things, maybe I've said it before, that I read was just simply preach the gospel to yourself every single day. And that is certainly helpful for me because I tend to be forgetful about who God says I am and who God is and what he's done.

[2 : 24] And hopefully this can remind us, but also challenge us in our own Christian lives or challenge us if we haven't placed our faith in Jesus yet.

The Bible so often tells these stories, but they're not just stories. The Bible is also historical events. And Jesus really was there and he really did tell the story and he really was making this point.

And when we read the Old Testament and see all the stories there, there are historical events that happened. But this story is a parable and we'll see it applies to each one of us, at least in some way.

And very simply, all I want us to do is look at the four different places the seed is sown. The seed, of course, is the gospel. It's the word of God, the message of Jesus, the forgiveness that he alone can offer.

And the soil is, of course, the human heart. And so what we're getting to an extent is a heart diagnosis, but also an opportunity to see the God who loves us and, in fact, promises to give us a new heart.

[3 : 34] So let's see these four places one by one and see the different reactions to the seed being sown and see how we ourselves may behave, may respond.

So first of all, we have the path. Some of the seeds sown in verse four falls on the path and the birds take it up and devour it.

And that's the thing that makes a path so useful, isn't it? That nothing does grow there. If you're climbing up one of our many mountains, if you're doing something like the West Highland Way, then you want a path that you can see, that you can follow, that hasn't been overgrown or you're going to get lost.

That's what makes a path useful. So if you plant seeds, they're not going to grow as people walk over them, as birds pick them up. There will be no roots. They'll be immediately snatched up.

And so what we're dealing with here is a hard heart, a place where nothing grows. And Jesus is speaking to, well, probably two different types of people. And they're kind of the same, really, but they come from two very different places.

[4 : 47] One is perhaps more obvious, but another can be hidden well, especially in churches. So first of all, there's the hard heart that is obvious, and that's the one that wholeheartedly embraces sin, that likes to do wrong, that rejects God, that doesn't want anything to do with God, that wants to live for self and will make no secret about it.

And that's just the way that we live. They have a hard heart because they don't want to hear the gospel. They don't want to know anything about Jesus. They don't want to know anything about the Bible. They want to live for self.

And really, that's all of us without Christ. That's how we all live if we haven't placed our faith in Christ. And it's sin itself that causes this. It's sin that brings the hard heart.

And the more we sin, the easier it becomes. And we all probably are slightly aware of this ourselves. Maybe there's something we thought was wrong at one time. We felt guilty about it. The occasional lie, maybe.

But now we just naturally slip into it. We can do it. And it's easy. You know the person who lives a lie, a secret life, and they're hardened to the guilt, hardened to the hurt.

[5 : 57] It causes others. How many people have abandoned their families and do it guilt-free, for example? Hearing the gospel or the good news about Jesus does nothing.

Because this person doesn't, at least doesn't want to think that they're doing anything wrong. And it's the way that most of this world chooses to live. Maybe there was some extreme examples there.

But it is, it's personal freedom. It's looking into ourselves to decide who we are and what we're going to do. And that living without God is better. Because then we can live guilt-free. People who harden their hearts against God because they don't want him.

And although verse 18, of course, reminds us the devil is active in this, it doesn't excuse a person because they've hardened their heart, because they've embraced sin. They've just given the devil an easy target, keeping it from sinking into their heart and taking root.

So that's the first type of person. The second type of person is no different, really. The only thing different is they cloak it in religion. Jesus was probably speaking partly to the Pharisees, to the Sadducees, the religious elite, in other words.

