

How's Your Heart?

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[0 : 00] If we could, with the Lord's help and with the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, and for a short while I just want us to look at Luke chapter 8, looking at the parable of the sower.

Luke chapter 8, and if we read again at verse 4, what it says there, and when a great crowd was gathering, and people from town after town came to Jesus, he said in a parable, a sower went out to sow his seed.

A sower went out to sow his seed. I want to ask you this morning my friend, how is your heart?

How is your heart? Now as many of you know, I've probably asked you this question not once but on numerous occasions, either publicly from the pulpit or personally in a conversation, and I ask you the question, how is your heart?

Because your heart is my greatest concern. Your heart is my greatest concern, because as J. C. Reil often said, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

[1 : 20] And your heart, your heart needs to be cleansed from sin and committed to the Saviour. Your heart needs to be cleansed from sin and committed to the Saviour.

And so how's your heart? How's your heart? You know that's the question Jesus is asking from this well-known parable. How's your heart?

And as you know, the parable of the sower, it's probably one of the most familiar parables which Jesus told. And we know that Jesus told many, many parables.

He told all these parables to the crowds that followed him. In fact, Matthew tells us in his Gospel that Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using a parable.

Because the word parable, the word parable literally means to cast alongside. It means to cast alongside. In the sense of using a real life incident or situation in order to make this comparison.

[2 : 23] And that's what Jesus often did. He cast alongside a parable in order to make this comparison with your life and with my life. And the reason Jesus speaks in parables is so that we'll become personally involved in the parable and see that we are being portrayed in the parable.

And that when we see ourselves in this parable, it will compel us to make a personal decision about following Jesus. My friend, the parables of Jesus were to be the test of all his hearers.

That's why Jesus says in this parable, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. The parables were to be the test of your hearing.

Because how you hear affects your heart. How you hear affects your heart. And your heart, as we said, it needs to be cleansed from sin and committed to the Savior.

Your heart needs to be cleansed from sin and committed to the Savior. So how's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? A hollow heart?

- [3 : 35] A hungry heart? Or a healthy heart? How's your heart? And you know this question, it's one which we should be confronted with at least once a year.
- And you know it's at this time of year that many people they begin planting and sowing and fertilizing. I was fertilizing in thecroft only a couple of weeks ago.
- And it reminded me that we should come back to this parable at least once a year. In fact, Spurgeon said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year.
- Because my friend, it's in the parable of the sower that we're reminded about the purpose of the sower in sowing the seed. We're reminded about the power of the seed to change hearts and to transform lives.
- And we're also reminded about the people of the soil. That there are different types of soil present in every congregation. Spurgeon said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year.
- [4 : 43] Because my friend, it's in the parable of the sower that we are reminded about the purpose of the sower, the power of the seed and the people of the soil.
- It's in the parable of the sower that we're reminded about the purpose of the sower, the power of the seed and the people of the soil.
- And that's what I want us to do this morning. I want us to come to this well-known parable. And I want us to see first of all the purpose of the sower, the purpose of the sower.
- We're told that in verse 4, and when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, a sower went out to sow his seed.
- A sower went out to sow his seed. Now when you read the parable of the sower, you very quickly realize that the parable isn't really about the sower and it's not really about the seed.
- [5 : 43] The parable is about the soil and onto what type of soil the seed fell. But of course without the sower, the seed would never have been sown upon the soil.
- And so we have to ask, well, who is the sower? Who is the sower? Well, the sower is someone who scatters the seed of the gospel.
- The sower is someone who scatters the seed of the gospel, whether that's a minister in a congregation or a missionary on the mission field or a parent in the hearts of their children or a Sunday school teacher at Sunday school or even a Christian who's working in their home or even working in the workplace.
- A sower is someone who scatters the seed of the gospel. But in the context of preaching to the crowds, Jesus specifically highlights that a sower is a preacher of the gospel.
- A sower is a preacher of the gospel. But if Spurgeon said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year, then every preacher should remind themselves of their purpose.
- [6 : 56] Every preacher should remind themselves of their purpose because as Jesus says, he's a sower. The preacher is a sower. He's not an entertainer.
- He's not a storyteller. He's not a comedian. He's not a social worker. He's not a celebrity. He's not a YouTube sensation. He's not a Facebook phenomenon. He's a sower.
- He's a preacher of the gospel. And as a sower, his purpose, as Jesus describes, his purpose is to work hard, to stay focused, to put in the hours, to expend his energy, to get involved, to get his hands dirty and preach the gospel because he's a sower.
- He's a sower. But of course, the sower isn't the only biblical analogy that's used to describe a preacher of the gospel because when Jesus first called his disciples to leave their nets and to follow him, Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

