

The Parable of the Sower – The Ground

Studies in the Parables

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Bible Text: Luke 8:4-15

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We are going to read in Luke's gospel and the eight chapter and reading together from the verse number four. Let us hear God's Word as we commence hear reading here at this point, Luke chapter eight verse four.

And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.¹

The Lord will add his blessing to the reading of this, his Word, for his name's sake and for his glory.

Please turn with me, again, to this passage that I read from Luke's gospel chapter eight.

¹ Luke 8:4-15.

We open up our Bibles there at this portion of God's Word as we continue with our study in the parables coming today to the parable of the sower.

Before we come to the Lord's message, let us bow in prayer and let us seek the Lord's help and blessing upon us as we come to his precious truth.

Our gracious God and our Father in heaven, we wait on in thy presence in the Savior's name and we pray, oh God, that it will please thee to help us now as we come to the Scriptures. We confess our great need of divine blessing and power and help. We hope that we will know such as we open up the book, as we come to thy Word, to the message for this occasion. Yet, Lord, we pause to pray, to beg of thee for the Spirit's sweet influence and power, for his gracious presence to be over our souls, to encompass our hearts and minds. Oh Lord, bless us this day. Breathe on us we pray. Grant thy help, thy grace. May the Lord Jesus be glorified. May there be work done. May Christ have all the preeminence and may his name be magnified we pray in that name and for his sake. Amen. Amen.

Luke eight and the verse number 15. It says, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."²

Now as we have been conducting this study on the parables of our Lord Jesus Christ we come now to a particular parable which, in many ways, is foundational to all of the parables and provides a very full and a very interesting study for our hearts and for our souls.

The very distribution of the parables is in itself an interesting study. You may be aware, for example, that there are no parables, as such, recorded in the gospel of John. They are found only in the first three gospels, from Matthew through to Luke. You will discover, as well, that some are found only in Matthew. Some are found only in Luke. You will discover, too, that those that are found in Matthew are also found in Mark. You will find, therefore as well, that there are only a few that are found in all three gospels and one of them is this familiar parable of the sower.

Now the details concerning the delivery of this parable are very interesting and very informative. We find that both Matthew and Mark make it clear to us that the parable was delivered by the Lord on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Furthermore, he was on a boat when he delivered this parable. The crowds were so vast that they pressed upon the Lord and, therefore, he entered into a ship and that ship moved out from the shore a little way and turned toward the shore and from that vantage point the Lord delivered this parable and preached to the people who were gathered there before him.

When you think about that particular vantage point, it meant that Lord had a very clear view of the hills of Galilee that stretched away from the shore and ran into the background. And on many of those hills there undoubtedly would have been corn fields

² Luke 8:15.

or fields containing some other kind of grain. And as the Lord stood there and he addressed the gathered crowds—and I say perhaps because the Word doesn't record it for us—but perhaps he saw even what he talked about here in this parable, that is, a sower going forth to sow.

Now that is only speculation on my part. I cannot be dogmatic about that, but I do know that standing there looking for the shores of Galilee he would have been looking at fields and he would have been looking at the grain. He would have been seeing many of the very things that he mentions here in this particular parable.

On the occasion of the delivery of the parable as I have noted with you already, great multitudes were present. They were listening to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I would suggest to you that that in itself is the reason why the Lord spoke as he did here on this occasion. He saw the multitudes and he was burdened, then, to convey to them the solemn truths that are contained in this parable, truths that have to do with the subject of the preaching of God's Word and the hearing and the receiving, the proper hearing and receiving, the beneficial hearing and receiving of the precious Word of the living God.

The gospels show that in the early part of the ministry of Jesus Christ huge multitudes gathered to listen to what he had to say. But that very fact of gathering to listen to the Word of God always brings—and it did then, no doubt—serious responsibility upon the very multitudes who were gathered on all those occasions in terms of the response that should be given to that which is spoken. And it is that point that this parable is really making. The response that should be given and that is called for any time the Word of God is preached.

That is really the heart of this parable. That is what it is all about.

Now not only did the Lord deliver this parable, he gave an explanation of it as you have seen in our reading of it today. He gave the parable. Then he gave an explanation of that parable. And in that explanation he made a number of things very clear. For example, he explained that the seed is, indeed, the Word of God.