- [7 : 10] And these were people who were so sure that they had it worked out, who were so sure that their good works were enough, that they were really righteous and good in God's eyes, that they'd hardened their hearts by relying on themselves.
- They cloaked it in faith. They said all the right things. They went to all the right meetings. They knew all the right people. They were the right people to know. But what they'd actually done was they'd hardened their hearts and lived for self.
- And actually, whenever they met with Jesus, whenever they heard about the kingdom of God, about the gospel, well, they didn't want to hear it, did they? That's what, if you read the gospels, that's what they say.
- They're the ones who would end up putting Jesus to death, conspiring to have him killed, because their hearts were hardened. They cloaked it in their religion, but they were the same.
- They were happily sinning. And they're really the same because what it's saying is, I don't need God. And I can look to myself. And I can work it out.
- [8 : 10] And I can manage. And I don't need Jesus. I don't need forgiveness. I can do it. Both are just wanting to be their own master, the captain of their own fate, and to say that Jesus is Lord is just too much because it ends all freedom.
- It ends all self-reliance. And this is maybe the most challenging one for us who are in church, who have been brought up in church, perhaps, because how easy it would be to think we can rely on ourselves, to think that because we've been brought up in it, that we know it, that we don't really need to hear the gospel anymore, that we've got it worked out.
- Where do we stand? Where do I stand? Where do you stand? It's so easy for us to become self-reliant. Believe me, I know. And that's the root of it, isn't it?
- Self-reliance instead of trust in Jesus. It is a hard heart. Like the path, hard, stamped down, nothing can grow. The seed is snatched away.
- The word is snatched away. And there is no hope of life, at least humanly speaking. So that's the path. But second of all, the seed is sown amongst the rocks.
- [9 : 22] Verse 5, The other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. And verse 20 says, This is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy.
- Yet he has no root in himself, endures for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. There's not just hard-hearted people in this world.
- How many people have we personally known who have been to church often, who have come along and seem to love it, but quickly disappear as soon as things start to get a little bit difficult? How many people have been brought up in church and then try and leave as soon as they can, as soon as they're given that little bit of freedom?
- And how many people just sit in church week by week because it's what we've always done? There's some nice stories. It's nice when the sermon tells us exactly what we want to hear.
- But when it comes to being challenged by God's word, that's when we start to, you know, whoa, I don't want to hear that, to move away. Or as it says here, the sun of opposition comes, it scorches, and people fall away.
- [10 : 36] And it just becomes a phase of life, a youthful naivety, whatever you want to call it. Maybe challenges come from other people, questioning the faith, and it's all too easy to abandon the faith because it was never that deep anyway.

That's challenging. There can be great enthusiasm and then yet nothing. I remember when I was in early high school, there was all of a sudden, a few classmates, and I was probably the only Christian in my year in school, but all of a sudden, there was those with no church background who started going along to local Baptist church where they had, you know, a youth pastor, lots of youth ministry, very trendy, very cool.

And I was excited to be no longer the only person who went to church. This was great. And those who went seemed excited to be at church and they liked the message and, you know, the sermons were good.

The gospel was preached and it was great. And yet, very sadly, a few months later, people were gone. And please don't take that as me being judgmental of these people.

I'm sure there were many complex reasons for it and these are really straightforward things. But one thing is definitely true. They didn't have the roots in the gospel.

[11 : 52] The word hadn't taken root. And what each one of us needs, no matter what phase we may think of ourselves as being, if you can put it like that in the Christian life, we need roots that are planted in the gospel, in the message of the cross.

We need that. Only a tree that can grow its roots will really survive. There was recently a news article that was saying we had a false autumn and that trees were losing their leaves too early.

And they were saying the only trees that will really survive and thrive are those that had their roots deep because they could keep feeding from the earth. And that is what we need to be like.

We need to have deep roots, not into ourselves, not into just going to church, but deep roots into actually knowing God, knowing the gospel, trusting in the gospel.

That is what we need. Maybe this one seems like less of a problem in our society because so many people don't even step anywhere near church.

[12 : 57] Our culture has proudly moved on and there aren't maybe even many people who would receive this news with joy. At least it feels like that. But it does happen. And we must be looking into our own hearts and challenging ourselves, whether we are growing deep roots or if we are just happy to coast along, as long as it works for us, as long as it's easy, as long as we're not challenged too much.

And especially those who grew up in church who are younger and then again have that freedom when they leave home. Are the roots there? Are they growing? And all of us, are they growing into the gospel or are they growing into this world?

And please, please do not take this as a guilt trip or anything like that. We must be challenged to reflect on what it is that we are rooted in in life, that keeps us grounded in life.

Is it ourselves or is it the good news about Jesus on the cross? This is the challenge of this passage. But third of all, and perhaps even more challenging for some of us at least, there are the thorns.

Maybe the most challenging in our society, some seeds fall among the thorns and the thorns grow up and choke them. And we're told that in verse 22, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

[14 : 29] It's something, isn't it, that can be so subtle, so very, very well hidden, even from ourselves, even in our own hearts, this comfort, this need to fit in for luxury even, some of us.

Our faith can be destroyed by the weight of other things and shown not to be that strong. Our hearts can be choked with many things.

I am not a gardener, to put it mildly. I'm the kind of person that I'll be walking in the drawer one day and suddenly notice there are weeds everywhere and they just seem to have appeared.

I've never noticed them before. And I'm told they've actually been there a while, but in my mind, they've just come. They've just appeared overnight and that's it.

And maybe some of them do, but apparently, they've been there a while, they've been underneath, they've been slowly growing, they've come through the cracks and they're there. I just haven't been paying attention, I'm told.

[15 : 35] But that's what happens in our hearts. There's things that grow that we are not wanting or willing to deal with. The thorns. These appear, they take place, they start to wrap around our hearts to choke them.