Ezekiel, in the book of Ezekiel, he used the analogy of the watchman who watches over his people or the Lord's people and he warns the Lord's people.

[8 : 10] Paul also used the comparison of a herald because the preacher of the gospel is the king's messenger. He's a herald. He's to be an ambassador for Christ and herald the good news that Jesus Christ is the savior of sinners and that the good news is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe.

Then you have Peter. Peter described the preacher as a pastor, a shepherd over the flock of God. We'll see more of that this evening.

Even Peter himself, he was told at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus sent to him, feed my sheep and shepherd my sheep. But you know what's remarkable is that every New Testament writer emphasizes that the preacher of the gospel is a servant.

They're a servant of Jesus Christ. They're a minister, which means that they're not to exalt or elevate themselves. They're not to place themselves on a pedestal.

They're not to seek the honor and glory of men and women. No, they're to take the same line as John the Baptist took. He must increase. I must decrease.

[9 : 22] That's what we're to be. We're to be a servant. And so the preacher of the gospel is a sower, a fisherman, a watchman, a herald, a shepherd and a servant. And he's to take his role seriously.

He's to live life consistently. He's to preach the truth faithfully and to scatter the seed of the gospel lovingly.

But more than that, as a sower, he must prepare the ground. Because as every good gardener or good crofter knows, the sower must do as Hosea said, he must break up the fallow ground.

He must break up the fallow ground and a sower breaks up the fallow ground by seeking the Lord in prayer. Because every sower knows, Paul may plant and a Paulus may water, but it's God who gives the increase.

Therefore, a sower must seek the Lord in prayer. But the sower is not only to prepare the ground by seeking the Lord in prayer. The sower is to prepare the ground by seeking the Lord in his word.

[10 : 33] Because the sower, he must fill his pouch with precious seed, this precious seed in order that he'll be able to sow bountifully. Because as the Bible reminds us, whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly.

But whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully. For the sower's sermons, they can't be half-hearted. His preparation can't be anything less than his best.

His commitment to the seed and to the soil must be 100%. The sower must spend and be spent for the sake of winning souls to Christ.

He must put his hand to the plow and not turn back. But you know, sometimes thinking about it, it comes at a cost.

Because sometimes the saying is true that as a sower, you are plowing a lonely farrow. As a sower, you're plowing a lonely farrow.

[11 : 36] Now don't get me wrong, it's the greatest privilege to preach the Gospel. But sometimes it's like plowing a lonely farrow. Far too often we forget that the sower is human.

Far too often we forget that the best of men are only men at best. Far too often we forget that the minister is just a poor, weak sinner that needs to be quoted in prayer.

Because maybe I've mentioned this to you before. Before I became a minister, I read what Spurgeon said about prayer. That you should pray for your minister before you even pray for your family.

And at first I thought, well that's a bit extreme. But now I understand why Spurgeon said it. Because the sower, as you might expect, the sower is Satan's number one target.

And so I would say to you, pray for your sower. Plead for your sower. Protect your sower. Because the purpose of the sower is to sow the seed of God's word.

[12 : 45] And that seed is the power of God unto salvation. Which is what I want us to consider secondly. I want us to see the power of the seed.

Spurgeon said that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year. Because it's in the parable of the sower that we are reminded about the purpose of the sower. And then secondly, the power of the seed.

The power of the seed. Look at verse nine. When his disciples asked him, that is Jesus, what this parable meant, he said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But for others they are in parables. So that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God.