We find here in verse 11 of Luke chapter eight that that is made clear. Then Mark in his record he says, "The sower soweth the word."³ And Matthew defines the seed as the Word of the kingdom.⁴ So that is one thing that the Lord makes clear as he explains the parable. This seed is the Word of God. It represents the Word of God in the parable.

Another thing that he does is that he explains that the different kinds of ground—and there are four kinds of ground mentioned—represent various kinds of people who listen to the Word of God at any given time. It is people who are in view in all those different kinds of ground, the stony ground, the wayside, the thorny ground and then the good ground. They represent people, people who listen to God's Word. That comes out when you read the verses where the Lord explains the parable and then those explanations that

³ Mark 4:14.

⁴ See Matthew 13:19.

he gives he talks about these and those and they and their and those very words are speaking of people who are listening to the Word of God. These people, those people, they in their hearts and their response to the preaching of the Word. The very use of the pronouns tell us that the grounds represent different kinds of people. That is another major thing that the Lord explains in this parable as he gives the explanation.

Another important detail is to do with the sower of the seed. As we already noted from Mark he says, “The sower soweth the word.”⁵ So it is very obvious that the sower is the preacher and that the parable sets forth under the imagery of a sower the great and the solemn and the divinely appointed labor of the preaching of the Word of God.

Now one of the vital things to keep in mind about the sower here in this parable is that the sower is the Lord Jesus Christ himself first and foremost. Christ is the sower. In the original text in all three passages where the parable of the sower is found, you will find that it says this. “The sower,” not “a sower,” but the sower and in Mark’s account of Christ’s explanation of the parable the first statement that he uses is this. “The sower soweth the Word.”⁶ So, in other words, someone specific is in view. It is not just a sower in general. It is the sower and the sower is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the sower above all others.

The Lord Jesus Christ was a preacher of the Word without parallel, without equal. And we that, of course, as we understand the Lord at all. No one could preach like Jesus Christ. And what a marvellous thing it is as you think about it. Our Savior, the eternal Son of God came into this world and he stood in this earth and he opened his mouth and he preached the Word of the living God. How marvelous that must have been to actually sit before the Son of God or stand before him, whatever posture it may have been, and hear the Son of God preach.

Christ is the sower. And even as his enemies once said, “Never man spake like this man.”⁷ And we must keep that always in mind. Christ is the sower in this parable.

Let me also say to you that as the sower the Lord Jesus Christ continues to forth to sow the seed. The Bible makes it very, very clear that the preaching ministry of Jesus Christ has not cased in that he preaches through his servants still and right through to the end of time he will continue to minister through his servants. The preacher, the sower is still going forth to sow.

Turn to the end of Mark, the gospel of Mark and the chapter 16 and look with me at how that little gospel closes and you will see this fact that Christ the sower is still going forth. Mark chapter 16 and in verse 19 you read that the Lord taken up into heaven, sitting at the right hand of God, there is our ascended Christ, our Savior in his glorious throne in heaven on the right hand of God. But look at verse 20. “And they went forth, and

⁵ Mark 4:14.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John 7:46.

preached every where [that is, the disciples], the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.”⁸

They went forth preaching and it says the Lord worked with them. The Lord was there. The Lord was present in their lives and in their ministries and the Lord was involved in the preaching of the Word through the medium of his servants.

Turn to Ephesians chapter two for a moment because in Ephesians chapter two and the verse number 17 you read of a very interesting detail that we should not miss. Ephesians two verse 17, it is relevant to what I am saying here that the Lord who is the sower in the parable continues to go forth and through his servants he goes on preaching the Word. Ephesians two verse 17 look at these words, “And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”⁹ The ones afar off are the Gentiles and those who are said to be nigh are the Jews. That is who is in view. But the opening words, “came and preached peace to you.”¹⁰

Now how is this? Well, it is the Lord Jesus Christ because he is the subject the whole way down from verse 13. “...in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”¹¹

Verse 14. “He is our peace.”¹²

Verse 15. “He has made peace.”¹³

Verse 16. “He might reconcile both unto God in one body.”¹⁴

Then verse 17. “[He] came and preached peace.”¹⁵

Now notice this. The Lord Jesus Christ was never at Ephesus in his earthly ministry. He was never outside the very bounds of Palestine. But here we are told that he came and he preached peace in the city of Ephesus and the reference, of course, is to the great ministry of the apostle Paul when he went to Ephesus, but the point is when Paul went to Ephesus Christ went to Ephesus and through the apostle the Lord Jesus Christ was preaching.

And, brethren and sisters, that ministry continues to this very day. The sower still sows the seed. Christ still goes forth preaching the Word of God in this world through his servants, by his messengers. Isn't it a remarkable thing that he does not send angels down from heaven? He does not use some other kind of phenomenal way of proclaiming his truth. But instead he takes mere men, ordinary men, sinful men, men who are weak and

⁸ Mark 16:20.

⁹ Ephesians 2:17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:13.

¹² Ephesians 2:14.

¹³ See Ephesians 2:15.

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:16.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:17.

feeble and frail and without any strength of their own at all and through them this sower still sows the seed.

That is a marvelous thought, a marvelous truth. And we must keep in mind as we study the parable of the sower.

But in a more specific manner this parable does something else. It gives us—and I have noted this with you already to a little degree—it gives us an insight into the results of the preaching of the Word of God. That is essentially what the parable is designed to bring by way of shedding light on a certain subject. It is designed to show us this matter of what happens when the Word of God is preached.

And as we come to that line of thought today I want just to deal with one particular point that the parable brings before us in relation to this. I have other thoughts that I will deal with perhaps next week as the Lord leads and the Lord helps, but just one today, but with many little ramifications attached to it.

I am talking here today about this issue of the ground that is so prominent throughout the entire parable. The Lord brings a tremendous focus on the ground as you can see. Now verse 15 here of Luke chapter eight, I am using that as a text, but we will look at many other Scriptures. I will be going to and fro between Matthew and Mark and Luke. That is why I have got three Bibles here in front of me today because rather than me turning up all the verses and getting lost and doing so, I have got the Bibles open here at the appropriate places. If you want to turn that's up to you. But I will be going to and fro quite a lot here in order to bring all together.

But we are looking at this idea of the ground. Here in verse 15 it says, "But that on the good ground..."¹⁶ Now there is one type of ground that the Lord mentions and majored on in this parable, good ground.

Go back to verse eight and it says, "Other fell on good ground."¹⁷ There is the parable itself as the Lord is delivering it from verse five down to verse eight in this passage of Luke eight. And he mentions the good ground, again, he says in verse eight, "And other fell on good ground."¹⁸

Now go back to verse 15. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."¹⁹

Now this detail concerning the ground is shown by the Lord Jesus to represent the heart of the hearer of the Word of God. Notice that. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart."²⁰ Get that point. Get that thought. The ground has to

¹⁶ Luke 8:15.

¹⁷ Luke 8:8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Luke 8:15.

²⁰ Ibid.

do not merely with the hearer generally, but specifically the ground has to do with the heart. That is the vital thing. It is focusing right in on the heart of man.

And the other three cases that we find in the parable, the other three types of ground are dealing with the very same things. They are all focusing in upon the hearts of men and women who listen to the preaching of God's precious Word and especially with regard to the various reactions and responses of men in their hearts to the truth that they hear.

How do we sum all of this up to think about the ground here and the responses of men in their hearts to what they hear when God's Word is proclaimed? Well, I am trying to do that by having you focus on the good ground. Because we must keep in mind that in the parable the good ground is a very prominent thing and, indeed, is the part of the parable that brings us to see that thank God there is a kind of hearer, there is a special work done in a hearer's heart that is described here under this symbol of good ground.

We must not miss that. The good ground, that type of ground is so important to any understanding of the parable.

Now the entire parable is built around the fact that in the agricultural realm... because remember this is based on every day life. As I said earlier the Lord is preaching from a boat. He is looking out toward the land. He sees fields. And I would almost be sure he saw corn fields or some other kind of grain. And he bases his parable on those physical features and it is true in the agricultural realm that there is ground that is not congenial to the production of a crop. And then there is ground that is congenial to the bringing forth of a crop or of a harvest, but only because—this is the vital thing—only because it has received the necessary labor and work to make it productive, to turn it into good ground.

Now you think about that because everybody here today knows fine well that left to itself all that any piece of land will bring forth are the weeds that are naturally there in that land, in that ground, in that soil.

We go right back in our thinking to Genesis there verses 17 and 18 where the Lord said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground."²¹ And then he says, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."²²

We know that. We understand that. We live in a little land where farmer is a major industry and every farmer knows he doesn't have to sow any thorns or any thistles or nettles or any kind of weed. They are in the ground naturally.

Look at Proverbs 24 verse 30. And there you have a picture of what happens when ground is left to itself. Proverbs 24 and the verse number 30, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding."²³ And notice with me that this is a field, it is a vineyard. It means that the preacher here, Solomon, is talking

²¹ Genesis 3:17.

²² Genesis 3:18.

²³ Proverbs 24:30.

about a piece of land that had formerly received attention. It was a vineyard. It was a proper field. A man had labored there in years gone by, but now he has let it fall into neglect. And what had happened?

Verse 31. “And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.”²⁴

You leave a piece of ground and you know this well and it will naturally and spontaneously bring forth its weeds.

Now what is the Lord showing us here as we look at that little detail? Taking the good ground, even in the physical realm. And the detail, the truth is this: The ground that is called good ground would be different from the other kinds of ground. It would just be as hard and thorny and rocky as the rest, but for the fact that somebody labors it.

And in the spiritual level and in the spiritual realm the very same truth is there. The hearts of all men are the same. And the hearts of men will bring forth only that which is natural to those hearts. This is what God is teaching us here. And therefore we are seeing that the heart that is represented by the good ground is not a heart that is different from any other heart, I mean naturally. It is just the same. The only difference is somebody has worked there. Somebody has labored there. Somebody has done something there that causes it to be good ground.

The heart symbolized by the good ground is good only because of a preparatory work. And that, of course, is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is the work of the Spirit alone to produce a heart like we have in verse 15, this good ground, this heart that is represented by that very term.

The Holy Spirit must work in a man’s heart so that that heart can be seen under such a symbol and under such a term as we have right here, good ground.

And notice with me something more about that heart which makes it very, very clear that this is a heart where somebody has wrought and done a work that has changed that heart so that when the sower comes with the seed, the seed is received into this heart because of that preparatory work.

Look at verse 15. Notice what it says. “But that on the good ground are they...”²⁵ Now listen to this, “which in an honest and good heart...”²⁶ Now is honesty natural to man? Is what it says here, “an honest and good heart,”²⁷ is a good heart natural to any man? Is there any man in among men who naturally speaking has this kind of a heart or this kind of a soul? And, of course, the Bible answers that question for us. Because there is no man who has that kind of a heart left to himself in his natural state. The Bible tells us,

²⁴ Proverbs 24:31.

²⁵ Luke 8:15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

rather, the very opposite. The heart of man, Jeremiah says, “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”²⁸

And the Lord Jesus Christ tells us in Mark chapter seven what will naturally come out of the human heart. Turn to Mark chapter seven and look with me at verse 20. And it says there, “That which cometh out of the man,”²⁹ Mark seven verse 20, “that defileth the man.”³⁰

Now listen to verse 21.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.³¹

And therefore we are being taught that there is no man who naturally of himself has this kind of a heart that the Lord describes as a good and an honest heart. It is the very opposite. And, men and women, we all have got that heart by nature, every one of us.

Look again with me and you notice here something else about the good ground here. If you look at Matthew’s account in Matthew 13 verse 23 it says this. “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it.”³² He hears the Word and he understands it.

In verse 19 of Matthew 13 it says this. “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not...”³³ And here is the wayside hearer. So on one hand one man is said not to understand. On the other hand a man is said that he does understand. What is the difference? Is the second man on the good ground, is he superior intellectually and spiritually to the other man? Of course he is not. Because the Bible says in Romans chapter three, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God,”³⁴ and so on.

So while there is a difference here between the hearts of men, one heart is honest and good and that same heart understands the things of God. The other heart, the other hearts, in fact, they are the very opposite. They don’t understand. They are not honest. They are not good.

What is going on here? Well, yet there is something else to notice. If you look, again, at Matthew 13 and verse 23 once more you will notice what it says here. “But he that

²⁸ Jeremiah 17:9.

²⁹ Mark 7:20.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mark 7:21-23.

³² Matthew 13:23.

³³ Matthew 13:19.

³⁴ Romans 3:11.

received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it..."³⁵ and so on. Here is a man who is said to receive the seed right into his own heart. He that receives seed into the good ground. There is a reception of the Word now right into the heart.

But does it not say that two of the other kinds of ground also receive the Word? It does say that, but we have got to understand this. They receive the Word, but not in the same sense as this man receives the Word of God. It is entirely different. They only receive the Word outwardly and apparently. They do not receive it in the same saving sense as the man who is described as the good ground hearer because this man receives it and believes it and keeps it and lives it out.

And the question, therefore: Why is all this? Why is his heart described as good and honest? Why is it said that he understands? Why is it that he receives the Word sincerely and believes it and exercises faith in it?

My friend, the answer simply is this. It is the work of the Holy Ghost to bring all this about. That is what the Bible teaches throughout its course, that there must be a work of the Spirit of God in order for all these things to take place. If there is any understanding it is because the Spirit gives the understanding. If there is any reception of God's Word it is because the heart of man has been given faith to receive that Word and to believe that Word. If there is a heart that is honest, it has been made honest by the Spirit of God. It is not naturally there.

So as we think about the good ground there is a lot here that is to be seen to be noted with regard to the hearts of men and how, as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, there is a heart that is described in this particular way.

So the heart symbolized by the good ground is one in which a work of the Spirit has been done.

What I want to do now is to contrast that heart with the others and we are going to see how this thought develops even more concerning the ground, the good ground hearer made honest, made tender, broken up by the Holy Spirit, given understanding, receiving the word of God.

Contrast all of that with the other types of ground representing other kinds of hearers and what do you find as you draw the contrast? You find this. You find three things and, number one, you find this. This is a heart where there is brokenness in contrast with hardness, brokenness in contrast with hardness.

In the physical realm good ground is soil, ground, broken up, cultivated to give it good seed bed. Any farmer here knows that. Good ground, as I have shown you is not naturally there. It must be worked. It must be labored. It must be tilled, plowed, harrowed, all that is done with it to make it to come to the point as it is described right

³⁵ Matthew 13:23.

here. And when you have got your good ground, what have you got? You have got ground that is broken and opened and soft and easily managed.

Now go to the very first kind of ground. Go back to verse five of Luke chapter eight and here is the contrast now that I have shown you, brokenness in contrast with hardness, verse five. Look at it. “A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”³⁶

Now the way side is simply a reference to a public path that actually many occasions ran through the corn field. You may have remembered in years gone by... I can remember this vividly on my own father’s land, part of his land where there was a public foot path. And the people had a right of way to go from the public roads and down across the fields and up to the shop in that particular town. And it was a known thing in those days in our own little country and, of course, in other countries as well. And this is what the Lord is talking about.

Through the corn fields where the sower was sowing his seed there were actually paths. As you might have wondered about that. Why would the sower leave the field and go and sow seed on a public foot path called the wayside, for that is what it is.

Well, he didn’t leave the field. The path was right through the middle of the field and up along side of the field. And as he sowed his seed, therefore, some fell on the footpath or the wayside that had been hardened by the tramp of many feet. And therefore it was soil that was characterized by hardness. The seed fell in that ground, the wayside ground, but it did not penetrate it. And therefore the fowls of the air came and they quickly devoured the seed that lay by the wayside or on the wayside ground.

Now look at the Lord’s interpretation of that in verse number 12. And there he says, “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil.”³⁷ So the Lord tells us here that the fowls of the air symbolize the devil. “Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”³⁸

My dear friend, here is the hardness of the human heart. And in contrast with that you have got the brokenness of the human heart. Both hearts originally, naturally are the very same. The heart of man is hard. There is no man born into this world who has a tender heart, a soft heart, a spirit that is pliable. Note the heart of man is naturally hard. It is a stony heart. We will see more about that in a moment or two. But there is the hardness of the heart. And therefore there has to be the work of the Holy Ghost to make it broken, to produce the brokenness, to bring about a situation where there will be this reception, this understanding, this belief of the truth.

³⁶ Luke 8:5.

³⁷ Luke 8:12.

³⁸ Ibid.

Turn over to Romans chapter seven and just keeping with the image that the Lord is using. No field will have good ground until, first of all, the plow has been put in. And very often the old writers, the old preachers talked about the plow of the law.

So turn to Romans chapter seven and look with me at verse seven. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.”³⁹ Now here are the Bible words.

Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. [That means lust]. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.⁴⁰

What is all this? Paul is describing here the operation of the law of God in his own heart. He is giving his own testimony. This man who knew the law, who memorized the law, who repeated the law, who debated on the law, he knew it inside out—or so he thought. He only had the letter of the law. It had never touched his heart. Until God began to deal with him it was just the letter. There was nothing of the deep work of the Spirit in his soul. But there came a day when things began to change and he puts it this way. “I had not known sin, but by the law.”⁴¹

There is a Bible statement. How does a man come to know he is a sinner? Not by being told that God loves him, but by being told that he is a wretched, vile sinner, that he has broken God’s law, that he is guilty before God, that he has violated that law from beginning to end. That is what he needs to hear. And once he hears that, then he comes to the knowledge of his sin.

And, oh my dear friends, sin then begins to be revealed to that man in a most powerful and vivid way until his heart is broken.

It works something like this. He hears the law and the law says, “Thou shalt not covet.”⁴² That is the commandment that Paul quotes here. And once a sinner hears that commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,”⁴³ he is really hearing a commandment that governs all the rest because when God says, “Thou shalt not covet,”⁴⁴ he is also saying:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image⁴⁵

³⁹ Romans 7:7.

⁴⁰ Romans 7:7-9.

⁴¹ Romans 7:7.

⁴² Exodus 20:17.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Exodus 20:3-4.

He is also saying, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,”⁴⁶ and “Thou shalt not break the sabbath day”⁴⁷ and “Thou shalt not dishonor your parents or kill or commit adultery or steal,”⁴⁸ or all the rest of it.

He is saying all of that because behind every violation of the law, behind every sin there is covetousness. It is at the root of it all. That is why Paul singles that commandment out, “Thou shalt not covet.”⁴⁹

So he is telling us when that had come to home him what did he find? He found his heart rebelling against it. He found deep in his soul that he was a covetous man. He wanted prestige. He wanted popularity. He wanted the acclaim of his fellow Jews. He coveted all that. And he found that his heart began to react against the law at first and thereby he saw the exceeding sinfulness of his sin.

Let me describe it this way and this is something that is natural that we have seen, perhaps, in our own children, even in our hearts or our own experience. You see a door that says, “Do not enter.” What is your immediate reaction? I would love to know what is behind that door?

There is a command there and it provokes a response in your heart and it is a response of rebellion.

Now, of course, the irresponsible person will open the door and go on through and I don't know what he will find, but the point is he sees the command and it provokes this response. That is what Paul is saying.

God's Word says, “Do this,” or “Don't do the other thing,” and the heart of man responds in that way. And thereby the sinfulness of the heart is being exposed. This is how the law works.

I haven't really any more time to stay with that, but that is the plow of the law. That is the heart of man being broken up. That is the good ground being prepared and being produced by the plow of the law. But there is also the harrow. There is the harrow of conviction. When a man has plowed a field then he needs to harrow it, to break it up even more.

John 16 the Lord Jesus says, “When [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove.”⁵⁰ That word means to convict.

And there is the convicting work of the Spirit of God. And, my dear friend, there is no other explanation for the production of a heart that is broken, a heart that is tender,

⁴⁶ Exodus 20:7.

⁴⁷ See Exodus 20:8.

⁴⁸ See Exodus 20:12-15.

⁴⁹ Exodus 20:17.

⁵⁰ John 16:8.

ground that is good as the Lord calls it, but this. The law of God and the Spirit of God at work in that heart breaking up the fallow ground, bringing conviction of sin, bringing the feeling of guilt before God. This is how the Lord does this. This is what the Lord is teaching us here when he comes to the ground that is called good ground. It is characterized by brokenness in contrast with hardness.