Jesus describes them as the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches. And we ignore them and we see them too late. And if there ever was a society that needed to hear this, it's ours.

Maybe people are struggling now. Of course they are. And yet at the same time, it's also true that our society is richer than most other societies throughout all of history.

We have so much more than any other nation or whatever in history. The world's wealth is unparalleled, especially here in the West.

And the world seems to offer so much. Have the latest gadget, you'll be happy. Get a nice house, you'll have made it. Get a new car and you'll be the envy of those around you.

[16 : 40] Get a good holiday and you'll be more relaxed than ever. There's so many things and maybe it's something different for you. But whatever it is that we think will bring the good life, the happy life, the relaxed life, the life of rest, that can often be the thorn in our hearts that grows and wraps itself around our faith and will choke it.

And you know, none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves. But it's these things that take control, that we let grow, that we let take the place of Christ.

And that's what makes it so subtle. God gives good gifts and he graciously gives and it's good to rest, for example. It's not wrong to have a house. It's not wrong to have a car.

And yet when these things become ultimate, that's when the cares of this world, the deceit of riches is taking over. When these things become what we live for, what controls our lives, that's when we're being taken over.

And the question to ask of us to lose, whatever it might be, would I be able to be content? Would I think that life was good and worth living? These things, they grow up subtly.

[17 : 51] We get them all and we don't realise till too late they've choked. And it's not just for the wealthy, actually, because what it is is a question of our hearts, a question of the attitude that we have towards the riches of this world, the cares of this world.

We could be poor and yet spend money that we don't have, still be desperate for more stuff, the latest stuff. And, you know, you see society, more and more debt, all these things, all these problems.

And when I think about these things, I know it would be hard for me to answer some of these completely honestly because there is so much pressure around us with these things.

And they want to take our heart. They want us to take us away from Jesus, to destroy our walk with him. We can't let these take the place.

They are nothing next to knowing Jesus. They are nothing next to the power of the cross, the hope of eternal life. Jesus spoke to what's described as a rich young man in Matthew 19.

[18 : 57] He was told that to be perfect and to get eternal life, he had to sell all that he possessed, give to the poor, and that he would have treasure in heaven and he could follow Jesus. And the man, what happened to him is he went away sad because he had a lot of possessions.

You know, he was offered treasure in heaven, but he was sad because it would mean losing everything he held dear in this life. It's Jesus who needs to come first.

And the answer isn't to say just give away all your stuff, but what is needed is a deeper love for Jesus. That can mean giving away stuff and giving up stuff, but what is needed is to know Jesus, to have a deeper love for him, a greater knowledge of him, a closer walk and relationship with him.

When we are cultivating that in our lives, then the cares of this world and all its empty promises, all its vanity, will not hold the same sway over us.

There is something more precious. There is a treasure that does not rust, that cannot be taken, that will never perish, and that is following Jesus. It is knowing him and being one of his people and being with him.

[20 : 10] We need to watch out for the thorns, for the cares, the riches, the deceit that they offer in this world. But finally, we have what is called the good soil.

We might ask what the best conditions are for something to grow. It's the good soil that's been prepared and ready to receive the seeds that are sown.

It's these that bear fruit. We're told in verse 8, other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. And we're told that as for what was sown on good soil, verse 23, this is the one who hears the word and understands it.

He indeed bears fruit and yields. In one case, a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. When these seeds grow up, it's fruit that comes.

They grow. They show great growth. They stand proud. They can be harvested by the farmer later. They're exactly what has been looked for, what has been wanted from sowing the seeds. That kind of heart, that kind of soil, it's the open heart.

[21 : 19] One that is ready to receive the gospel. One that wants to know Jesus, that wants to meet Jesus, that wants to forsake everything else and is glad to run to Jesus and to find him with open arms.

And yet, I read that and I'm challenged. Because the one who's received the word bears fruit, lots of fruit, by the sounds of things.

And that is the sign of faith, isn't it? By their fruit you shall know them. It's highly challenging, but what we must look for in our own lives, often we can be very quick to look at other people and see if they're bearing fruit.

But what we should be looking at is our own hearts, our own lives, and saying, am I bearing fruit? Often we're content with the intellectual belief, an important thing, of course, and yet what we need is the fruit.

If we've got the root in the gospel, we need the fruit that comes from faith. That's what these beliefs should lead to. Jesus says in Matthew 7, they know false prophets by their fruit as only a good tree brings good fruit.

[22 : 25] And it applies to all of us. And so what we need to be are people who bear fruit. You know, we're told in Galatians that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, self-control.

Often what we look for in ourselves and in others, I suppose, is giftedness, is how good we are at something, how capable we are. Not bad things, God gives gifts, of course.