Now the parable of the sower, it's said to be the first parable which Jesus expressed. But it's also said to be the first parable which Jesus explained.

[13 : 49] And Jesus explained the parable simply because the disciples asked him to. But the answer Jesus gave to their question, it wasn't the answer that they expected.

It's probably not the answer that we would expect either. Because we would expect Jesus to say that he spoke in parables in order to make his teaching easier to understand.

But Jesus says that he spoke in parables in order to emphasize that salvation is a mystery. He says in verse 10, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But for others they are in parables. So that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. And what Jesus is saying is that some people are saved and some are not.

Some respond to the gospel and some don't. But we're not to ask why. That's not for us to question, says Jesus. We're not to try and understand these things because salvation belongs to the Lord.

[14 : 51] It's a mystery of the kingdom. And with that Jesus then quotes what the Lord said to Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6. Because it's there that Isaiah in chapter 6, he receives this heavenly vision and call to be a sower where the Lord asks, whom shall I send and who will go for us?

And Isaiah responds by saying, here am I, send me. And then the Lord he calls and commissions Isaiah to be a sower. And Isaiah is told to go and say to this people, keep on hearing, but do not understand.

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. And then you hear Isaiah asking, how long, oh Lord, how long? How long do I have to sow the seed for?

How long do I have to persevere in preaching the gospel? How long do I have to keep going to sinners with the message of salvation? How long, oh Lord? How long?

And the Lord says, until the cities lie waste without inhabitant and houses without people and the land is a desolate waste.

[16 : 02] How long? The Lord says, you don't stop. You don't stop. You don't stop sowing the seed. You don't stop persevering with the gospel.

You don't stop going to sinners with this message of salvation. You keep going to them. You don't stop. And with this Jesus, he's emphasizing to his disciples then and to his disciples now that the seed of the gospel must be sown everywhere.

The gospel must be proclaimed to whosoever because no one is to be exempt. No one is to be excluded and no one is to be excused. The good seed of the gospel is to be sown to the ends of the earth.

And that's what Jesus said to his disciples, you're to be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

You're to keep sowing the seed. You're to keep preaching the word of God. You're not to stop in the face of obstacles and opposition. You're to keep sowing this precious seed.

[17 : 11] And you know, even in recent weeks, when the church closed its doors due to the coronavirus, we all thought that that would be an obstacle to the spread of the gospel.

But it's actually proved to be an opportunity for the gospel because the remarkable thing is that the seed of the gospel is still being sown, but it's spreading further and wider than ever before.

There are people who are listening to the gospel that maybe never listened before. There are those who didn't come to church and yet in a virtual way, they are coming to church like they've never come to church before.

There are people listening to more sermons than ever. There are people telling me that they listened to four sermons on the Lord's day. And when I would ask, what are you doing with all that you're hearing?

Because the Bible says, don't just be a hearer of the word. Be a doer of the word. But you know, despite the obstacles and the opportunities for the gospel, Jesus makes it absolutely clear the seed is not to change.

[18 : 29] The seed is not to change because as Jesus says in verse 11, the seed is the word of God. And you know, when you read this parable, you imagine the sower, don't you?

You imagine this sower who's filled his leather pouch with the good seed of God's word and he's come to the gospel field that is ready and prepared and he walks out into the middle of the field and he pushes his hand into his pouch and he just begins to scatter the seed as best as he can.

And of course, the sower, he knows there is actions of sowing the seed. It could have life changing and heart transforming effects upon the soil. But that's not because of the sower.

That's because there's power packed inside that tiny little seed. And you know, it's a reminder to the sower, isn't it? It's a reminder to the sower that it doesn't matter how intelligent or how eloquent or how structured or how animated or how passionate he is.

The power is in the seed. The power is in the seed. The seed is the word of God and the word of God is the power of God unto salvation.

[19 : 43] The word of God, it's God breathed, it's infallible, it's inerrant and it's the power of God unto salvation. And the friend Jesus is reminding us that there's only one seed that is to be scattered.

There's only one seed that is to be sown and no other seed will do apart from this precious seed because the seed is the word of God.

And the wonder is nothing else will change lives. Nothing else will convert sinners. Nothing else but this seed will bring people to Christ. Nothing else will give you hope in this world.

Nothing else will bring you comfort in the midst of sorrow. Nothing else will encourage you when you're at your lowest. Nothing else will remind you of God's faithfulness in times of trial. Nothing else will give you peace in life and hope in death.

Nothing else, my friend, apart from this seed will do your soul any good. And you know what's wonderful is that this precious and powerful seed, it comes with the greatest promise.

[20 : 51] The greatest promise. And you know I take comfort in it. Because the promise which the Lord gives to the sower is my word that goes forth out of my mouth.

It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish in the thing that I please and it will prosper in the thing where to I send it.

That's the greatest comfort because this seed will do our soul any good apart from this precious seed.

Nothing else. And you know don't you just love those words in Psalm 126 where it describes the confidence of the sower in the power of the seed.

The sower, he knew that he was powerless, but the seed was powerful and that the seed would have an effect upon the soil. And that's why the Samist in Psalm 126 he says that man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless.

[22 : 02] He doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing shall return. The sower was doubtless because he had confidence in the power not of himself, but the power of the seed.

The sower was doubtless because he knew that as this seed is scattered, sinners, as Peter says, they will be born again, not with corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God which lives and abides forever.

And you know my friend, we should also be doubtless as the seed is sown. We should have confidence, confidence not in the sower, but in the power of the seed.

We should have confidence in the power of the seed. That's something I think I often lack myself, confidence in the power of the seed. And that's why we need to come back to this parable every year to be reminded that we are to have confidence, but to be doubtless because of the power of the seed as it is scattered upon the people of the soil.

And that's what we see lastly, the people of the soil. Spurgeon said every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year because it's in the parable of the sower that we're reminded about the purpose of the sower, the power of the seed and the people of the soil.

[23 : 28] The people of the soil. Look at verse 12. Jesus says, the ones along the path are those who have heard.

When the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who when they hear the word receive it with joy, but these have no root.

They believe for a while and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their fruit does not mature.

As for that in the good soil, they are those who hearing the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

How's your heart? How's your heart? So you said earlier that's what Jesus is asking you in this parable because your heart needs to be cleansed from sin and committed to the Savior.

[24 : 33] So how's your heart? And what Jesus has explained from this parable is that how you hear affects your heart. Because when Jesus explained this parable he said that everyone in the crowds they heard, they heard the gospel, but how they heard affected their heart.

And we know that there were a variety of different people listening to Jesus preach because we read back in verse four that the crowds had gathered from lots of different towns in order to hear Jesus.

And so it was a mixed audience. It was a mixed audience. And you know it's interesting that the word audience, it comes from the word audio to hear.

They're for those in the audience, those in the hearing, they were a mixed crowd just like it is this morning. Those in the audience, those who are in the hearing, you're a mixed crowd.

You're not in front of me physically, but you're a mixed crowd because you're either a Christian or not a Christian. You're either converted or unconverted. You're either committed or uncommitted.

[25 : 46] It's a mixed crowd. And with this parable Jesus is reminding us that whenever and wherever the gospel is preached, those in the audience, those in the hearing, they are one of the soils.

They are one of the soils because how you hear affects your heart. So Jesus is asking us, how's your heart? How's your heart?

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

Is it a hardened heart? That's the first heart. Jesus describes. Is it a hardened heart where over many years your heart has hardened to the truth of the gospel so that when the seed of God's word falls onto it, it just lies there.

It can penetrate no deeper than the surface. And then as Jesus says, the devil just comes and snatches it away. And you know, my friend, the last thing the devil wants is for this seed to take root in your heart.

[26 : 54] The last thing the devil wants is for you to listen to the gospel. The last thing the devil wants is for you to respond in faith and obedience. The last thing the devil wants is for you to believe and be saved.

That's what Jesus says. The last thing the devil wants is for you to commit your life to Jesus Christ, which is why Jesus is asking you this morning, how's your heart?

Is it a hardened heart? Or is it a hollow heart? Because a hollow heart is when you look good on the outside and to all appearances above the surface and before the eyes of others, you seem to be making progress in the Christian life.

But on the inside and under the surface, the hollow heart says, Jesus, it has no depth, no earth and no root.

And it's all this, just this facade of religion, but no relationship with the Savior. Jesus says, it's like you like to read the Bible, but you don't like the Bible to read you.

[28 : 10] You, you, you're full, you might even be full of legalism, but have no life in you. You have a hollow heart. You have no depth, no earth and no root.

You look good on the outside, but on the inside, there's no life. It's a hollow heart. That's why Jesus is asking you, how's your heart?

Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart? Or is it a hungry heart? Because a hungry heart is when you're not satisfied with Jesus.

Because when Jesus isn't enough for your hungry heart and instead your hungry heart seeks encouragement and entertainment from all the cares and riches and pleasures of this world.

But you know, my friend, what your hungry heart doesn't realize is that all the encouragement and all the entertainment from the world, it's empty and it'll never be enough.

[29 : 13] It'll never be enough. Doesn't matter how much you seek, none of it will save you. And in the end, as Jesus says, it will only strangle you.

My friend, your hungry heart will never find through lasting satisfaction from all the empty encouragement and entertainment from this world. That's why you need to come to Jesus this morning saying, nothing in my hands I bring, but simply to thy cross I claim.

This is asking you, how's your heart? Is it a hardened heart, a hollow heart, a hungry heart, or is it a healthy heart?

Because Jesus says a healthy heart hears the word, holds the word and harvests the word. A healthy heart hears the word, holds the word and harvests the word.

That's what he said in verse 15. As for that in the good soil. Bear those who hearing the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

[30 : 23] A healthy heart says Jesus is the heart of a dedicated disciple. It's the heart of a committed Christian. It's the heart of a serving saint because a healthy heart hears the word, holds the word and harvests the word.

So my friend, how's your heart this morning? How's your heart? How's your heart?

Because as I said at the beginning, your heart is my greatest concern. Your heart is my greatest concern.

How's your heart? Virgin was right, you know, because every preacher, they should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year.

Because it's in the parable of the sower that we're reminded about the purpose of the sower, the power of the seed and the people of the soil.

[31 : 28] And as those in the audience, as those who are in the hearing, you are in the hearing as the people of the soil this morning, Jesus is asking you, how's your heart?

Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart? Is it a hungry heart? Or is it a healthy heart? Because how you hear affects your heart, which is why Jesus says to us, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray. All our gracious God may give thanks to thee for the wonder of the gospel that it is through the foolishness of preaching that people can be saved and be marveled that thou wouldst use soar in order to sow this precious seed, in order that the soils might bring forth fruit to thine own glory.

And Lord we pray even this morning that as thy seed, as the seed has been sown, we pray that it would not fall by the wayside, or among the thorns are onto the rocky ground.

But our prayer is that as the seed went out, that it would fall into the good soil, that thou wouldst enable it to grow, to bear fruit, some 60, some 30, some 100 fold.

[32 : 59] All Lord we thank thee and we praise thee for the wonder of thy word. And we pray that we would hide it in our heart, that we may not sin against thee.

Bless us then we pray, keep us we ask, keep us ever looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, for we ask it in his name and for his sake.

Amen. Well we're going to bring our time to a conclusion by singing this morning in Psalm 126, the Psalm that we mentioned earlier.

Psalm 126, it's one of the songs of ascent or the songs of degrees that one of the songs that were sung as the Jews made their way towards Jerusalem for the annual festivals.

And we're singing in Psalm 126, a wonderful reminder of the doubtless sower. He had no doubt when he was sowing the precious seed.

[33 : 59] So we read there in the end of the Psalm, that man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing shall return.

So we're singing at the Hall of Psalm 126 in the Scottish Psalter to God's praise. And we're singing in Psalm 126, a wonderful reminder of the doubtless sower.

The man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing shall return.