But then another thing is characterized by deepness in contrast with shallowness. Take the second type of ground. And you will find that it is referred to as stony ground. Look at verse six here of Luke chapter eight. “And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”⁵¹

Here is the stony ground and over in Mark chapter four, his account, and in verse five he says this about the stony ground. “It had no depth of earth.”⁵² Stony ground, no depth of earth.

Now remember something here. When the Lord talks about stony ground he is not talking about a piece of ground in which there is a stone here and a stone there and another somewhere else. No. The original language indicates that he is referring to a piece of land with just a shallow covering of soil over a whole table of rock that stretches maybe for yards upon yards. And in that part of the field there just is no depth. There is just a little shallow covering, just a little soil. That is what the Lord means by the stony ground, a piece of land, a table of rock, a little soil over it and that is all there is.

My friend, there the Lord is giving a revelation of another aspect of the heart of man. Man’s heart is hard and man’s heart, therefore, is a heart that is also shown here to be shallow. That is the point, shallow, no depth. And think about that for a moment or two. What does that mean? He is talking about people. He is talking about people who listen to the Word of God and many of them their hearts are hard. And others their hearts are shallow; hardness and shallowness, superficiality, no depth to them. This is what the Lord is telling us here. That means that they have no stability.

Mark says about the stony ground hearer, Mark four verse six, “It had no root.”⁵³ What does he mean by that, “It had no root”?⁵⁴ Because it does spring up a little and it appears to grow, but Mark said “It had no root.”⁵⁵

What he means is this. Have you ever seen a plant growing on a piece of land where there is a table of rock and just a little soil? What will you find about the roots? All you have are surface roots. It is all very shallow and the roots go no depth because they can’t. And what the Lord is describing here is this, a heart where there is no stability because there is no root and that plant will be easily plucked up.

⁵¹ Luke 8:6.

⁵² Mark 4:5.

⁵³ Mark 4:6.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid.

And all three evangelists—Mathew, Mark and Luke—bring out that very fact, that very truth. They bring out the point that there are hearts where it may seem at first that there is a work done, but then something takes place.

Let's see what Matthew says here, quickly. Matthew 13 and the verse 20, Matthew says this, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it."⁵⁶ Oh, you see, all looks great. It all looks very, very, very, very good and if we stop right there, well, we would wonder, well, what else is there to be seen here?

Well, read on in verse 21. "Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."⁵⁷ You see, he is just a shallow ground hearer and there is no stability and when the offense comes for the sake of the gospel then he withers away. He doesn't last. The other writers...

Mark he says something similar, Mark chapter four verse 16.

And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.⁵⁸

They don't last. They give up. They turn away from Christ. They abandon the gospel. They go back to the world.

Brother and sisters, let us notice something here as I... as this brings to mind in passing. The Lord is explaining to you why it is sometimes that people come along. They profess faith. They claim to be a Christian. They seem to run well and then they vanish. And you hear of them the next day and they are back in the world. And that is very discouraging for God's people, very discouraging for those who are going on with God to see that kind of thing happen.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is warning you here. These things do happen. There are wayside hearers and the Word never enters their hearts at all. There are stony ground hearers and they seem to be fine. But there is a shallowness there in contrast with the deepness of the good ground hearer and because there is shallowness there is no stability. But there is also no spirituality because Luke supplies one other detail that is very important.

⁵⁶ Matthew 13:20.

⁵⁷ Matthew 13:21.

⁵⁸ Mark 4:16-17.

Look at verse six again of Luke chapter eight. It says, “And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away.”⁵⁹ Now here is the reason given. “Because it lacked moisture.”⁶⁰

Now, take, again, the whole imagery here of the flat piece of rock with the little shallow covering of soil and you know fine well that such a little shallow covering can’t hold the rain. There is no moisture there. And in the Bible moisture and dew and rain are symbols of the Sprit of God. And the Lord is telling us here that on the stony ground there is no moisture. There is no spirituality because the Holy Ghost is not there. There is nothing but shallowness and superficiality and it will soon be demonstrated by the carnality and the fleshliness of that kind of a hearer, people who have no depth, who never manifest any real likeness to Jesus Christ, who never show any of the graces of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, yes, they say they are saved and they say they belong to the Lord. But you watch their lives when you hear them talk, when you watch their actions and what do you hear and see? You see the revelation of deep carnality, fleshliness and the love of the world. And the Lord is simply telling you that person is a stony ground hearer.