And yet the fruit that God is looking for, that Christ is looking for, is love, it's joy, it's peace. It's a character that is transformed by the power of the gospel, by seeing Christ on the cross and seeing him dying for us and how we have sinned and how he has forgiven us.

And so as we live the Christian life, it is fruit that we are looking for in ourselves. It is following Jesus in everything, into opposition even. It's being content with our lot in life because we have Jesus, because we have a treasure in heaven, because we know that even if we were to suffer all our lives here, we would have an eternity, a whole weight of glory there waiting for us.

It is fruit that follows Jesus in telling us to go and make disciples of all nations, to share that faith, to go out. God is growing in everything. That is the fruit.

[23 : 52] That is what the good soil brings. That is what the word brings in the good soil. That is what Christ brings in the good soil. But then, for the unbeliever as well, what we're being told is only someone who is this soil, who has this open heart will be saved.

Only someone who will listen to what God says and accept his forgiveness will be saved. We must turn aside from our hard hearts. We must not care for the things of this world.

We must be prepared for opposition. And the obvious pushback, and even those of us who are Christians could do this, we can't get rid of these hard hearts. We do care about things, material, whatever it might be.

We can't stop opposition and it's hard not to react. It's hard not to get discouraged. We might want a heart like that, but we know that it isn't us and that we can't do it by ourselves. And that's really kind of the point.

We can't do it by ourselves. We can't. It's impossible. We can't save ourselves. We can't give ourselves a heart transplant. We can't make ourselves good soil. The message here isn't that we must try really hard and remove all these things.

[25 : 00] Yes, we can be challenged, those of us who are Christians, but the message isn't simply try really hard, get these things out of your life, and then you'll be a good person. That's what the Pharisees believed, because the harder we try, the more we realise we're failing miserably.

So what can be done? Well, this is the good news. We can trust that God will work in us and that he will change us from within. And maybe it's worth saying that even the desire to be rid of these things is a sign that God is working in our hearts and is doing something new.

The thing about soil, though, is that it's just soil. It can't really change itself very much. It's just there. And what's needed is for the farmer or whoever to make the changes.

And that's exactly what God promised to do in the Old Testament. That's exactly what God does for each one of us. He promised in Ezekiel 36, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Do you see what it is? It's a whole new heart. The heart of stone, the hard heart, the one that will not take anything, the one that will not bear fruit, the one that will not do it, it's removed from us and we are given a new heart, a new spirit and it is God who does it.

[26 : 33] That is what the Bible makes very clear. It is him who saves and that is wonderful good news because if it depended on us, if it was about what we did, we'd never bear fruit, we'd never receive the gospel, we'd never want it, we would just keep going and even if we tried really hard we would keep failing.

Our hearts would still be the same as we said in our first point. We would still just be living for ourselves. We would still be hard to the message of the gospel that says we can't do it, that says Christ has done it though, that he has died in our place and that we don't get our own righteousness, that we get his righteousness.

We need him to do it or we'll keep rejecting, we'll keep chasing the rich of this world, we'll keep facing opposition, not being able to deal with it.

But God gives us a new heart. One that receives his word, one that listens to him and the promise is that if you do come to him, if you do come to God, if you do trust in Jesus, he will give you a new heart.

Not that he might, he will. One that trusts in him, one that listens to him, one that hears the word and grows in faith, grows in fruitfulness, that is what we are promised.

[27 : 52] We are promised that he will do it. He will give us a new heart. He will rescue us and we will bear fruit. Yes, we can be challenged by these things and it's right that we are those of us who believe, but fundamentally, what God does is he rescues us, he gives us the new heart.

He has done the work through the cross where he took all the guilt of our sin, all that we had done wrong on his own shoulders and died in our place so that we could have that new heart, so that we could have Christ's righteousness and it would be credited to each one of us who believes in him.

That's the message of the gospel, that's what each one of us needs every single day of our lives. May God bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray to him.

Lord, we find it so easy to get distracted. We find it so easy to be too concerned about the deceitfulness of riches.

Our hearts are so often looking in the wrong places. Lord, forgive us for these things and help us to rest not in ourselves but in the new heart that you promise us and the hope of the gospel that Christ has died for us.

[29 : 11] Help us to rest in these things. We so often forget. We so often rely on ourselves. Help us. We do pray. Thank you for the gospel. Thank you for Christ. Thank you for all that he has done on our behalf and help us to rest in this always.

And we do pray that each one of us would bear the fruit that comes with repentance, the fruit that comes with faith, that we would live as your people, that we would live with the fruit of the Spirit.

again acknowledging it's of the Spirit, not of ourselves and that we would live Christ-like godly characters in everything that we do. Lord, we pray all these things in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen.