

I don't know what your circumstances are. If you've read and understood this, and believe it's true that Jesus died for you, and through Him and Him alone, not your own righteousness, but His righteousness and His blood you can be saved - you must believe that gospel, and you must be willing to forsake your sin. He will give you the power to become a son of God. You will show your own heart to be a fruitful one, good ground, if you can bring yourself both to believe Jesus Christ and to repent of your sin.

Maybe you're a child or a young person, and you think that you've been saved, maybe you're not sure now. Make sure! How many of us that have grown up in Christian homes have not had to, at some time, make a rededication to know that we were sure that we were saved? You do it, and be sure. Please don't remain with a hard or a shallow or a crowded heart.

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The Hearing of the Heart



*The parable of the sower,
from Matthew's Gospel*

A Gospel Sermon by Pastor David Legge

“The Hearing Of The Heart”

The parable of the sower is found in Matthew 13, and it's one of the most important Scriptures relating to Gospel preaching and Gospel listening, listening to the message of the good news, especially in this modern age. The irony is that you seldom hear it preached on, especially in a meeting on a Sunday night where the gospel is meant to be expounded. I think the reason for that is perhaps because there are so many different understandings of the passage, or even understandings of what a Christian is. Even if you're not terribly religious or haven't been around too long, you'll know that there's a dispute on regarding what a Christian is. Some people will tell you: 'Well, it's just someone who goes to church, to a Christian church, whatever denomination it may be, Protestant or Catholic does not matter'. Others will tell you: 'Well, no, you have to be baptised and catechised, and on the roll, and be a communicant and all the rest of it'. Then there are those who say: 'Well, the Bible teaches that you need to be born-again by the Spirit of God' - and we believe that that's what the Scriptures do teach.

The sad fact of the matter is that there's a dispute on not just in the world regarding what a Christian is, but this modern age that we live in has witnessed another phenomenon which is a subtle difference of opinion or emphasis among so-called evangelicals regarding the question of what makes you a Christian. Even evangelicals are debating and fighting among themselves - now what am I talking about? Well, let me sum it all up in the words of a man called A.W. Tozer, he said this: 'A whole generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ without forsaking the world'.

I believe that this is one of the greatest curses of our age, especially in Northern Ireland. Let me be more specific and give an example of what I'm talking to you about. This is the type of person who thinks they are a Christian because they agree with the message of the gospel. They believe it's true, and maybe one night at a meeting they have put their hand in the air in response to an invitation, or maybe they have prayed a prayer that's been written on the back of a gospel leaflet, or that someone has led them to pray - and like a mantra or a magic spell, they feel that because they have responded in whatever way it might be, coming down an aisle or whatever, that God is obliged to save them. Maybe they have been quoted verses like Acts 16:31: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved', and they say: 'There it is, I believe, I agree that Jesus came into the world, He was the Son of God, He bled and died for my sins, He rose again, I agree with that and I want this salvation, so God must give it to me!'.

in the emotion of it all, that they flourish and then when the heat comes they are scorched and die. It's not destroyed by the competing desires and influences of the world and the flesh and the devil. Here is a heart that truly believes and receives deep rooted into the heart, and the proof of it is that they bear fruit to the glory of God - a harvest character!

Do you have a harvest character? God's word says that the fruit of the Spirit is joy, love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance, meekness. Then it produces a harvest of good works, Paul says: 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them'. My friend, this is a fruitful heart. This is a verse I'm about to quote to you now which you will very seldom hear at a Sunday night meeting anywhere, Hebrews 12:14: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'. Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord! I saw a title of a book on one occasion, and it was this 'No Holiness, No Heaven'. Holiness won't take you to heaven, holiness is the proof that you're going to heaven! Do you have it, my friend? It's not your own righteousness, it's the righteousness of Christ that's manifest in you through your life as Christ has changed you. You see, if you're saved by the word of God, the word of God will produce fruit in your heart - the fruit of a changed life! Jesus said: 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. James said: 'Faith without works is dead'.

Oh, I know that all do not produce to the same degree, the same frequency, but nevertheless all produce. I know that all of us at one time or another, at least most of us, have backslidden - but I have to tell you, I fear that I cannot see in the Bible the type of backsliding that we have invented in some places in Ulster! You sing 'Just as I am', and then go away and live as a reprobate! Jesus said: 'No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. You must have a fruitful heart.

Can I ask you in closing: which heart are you? Which are you? The hard heart, the shallow heart, the crowded heart, or the fruitful heart? Jeremiah said: 'The heart is deceitful', so be careful that you're sure which heart you have. You might say: 'Are you trying to get people to doubt their salvation?' - I'd rather cause some of you to doubt your salvation and be sure of it, than make false Christians by leading you down the garden path and whispering in your ear 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace. It's a good thing to doubt your salvation, if you have a salvation that ought to be doubted! It's better to doubt and go to heaven, than never doubt and go to hell.

you're not willing to leave your sin, why should God give you the power to do it? God has power to achieve repentance in your life, but you must be willing!

Let me tell you a story quickly about a rich young man, and do you know something? He kept all the commandments - I have no reason to believe that externally, outwardly, he wasn't blameless. We read that the apostle Paul was blameless in the keeping of the laws, so there's no reason why this rich young man wasn't as well. He came to Jesus, and Jesus knew about this man, because Jesus was God, the Lord and Christ. He could see into his heart, just as He can see into yours. The young man said: 'What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?'. Jesus said: 'Keep the commandments', and He rhymed them all off, and the man said 'I've kept them from my youth'. Then Jesus knew 'This is a religious man, this is a moral man, here's a man who has grasped the gospel truth of the law in his mind, here is a man who emotionally has embraced My truth and My law' - but there was something that was holding that man from coming to Christ: he was very rich. So Jesus told him: 'Sell all that you have, and give it to the poor', and that young man's face dropped, and it says that he went away sad. Jesus began to tell His disciples and the crowd how it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to get into heaven, for a man that loves things as much or more than Christ - whatever those things may be, legitimate or illegitimate. Maybe you're sitting here and saying: 'That's why there's no hope for me!'. Well, Jesus didn't finish there, because at the end of this story He said: 'But what is impossible with men is possible for God'.

This young man thought he had to do it all himself. He just had to be willing, it was God who had the power. The question I'm asking you is: if you're in danger of being or becoming a crowded heart, are you willing to give up your sin? Now listen carefully: because if you're not willing to give up your sin, you're not saved! Strong stuff.

The Fruitful Heart

Then finally there is the fruitful heart, verse 23: 'He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty'. Here's the clean soil, the prepared heart. God has prepared it, and it's deep soil that the seed may plummet into the depths of and take root, and flourish and change and draw nutrients, and add to. You see that the seed doesn't just bounce off this heart like the hard heart. It's not a momentary thing that goes on for a couple of weeks

This is particularly prevalent and common in those who have been reared in Christian families. Children grow up, and they have no argument with the message of the gospel, and they sort of naturally fall into line with their parents, and they intellectually give assent to everything that the gospel is - but the question I'm asking tonight is: are all of them really saved just because they agree with the Gospel? We even get evangelists, and if a person is concerned about their soul they will open the Bible to them, and they will pray a prayer with them, and after they pray that prayer they will assure them: 'Now, you're saved, because you prayed that prayer and God has promised to listen to the sinner's prayer, so you're saved' - and they give the sinner the assurance of salvation.

Now what is the fruit of this type of preaching and this type of evangelisation? Well, I believe the fruit of it can be openly seen around us in Ulster: people running around, professing Christ with their lips, and their lives are a complete contradiction to their claims. It's not just the young people now! Young and old alike, because at some time in their past they prayed a prayer, they did a deed, they believe that they are saved - yet in the present they have no desire to be among God's people, they maybe even scorn and laugh at Christians, they have no thirst to read God's word, they have no yearning to pray to God or at least to learn to pray. There is no holiness in their life whatsoever. To put it bluntly, they're no different than everybody else in the whole wide world.

My friends, I want to say to you: that is not what a Christian is. I don't care what bill of goods you have been sold, or the preaching you have heard, that is not a child of God. Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying: I'm not saying you're saved by good works - you're far from it! You can only be saved, not by your own righteousness, but the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. That's why Christ came into the world: He is the only one able to live up to God's standard, for He is God's Son, and He came to live a righteous life among men, He went to the cross, and the Bible says that there He took your sin, and in taking your sin He was exchanging your sin for His righteousness to give you His holiness that you may come into the presence of God - not in your own strength, but in His goodness. The Bible says that on the third day He rose again, and He is alive today, He is able to save men - and it's simply by faith that we are saved, not by works - not by works of righteousness which we have done, the Bible says. Therefore texts like Acts 16:31 are true - praise God: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'. Romans 10 and 13: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. The Lord Jesus said Himself in John 6:37:

'Them that the Father give me will come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' - all of those verses are gloriously true! But I say to you: they're not little Gospels on their own. They are from a bigger Bible, and this bigger Bible has many other verses, and many of these other verses tell us how we can know that we are truly Christians.

You see, coming to Christ alone can never be evidence of being truly saved. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:22: 'Many will say to me on that day of judgment, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out devils in thy name? Do many wonderful works in thy name?', and He will say 'Depart from me, I never knew you'. In fact, in the life of the Lord Jesus it says in John's gospel that many believed in His name when they saw the miracles that He did. When they saw, the people saw what Jesus could do for them, Oh they all believed in Him - but the Bible says Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because he knew all men. Now whoever you are, what I'm encouraging you to ask yourself is: am I sure I am a Christian? Whatever you've done, wherever you've been, whatever you've prayed, whatever you said I don't care - just ask yourself: are you sure you're a Christian? Or ask yourself: where is the evidence that I am a Christian? If you were to stand in a court of law and be convicted for being a child of God, what evidence could be brought for your cause?

Now some people might say: 'Boy, you're off the mark, you should never cause people to doubt their salvation!'. I'll tell you, that is wrong - the most biblical thing I can do is what Peter said: 'Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure'. Paul put it in 2 Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves'. Now if you wish to know how you can be sure that you're really saved, the parable has the answer. The Lord Jesus who knows all men's hearts, knows how men's hearts respond to this message of the gospel. As the preacher, that's who's going forth here in the parable, sowing the seed, as he goes forth preaching the word of God, Jesus says that there are four different responses to the good news of the gospel that men can have in their hearts. You're one of them - maybe you think you're one and you're not - well, let's see and diagnose what you are.

A Lesson To Preachers

Incidentally, before we do that, let me say that one of the first lessons in this parable, as a side issue, is a lesson to preachers. The Lord Jesus Christ shows this farmer, and he's sowing the good seed of the word of God. He doesn't invent his

The Crowded Heart

Well, let's look at the third heart, the crowded heart. We'll read the interpretation in verse 22: 'He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful'. It's full of thorns. Now farmers can be lazy! At times what they used to do was they cut the heads off these weeds, maybe even down to the very layer of the ground, some of them even went as far as to burn the evidence that there were weeds there - but the fact of the matter was, deep down under the surface there was still the roots. In time, what happens? They all grow up in their strength, and in among those weeds there have been sown the flowers and the crops, and when they come up the weeds grow around them and choke the life that's in them.

This is the crowded heart, a heart that's preoccupied with the things of this world. In other words, a double-sighted heart - a heart that sees Christ and everything that's in Him, but also sees the world and the attractions that are there, and the pleasures of sin. It's a divided heart, in other words it's someone who wants the best of both worlds. They want to have one foot in heaven and one foot on the earth. My friend, I want to tell you on the authority of God's word - I don't care what anybody else says, whatever preacher or church or evangelist - that won't do Christ. That won't do Christ! Jesus said no man can serve two masters, for either he will love the one and hate the other. The book of 1 John, I encourage you to read it, says that him that sins and continues to live in sin, and says that he's a child of God, is deceiving himself and lying to his own heart and those around him! You can't have your sin and have Christ!

This is an experience of the crowded heart, who is a person who has emotionally embraced the gospel, maybe it has also affected their intellect because they have understood it, but it has never affected their will - they have never been able to give up their sin! Now people will say to me: 'Ah, well, you're not preaching faith alone now, you see. You're saying that somebody has to do something before they're saved'. Maybe you're not a saved person here, and you're saying: 'I can't repent, you're telling me to do something I can't do. I can't let go of my sin' - praise God that you have that realisation, because you can't do it, and I'm not asking you to do something that you can do. Repentance is a change of mind, I know you can't repent of your sin - you need God to repent of your sin, and repentance, I believe, is a gift of God - but you've got to be willing to leave your sin if you want the power to leave it. Sure that's common sense, if nothing else. If

servicing the country, you talk of the row of medals that you'll get for great victory, the prestige and the respect in family and society - but you don't tell them of the bloody realities of the battlefield, the cost of war. You see, Jesus taught, if He taught anything, that the Christian life will cost you everything.

Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying: the Christian life is the greatest life, it is a life of joy, it's a life of peace. Jesus said: 'Come unto me all ye that labour with the world's weight and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I will give you my peace, my yoke is easy and light'. But friend, it'll cost you your sin. You can't come into the kingdom with your sin intact. It will cost you yourself, it'll maybe cost you your friends, and this is the message of the gospel: whatever it costs you, you must be willing to pay it, otherwise you have a shallow heart. Jesus said: 'If needs be that you have to forsake father or mother, husband and wife, children and parents for my sake and the gospel, you must do it'. You see, the shallow heart is someone who doesn't think the thing through - and we all know it's easier to start a thing than it is to finish it.

How do you know if you've a shallow heart tonight? Well, let me ask you: are you attracted to Christianity? Are you interested in the Bible? Do you love the doctrines of prophecy, or all the controversial things? Maybe you've been reading 'The Da Vinci Code', or other books that talk about the Bible. Maybe you're interested in the Lord's return, maybe you're interested in Armageddon, maybe you're in the Orange or the Black and you're interested in Protestantism, maybe you're even interested in Christ! You have an emotional embrace about it all, you love being among Christians, you love going to meetings, but the fact of the matter is: the Saviour has never got beyond the circumference of your life.

You see, it's either all or nothing. Oh, only a little faith in Christ will save you, there's no doubt about that, I believe, reading the Bible, that even childlike faith will save a man, but it must be the faith of the whole man!

*'Is there a thing beneath the sun,
That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah! Tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there!'*

Let us make certain that our response to Jesus Christ has not been an impulsive, purely emotional one. That could be why you're in the difficulty that you're in: you've come to the Lord and asked Him to save you over and over again and again, and you can't get rid of the shackles of the sin that you're living in!

own modern counterfeits, there are no clever gimmicks here, because it is only the word of God that will make the difference, will save the sinner. We are born-again not by corruptible seed, but by the incorruptible seed of the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Here is the lesson to every preacher, and indeed every church: give people the pure word of God! That's what they need!

But the next lesson is how to listen to the word of God, and these are the responses, and indeed they are in every congregation in the land: these four hearts are in residence even in this place. I wonder what your heart condition is?

The Hard Heart

Let's look at the first, it's found in verse 4, it is the hard heart, the interpretation is given in verse 19. Verse 4: 'And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up', and then when we turn to verse 19 the Lord Jesus gives the interpretation, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one', the wicked one, the devil, 'and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side'.

Now let me explain this to you. The wayside here in Palestine was very hard ground, it was not stone as such, but it was so hard that the seed, as the sower sows it, cannot penetrate into the ground. In fact, it was like a pathway that was a right of way, and because people had trodden across the ground it had got hard - so hard that it couldn't receive God's word. Now what Jesus is saying is that when people hear the gospel, and they hear about the love of Jesus, and how Jesus suffered on the cross for them and bore their sin, people with hearts like this ground, they're so hard that it is nothing to them! It doesn't figure with them, they don't shed a tear, their heartstrings aren't pulled, they just don't feel anything. They have a wilful conscious rejection of Christ and His gospel. It is characterised in a lack of urgency within these people, and maybe you're one of them. You could take or leave this stuff, but you don't feel urgency. Are you here tonight, and you just don't really care about all this Christian stuff? Maybe you even dispute that conversion is not necessary. You don't have to be antagonistic, you don't have to be hostile, you just need to be indifferent and apathetic, and it wouldn't be hard because that's the spirit of the age - particularly in our land - regarding the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people's hearts become hard because not only have they closed their hearts to the gospel, but they have opened their hearts to all sorts of other

influences of the devil that are continually plucking the seed of the word of God away from them. It could be other faiths or cults, it could even be the occult, people who have dabbled in Satanism or Spiritism, and they have allowed Satan to have a stronghold, a foothold in their lives so that they cannot respond and hear the gospel as they ought. But there's a principle here regarding the hard heart, it is this: if you harden your heart against the gospel, you will develop an unresponsive heart. You might choose at one point in your life not to respond, but there will come a day, if you keep on reacting like that, that you will not be able to respond. Oh, I pray to God that there'll be no one like this who reads these words. You see, you have a responsibility as soon as you hear God speaking to you, to listen and to receive God's Word. That's why Jesus said as He even told this parable: 'Let him that has ears to hear, hear'. In verse 12 He tells us that to whom is given and they receive it, more will be given; but if you're given something and you won't receive it, what you already have will be taken away. There is a depreciating factor here.

In other words, if you don't use the knowledge that God's word gives you, you'll lose it. Sure it's the same with your muscles, if you don't use it you'll lose it. It's the same with your mind, if you don't use it you'll lose it. Well, it's the same with God's word, and I pray and plead with you that if you hear an inkling of God's voice, if He starts to stir up your heart towards the things of God: fan those flames, don't douse them, preserve them! You see, you could be too busy - I think some people with these hard hearts are too busy to be saved. Someone has said, like the pathway, your life is beat hard asphalt with the frantic feet of your to-ing and fro-ing everywhere you go. You have room for pleasure, room for business, but for Christ the crucified not a place that He can enter in the heart for which He died. Could it be that the only way that God can save you is to break your hardened heart? He doesn't choose to break everybody's hard heart, He's not obliged to. But please, I beg of you, do not tempt the Lord to break your heart: I don't know how He'll do it, I don't know what means He'll use to do it, but if He does it, He will break you completely! The better option would be to plead tonight: 'O Lord, chasten me not in Thine hot displeasure, rebuke me not in Thine anger, but have mercy upon me; according to Thy lovingkindness blot out my transgressions, forgive my sin'.

The Shallow Heart

That's the hard heart, but we've got to move on. The second is the shallow heart, it's found in verse 5: 'Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when

the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away'. Jesus gives the interpretation in verse 20: 'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but continues for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended'.

Well, let's go back to Palestine, because the stony ground was not ground full of stones, it was a narrow skin of earth that was a shelf of soil above a plate of limestone. So you've got a couple of inches maybe of the earth, but below it there is this hard rock, so the earth is shallow. Much of Galilee was like that, and when the seed fell into the ground it germinated alright, but because the soil was so shallow there was little nourishment in the soil for the seed, there was little moisture, the heat of the sun would beat down - and soon that little sprout would be withered away, it would die! Here we have the shallow heart, who is this? It's the person who receives the word of God, it even says with joy! Oh, they rejoice! 'God loves me, Christ died for me, my sins can be forgiven', and they are easily convinced - but they are equally easily put off.

The shallow heart is the emotional response to Jesus Christ. It is joy! You see, your soul is made up of three things: it is made up of the emotion, it is made up of the intellect, and it is made up of your will. The emotion says in the shallow heart: 'I will have Christ, I want everything that Christ gives to me', but this seed of God's word has not penetrated their intellect. They don't understand what it will cost them to be a Christian - that it's everything, it's their life, they must leave their sin. It hasn't penetrated their will, so that they are repentant and say: 'I'm finished with sin, with God's help I will not return to it'. Do you see what happens? This superficial experience where they have tasted God's power at a meeting, and made an emotional decision, but they don't mentally realise the cost, and they don't exercise a willingness to pay the cost - when troubles comes and persecution arises, they fall away. They fail, and you'll hear them round the doors in most cities - what do they say? 'Och, I tried that, it didn't work for me' - like a bottle of medicine! 'It didn't work for me, I tried it' - my friend, they did not taste of eternal life at all, what they had was an impulsive response to the gospel.

I'll tell you, many of the enemies of the faith who come into the church and sow the seeds of false doctrine arise within the church originally in this way - an emotional response to the gospel. Let me say to every preacher, that we must never adopt the approach of the recruitment sergeant when we're preaching the gospel. What is that? You talk of the proud uniform, you talk of the privilege of