

# The Parable of the Sower - Listen, Know, and Tell the Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] So this reading this morning, and of course the following message on it, follows the effort made, at least over the Christmas period, to hand out the known Christianity cards.

A number of these were handed out at the carol service, you know, carefully, you know, with conversations to go with them. There are plenty more in one of the trays just out there on the notice board.

I plan on running this as many times as I can. It ran, I think, there were three last year, possibly four. There were four, including the children's one, which happened on a Friday evening, which went, I think, swimmingly well, tremendously well for them. But I plan to do the same again this year. It's a five-week course. I'll just read the questions out to you that actually get answered. So why did God create the world in us? Why does the world have so many problems?

[ 1 : 03 ] Why did Jesus come to die on the cross? Why does the Christian life matter? Why did Jesus create the church? The reason why these, I've chosen these questions and to answer these questions is because my fear, and I think it's a, it's not just my fear.

It's, I've spoken to a lot of other ministers and ministers who are much older and wiser than me and men who you can trust. That there is a growing concern that there's a belief in Jesus separate from a commitment to the church.

That there's a growing distinction between being a Christian and being the church, of which in Scripture that doesn't exist. If you're a Christian, then you're part of the body of Christ.

You are in the church. And therefore this, the idea of this course is to understand that if you're going to come into Christianity, that you're coming into the body of Christ.

It's not just about your personal walk with Jesus. And the reason I say that is because the very first question highlights the importance that when God created man and he created everything else, that even though Adam, the first man, had God, it's a, there's a real challenge there to any Christian who believes, well, as long as I have God, I'm okay.

[ 2 : 25 ] As long as I'm, long as I'm with God, I'm fine. But, but you're disagreeing with God if you actually say that. Because God, even though he created Adam, he was with Adam in the garden, said straight after that, it is not good that man be alone.

So the idea that a person having a relationship just one-to-one with God is a good thing, is good, but at the same time, God says it is not good for man to be alone, so he created Eve.

So the idea of the body of Christ being a church where we're with God and with each other is just reflective of the first creation. So God knew what he was doing in the beginning, it went wrong, and so when God does it again in a new creation, the church, he brings us into relationship with him, and it's not good that we be alone, and so he brings us into relationship with others.

So, if you want to consider coming on it yourself, some of you I think it would do you tremendously good to do so. But I also think if you want to come on it as a means of being able to share your faith, or share what the Bible teaches with somebody else, then that would be a good way as well.

We want there to be no uncertain sound about the bell that we ring. We don't want any form of deliberate ambiguity or accidental ambiguity.

[ 3 : 55 ] We want the clarity of the gospel to be made, to be heard properly. So, with that in mind, I'd like us to turn to Matthew chapter 13.

As you make your way to Matthew chapter 13 verse 1, it really begins in chapter 12 where Jesus has been healing people.

He heals a man with a withered hand. He indicates that a tree is known by his fruit. He also speaks about the binding of the strong man, hence why evangelism is possible.

And then in chapter 13, he begins to speak in parables. And this is what he says, chapter 13 verse 1. Now hear God's word. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach.

And he told them many things in parables, saying, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.

[ 5 : 06 ] 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched.

Since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

He who has ears, let him hear. Then the disciples came to him and said, why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables.

Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear. Nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, you will indeed hear, but never understand.

[ 6 : 16 ] You will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their hearts they have closed.

Lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are you, blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. Hear then the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what is sown along the path.

As for the one, as for what was sown on the rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

[ 7 : 25 ] As for what was sown among the thorns, that is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on the good soil, 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.

Well, may God bless the reading of his word. We're going to come back to that in its message. As you make your way through Matthew chapter 13, it becomes apparent to you very quickly why you listen to the word of God, or it becomes apparent to you very quickly why you're a person who doesn't listen to the word of God.

At the end of this message, you will know why you ought to proclaim the word of God to other people. You'll know why you need to hear the word of God for yourself.

As you make your way through the parable, you begin to realize that actually your ears are connected to your heart. Your eyes are connected to your heart. That you're able to hear the word of God depending on the condition of your heart.

[ 9 : 03 ] That you're able to see what God speaks of dependent on the condition of your heart. So, as you make your way through this parable, you'll know at the end of it, or at least partway through and in conclusion, why you listen to the word of God.

Why you pay attention and why from it you live according to it. When Jesus speaks in parables, he does so for a reason, and that's why the disciples asked Jesus the question, why do you speak in parables?

But he's highlighting a number of things that we of the church have looked at briefly, briefly, but of course recently, that the Christian sees by hearing.

The Christian understands by hearing. The Christian lives by hearing. Those in the world live by sight. But we see, but the way God causes a Christian to see is by hearing.

Because faith, we are to live by faith, and faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word. It's a fairly simple principle. That the way you see is by hearing.

[10:18] And that's what we've looked at last, or this year, earlier this year. As we come to this parable, we begin to realize that it's very much about hearing, it's very much about listening, but underneath the listening and the hearing, you begin to realize that it's actually to do with the condition of a person's heart.

Where is their heart when you speak to them? Are they really tuned in to what you are saying, or is their heart somewhere else?

The teacher has this trick that I've, not that I've ever seen, but I can remember it being told to me that they would be speaking, and if they notice a child not paying attention, they would sew that child's name into the middle of what they were saying, and all of a sudden, though the teacher would carry on speaking about what they were teaching, that particular child, on hearing their name, would pick up their ears and look at the teacher.

It's almost as if that we're only tuned in to hear certain things. And when we get indications floating around that these are the type of things that we want to hear, then at that point we pay attention.

So Jesus speaks in parables for such a people so that they don't pick up their ears, so that they go without hearing. Jesus is seeking those who are seeking to pay attention in many ways.

[11:47] There is nothing else, according to Jesus here, that can produce a harvest other than people responding to the Word of God. There is no other seed that can be sown that can produce a harvest other than the Word of God.

And therefore, to keep yourself from the Word of God or to keep others from the Word of God is to keep them from fruitfulness, the fruit that John speaks of in John 15 that actually glorifies God through our life.

Jesus speaks here in a parable to emphasize some things and to emphasize other things that he mentions as we go through. But nothing is more important than your ability to be able to hear the Word of God.

And it has very little to do with your hearing. It has very much to do with the condition of your heart.

Is your heart here at church this morning ready to hear what Jesus has to say to you?

Irrespective of who it comes through or how it comes to you. You know, sometimes we lay down those conditions, don't we? That if we're not discerning in hearing what Jesus' words sound like, we can say, well, we'll only listen to them if they come to us via this person or this means or that book or that video.

[13:17] But the undiscerning reader and listener makes those kind of conditions as a means of not listening to everything that is actually being taught.

So Jesus is putting all the emphasis here on your ability to hear, not on his ability to teach you.

Jesus is just telling a parable.

It's quite clear what he said. We've all read it together. The emphasis now is not on what he has said but on whether or not you have listened to what he has said. He draws no attention to himself of how well he has spoken or how well he told the parable or how well the parable came across in his delivery.

That's not the emphasis. The emphasis is on let him who has ears to hear hear. And the parable is fairly straightforward that the gospel is the seed that is thrown out onto the different grounds and the different grounds and the type of hearts that the gospel falls into.

Some of those hearts are incredibly hard. Some of those hearts are incredibly shallow. So the gospel seed is the gospel.

[14:29] The human heart is the type of ground that Jesus is speaking of here. And it shows that not everyone responds to the gospel in the same way depending on where their heart is before God.

And that's why Jesus decides to speak in parables. In other words he speaks to those who will listen because they will listen. And he speaks to them in parables because they want to listen so intently that they're willing to listen to a parable to get to the meaning that Jesus is speaking about. But in verse 11 this is what Jesus says. To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven but to them it has not been given. In other words that's why I speak in parables. In other words I'm teaching in a parable so that I can withhold the truth from those who do not want to listen. Someone reads a parable they go away not understanding what it means and Jesus' point

is proven.

They don't have ears to hear, they don't understand, they don't listen, I speak in a parable to make my point that they don't get it and they go away not getting it. My point is made.

[ 15 : 46 ] But even the disciples later on when Jesus speaks about the parable of the weeds and the tares are a little bit confused and Jesus then has to explain to them what the parable means and what he's indicating to them at that point upon explaining it is you should know better but even your heart has been given over to some form of idolatry that has dulled it to such an extent that you are now unable to hear the word of God with clarity.

Jonathan Edwards, not the triple jumper, the Christian back in the day said this, that wherever there is remaining sin in a person's heart there is a dullness to the things of God, that suddenly they are unable to hear the word of God, they are unable to see the things that God speaks of and he gets that from Matthew 13 that all forms of idolatry causes our senses, our spiritual senses to malfunction, that no longer can we see the things that Jesus is speaking about, no longer can we hear the things that Jesus is speaking about.

We've become like our idols who have eyes but cannot see, who have ears but cannot hear. We've given ourselves over to things that cannot show us the way.

So the people that are around listening to Jesus love being around Jesus when he's doing his miracles. They love being around Jesus when he has a word about the future.

They love being around Jesus when he's able to cure a man who has a withered hand or hear a person who is demon possessed.

[ 17 : 32 ] They love being around Jesus when he can do these things. They love being entertained but when it comes to listening to Jesus, they don't want that. no one seems to want to listen.

So Jesus speaks in a way in parables where it almost becomes purposely difficult to listen but those who want to try hard. They attune their hearts to listen to what Jesus is actually saying.

Jesus is filtering out those who want to listen from those who don't. anyone who finds something difficult will either push through that difficulty or stop at that difficulty.

And no one ever learns anything without doing the thing that is difficult. If you always stop at your limit of what you find easy and don't move on to the difficult thing, then you never move on.

You're always limited to the easiest thing that you find to do, the easiest thing that you find to understand. This is why many Christians throughout their Christian life stick to certain parts of the Bible and avoid certain other parts.

[ 18 : 49 ] Yeah, I find Revelation difficult but I read it. Lamentations, yeah, it's not the happiest book in the world but you read it. Jeremiah, well he's got his issues as well but you read it and the reason for reading it is because God is doing something to you as you read it.

God is wrestling with your heart. He is walking you down the path that he wants to take you. He is doing something good to you and it may not feel good at the moment that it is happening.

So Jesus does explain parables as he goes on but he indicates that as he explains these parables that even the disciples' hearts are caught up into a form of idolatry that has made them dull of hearing.

Every heart has it seems its idol that has to go but the distinction here is between listening and understanding. Everyone can listen to a point but it's whether or not they pursue the meaning and the understanding of what Jesus is saying.

So Jesus speaks and he speaks in a parable and your desire to understand that parable is your persistence to listen, to take it in, to weigh everything that Jesus has said.

[ 20 : 11 ] You're the person that seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You're the one who pursues through everything that Jesus has said regardless of whether or not you fully understand it.

You eat it all because you know it's good for you even if you don't like the taste of it. Some of us might have had a few items on our Christmas plate. like that. You eat them because they're good for you not because they taste necessarily that good.

And in many ways Christians need to learn that as they come to the word of God you eat it all. Even if you don't like the taste of it you eat it all because it's good for you. And it comes out you are what you eat in the very strictest form here.

So what does this have to say? Well number one the sower goes out to sow and the sowing is the gospel out into the world. And it goes on to different kind of hearts. There are hard hearts.

There are shallow hearts. There are hearts that are preoccupied with other things other than God. And then there are of course receptive hearts. Not perfect hearts but at least they are receptive. [ 21 : 18 ] They're not without sin but they're at least submissive to the one who is speaking. They're not without their problems. They're not without perhaps some form of hardness or difficulties but the point here is is that they're receptive to the word.

And so the seed that falls on the hard ground is the hard heart. This is the person who has over years decided not to listen to the word of God.

The person with the hard heart is the person who has continued to continue in sin. To not repent and believe. And over the years the hard is just got harder and harder and harder.

I think probably one of the best illustrations at this point is the woman who's accused of being caught in adultery. And Jesus asks for witnesses to come forward.

And you know he gets down and he writes in the sand. And then he stands up and he says you know let him who is without sin cast the first stone. If you read the next part of what happens next it says they all left the oldest first.

[ 22 : 34 ] They all left but they left in a particular order. The oldest left first. It seems as almost as Jesus is indicating that the hardness of heart hardens as you get older.

That as you get older the heart actually gets even harder than it was when you were younger. Such is that built up hardness. It's the man in Romans 1 who listens to the word of God but just suppresses the truth and his heart has just become harder.

Then we have the gospel seed falling on the shallow ground. This is a person with a shallow heart. This is a person who has received the gospel with joy. They can even remember the day they heard the gospel.

They can even remember the day they believed in it. Just for a few moments, a couple of weeks, they were in church and they were attending everything. They were at the prayer meetings.

They were at morning and evening services. They were serving in the congregation. Over the next few weeks they were just doing so much but over the next few years suddenly they don't do that anymore.

[ 23 : 44 ] They don't attend the Bible study anymore. They don't come to the prayer meeting anymore. At the beginning they were doing all of these things but now they don't do any of them.

They turn up perhaps every now and then to a church service. But no prayer meeting or Bible study, no listening, nothing that requires effort. The shallow heart that was receptive, joyfully receptive at the beginning but because they have no root and they have no depth, their faith is superficial, surface.

easily washed aside when something else comes into their life. There's a profession of faith. There is an early excitement but there is no growth.

There's no long-term growth. And what happens is that they begin to recognize patterns as a form of Christianity when they're not.

I've given you this illustration before but it's worth remembering especially with children in the service that there's a big difference between growth and a piling up.

[ 24 : 53 ] That tree is not going to grow. You all know that that tree is not going to grow. And if I brought in a brick each week and stuck it in the corner, over the course of a month you might say that pile is growing.

But it's not growing at all. It's simply accumulating. There's simply more bricks. There's more things. But it's not growth. It's getting bigger. There's an accumulation of bricks but it's not growth.

And what happens to a person who receives the gospel with joy but has a shallow heart? They accumulate things. I've been to this church for 15 years.

That's an accumulation. It may not be growth. It just could be an accumulation of church services. I've been to I've served in the church for 25 years.

But it could simply be an accumulation of activity within a church. It may not actually be growth. And so the shallow heart is one that doesn't grow but can easily accumulate Christian practices over the years.

[ 26 : 02 ] And there's a big distinction between growth which is organic, which is natural, which comes out from the heart and that which is accumulative over years. That you're a plodder, that you're a good plodder, and that you've accumulated many of these Christian practices, but there's still no growth.

And there is no growth because you haven't really listened to the word of God. You've not really been receptive. You received it but then other things have just washed that away. And then we have the heart that is choked out.

And I've always found this one the most difficult one to understand because is this speaking of a Christian who is a Christian or is this speaking of a person who again received the word but then the cares of the world just destroyed the faith?

I think that the more I look at this I think it could be both. I'm not entirely sure of if there is a fence here and you have to come down on one side. I think there's quite a lot of Christians who are choked.

They're alive. they belong to Christ they are alive but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches have such a strong grip on them that they're basically paralysed from living the Christian life properly.

[ 27 : 24 ] They're choked. They're not dead but they are choked. They're starved as it were of the life-giving oxygen and water that Christ gives. They're just not caught up in the things of God.

And it is almost point for point relational that people who are caught up with the cares of the world often think that the deceitfulness of riches is the answer to those cares in the world.

In other words, this person here in this parable is the person who has lots of things to care about, lots of good things to care about. Can he provide for his wife and his children?

Can she make sure that she's got nice clothes or good health care or a number of, you know, just genuine cares of food on the table and clothes on my back and somewhere to live.

But then the temptation is to believe that the provider of all those things is riches. And they get choked out by pursuing the riches rather than the God who provides the blessing.

[ 28 : 31 ] And suddenly their Christian life is not unchristian, but they're looking to the wrong thing to take care of their cares. It's their very pursuit of taking care of the cares, but taking care of the cares in the wrong way that choke out their faith.

In other words, they make the classic mistake that God's people have always made, and that is that they exchange the blessings of God for the God of blessing.

They come to love the gifts more than the giver. power. They come to recognize, at least, that they think that the true power is in the riches rather than in the God who can give those riches.

And this is why we've prayed often that we'd much rather have a little blessed than a huge amount unblessed. Because what we're recognizing when we're saying that is that it's not riches that can solve anything, but rather God who can solve all things.

God is the one who blesses. And so the person who is choked out by the cares of the world is probably the good Christian person sat in church and recognizes that as he sits there, or as she sits there, little cares that you take care of every day that seems as though I just do this without God and as long as I have money in the bank to get me through.

[ 30 : 09 ] And it's that simple slip of deceitfulness creeping in that suddenly that my security comes down to what I'm paid, that my security comes down to where I live, that my security comes down to the clothes that I have, in the health that I have.

That simple act of deceitfulness is a distraction from the God who keeps you healthy, who keeps you fed, who keeps you warm, who keeps you in the company of his people, who are able to provide.

That deceitfulness of riches. I was once asked a question by a young man who was training to be a doctor over in Sheffield, and he said, which do you think is the biggest problem, having lots of money or having not very much money?

And I said, well, it depends how you look at it. I said, there certainly is the case that a deceitfulness of riches can cause great problems. You know, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul?

There is a danger in having lots of money and not being able to handle it. But I said, the other danger is not having a lot of money and always pursuing it. that you're always pursuing money because you think that's going to take care of everything.

[ 31 : 35 ] And yet, it can't really take care of a great deal, at least not the things that God is concerned about. So the issue here is not that there's a problem with money, by the way.

The issue here is that there's a problem with the man with the money. money. Okay? So the problem is not that money is bad, the problem is that man is bad. Men and women can't handle

money because it has a deceitful power over them by which they are convinced that this is something to be worshipped, something to live their life by.

But then we have the good soil. Now this good soil is the heart that is simply open and receptive to the word of God.

It's not as if this person doesn't have any problems. But their heart is not hard and their heart is not shallow and their heart tries not to be preoccupied.

It's open, it's submissive to hearing the word of God, receiving the word of God and understanding the word of God. In other words, it's a person who has decided to make the conscious decision to consciously live a Christian life.

[ 32 : 51 ] And to be consciously Christian, not just Christian, but consciously Christian in your decisions and actions requires listening to the word of God. In other words, I need to know what Jesus wants from me in order to live it.

I need to know what Jesus is expecting in order to follow him. I need to know where Jesus is going so that I can go in the same direction that Jesus is going.

And the word of God provides all of that. If my heart is open and receptive. And of course when it is, then the word produces its fruit, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold.

God. You hear the word of God and the word of God blesses you. You receive the word of God. You understand the word of God. Your life is dictated to you by the word of God.

You don't think it embarrassing to be told what to do by God. In fact, you absolutely enjoy being told what to do by God. Most recently I've been reading, as I'm making my way through my own Bible readings, Jeremiah.

[ 34 : 04 ] And I got to Jeremiah 20 where Jeremiah has got this massive complaint against God. And his complaint goes something like this. That I'm not having a good time with you or the world that I'm living in.

And I've got two issues. I've got those out there that I'm struggling with and I've got you up there who I'm struggling with. And the problem that I have with you, Lord, Jeremiah is quite full on in the way that he's saying this, is that you told me that being a prophet was going to be difficult, but you didn't tell me how difficult it was going to be.

In other words, I grant to you, Lord, that you told me that the calling was going to be hard, but you hid from me how hard it was actually going to be. You hid from me just how difficult it was going to be.

You deceived me. And so here you have Jeremiah being called into the Christian life, if I can put it that way, being called to follow Christ. And Christ says, well, you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.

But he doesn't really go into great detail of what that actually looks like. And so when it comes along, you, like Jeremiah, begins to complain to God. You didn't tell me it's going to be this difficult. I know that you said it was going to be hard, but you didn't really, I didn't think you meant this hard.

[ 35 : 23 ] And that's Jeremiah's complaint. He is though, he's saying to God, you've deceived me, because even though you said it was going to be difficult, you didn't really explain what those difficulties were.

But then he goes on to say this, but I can't stop speaking. I can't stop telling people the word of God, because your word is like a fire within me.

And you turn up the heat whenever you like. And God's word in Jeremiah is like a fire that burns in his belly. And any moment Jeremiah feels like he doesn't want to go out and tell the world God's word anymore, God turns up the heat.

And it burns in him so greatly that he can't help but go out and speak God's word all over again. That's the power and the fruitfulness of the word of God in someone's life.

It just takes over them. In other words, Jeremiah, like us, come to realize at some point that when we wrestle with God, it's better to give up, right, because you're not going to win.

[ 36 : 39 ] God's will will always prevail. God's will will always do what God's will wants to do. And so I understand that you might have a similar complaint to Jeremiah, where you say, I know, Lord, you've called me into the Christian life.

I know, Lord, that you have called me to walk in this way. I know that you have called me to deny myself and take up my cross and follow you. I know all of that, but I didn't think you meant this.

I know, Lord, you told me to put your will before my will, but I didn't think it would mean this as well. And that's exactly what it means. But it's the word of God turns up the heat. The moment God's word is within your life, any moment you feel as though, that's it, he turns it up. He brings that burning conviction.

So here's the fruitfulness as we close. Jesus makes a point about quantity. He makes a point about how much fruit is produced. Hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold, verse 23.

[ 37 : 49 ] And you'll notice in verse 23 that the emphasis is not placed on what is sown, but rather on the one who hears. As for what was sown on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understand it.

He indeed bears fruit and yields. In one case, a hundred, sixty, and thirty. This is the person who receives the word of God. They bear fruit.

They bring forth fruit. All Christians will bear fruit. And perhaps the reasons for different quantities here is to do with the amount of appetite you have for actually listening to the word.

So here's the exhortation as we close. God speaks. God speaks. And we are to listen to what God speaks. When God speaks, he creates a harvest.

Men and women, boys and girls, become believers and followers of Christ. Christ. When Jesus said that he needed more workers for the harvest field, because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few, he's speaking of gospel workers.

[ 39 : 08 ] He's speaking of those who will go out and speak the word of God. Of course, he's changing his metaphors, but that's what he is speaking about. Your responsibility as a Christian with the word of God is to take it to somebody else who doesn't have it.

To sit down with them and speak it to them. Perhaps even open the Bible with them. Perhaps you start with someone you know, or you know through, you know, you don't know that well.

Perhaps you ask God to lead you to the person that this is to happen with. But your call is simple. You're a sower. go out and throw the seed. Go and throw it on whoever you meet.

And so the gospel call is simple here this morning. Number one, you're to listen. And you're to listen so that you can know. And you're to know so that you can tell.

You're to listen, you're to know, and you're to tell. That's the point here. To know and to tell the gospel. Amen. that to be ■■■■■■ throws as agglas as a buddy is taking say