Quickly, for our time is gone here just about. In this good ground hearer there is fruitfulness sin contrast with barrenness. In this instance we take the contrast between the good ground and the thorny ground. And in Mark’s account we have this, Mark four verse seven, “And some fell among thorns.”⁶¹ And then the Lord’s explanation in verse 18.

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,
And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts
of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.⁶²

There is fruitfulness sin the good ground. On the thorny ground there is barrenness. There just is no fruit.

And as we have noticed in Scripture thorns are associated with the curse and with the fall of man. But this is thorny ground, remember. They which are sown among thorns, thorny ground. And thorns are associated with the fall of man and with the curse. And therefore thorns are associated with a situation as the Lord explains himself here where there is a barren unfruitful state in the human heart in the spiritual sense. And he defines it even more. He says that there are people who sit under the Word, who hear the preaching, who profess to be Christ’s people and though they can be taken up with and are taken up with are this. The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lust of other things.

Now get this straight today. This is the Lord describing different kinds of people who are in the visible Church. And here is another one: barren, unfruitful in contrast with the

⁵⁹ Luke 8:6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mark 4:7.

⁶² Mark 4:18-19.

fruitful, deep, good ground. And their barrenness is such that it is demonstrated in these ways that the Lord says are taken up with the cares of the world.

Now that word “cares” it means literally to be drawn in 101 different directions. It means to be distracted, cares of the world it says here. The world, my friend, has got the potential to draw the hearts of men away. Its attractions, its allurements, that is what the Lord means by the cares of the world.

Then the deceitfulness of riches. Now notice something very carefully here. The Lord does not say the cares of the world and then the riches, but the deceitfulness of riches.

Abraham had great riches, but Abraham was not deceived by his riches. And there are some of God’s people across the face of the earth who have been entrusted with riches by the Lord and have been able to walk with God and have good testimony and so on and so forth. But the Lord is warning us here that there is a great danger concerning riches, the deceitfulness of riches. What is that? Riches have the power, the potential to cause an individual to think, “I am secure. I need have no worries in life. I can simply drift along, have a religion, have a church affiliation and never be concerned beyond that.” That is the deceitfulness of riches.

And then the lust of other things. What is that? Well, the overwhelming desire for anything and everything that is against the mind of the Lord and the will of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Lord is showing us here that within the visible Church we have all of these kinds of hearers.

Notice where there is everything that I have outlined here as quickly as I could, where there is hardness, where there is barrenness, where there is, whatever the other one was, it is all in those who sit under the Word of God in many occasions in contrast with the good ground here.

Now the point is this. What state is your heart in? What state is your heart in right now? Do you have a heart that comes under the description that the Lord uses in terms of the good ground hearer, where there is this depth, this fruitfulness, this blessed state where you love the Lord, you love the things of God, you want to promote the kingdom of God. And you have got a regard for the people of God and so on? Is that the state of your heart or is your heart filled with the thorns and the cares and the carnality that is all the evidence that there is a deep spiritual problem in your case.

Here is a parable that causes us all to search our hearts.

I have to leave it because my time is totally gone. But it causes us to search all our hearts, men and women. What you and I want to do today is go away and look at our own hearts and search them before the God of heaven. And let other people do their own searching. Search your own heart and determine into what category you fall: wayside, stony, thorny or good ground. You cant’ be in them all. You can be in all three of the

first three, but you can't be in them and be in the fourth. Now if you are in the fourth, you are not in the first three. You search your heart.

Let me tell you something. Where your heart is determines where you will be in eternity. It is as solemn as that. It is better to discover what is in your heart today and deal with it rather than to go on deceived and perish forever more.

Let us bow together before the Lord.

Our gracious God and our Father in heaven, take they Word this day we pray and use it. We pray that the Holy Spirit himself will apply it and he will do, oh God, what we have been saying: he will plow up the heart, he will break the soul, he will bring the sinner to an end of self and sin, exposing hypocrisy and carnality. Oh God and Father, come we pray and move to this end we beg of thee. And may there be an honest and an open baring of our souls before our God and doing business with him even this very day. Hear and answer prayer. Part us now with thy blessing. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with every true child of thine both this day and then forever more we pray in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen.