

The stakes are high in the Parable of the Sower: hard-hearted rejection of Christ's word versus the fruit of faith as it sprouts up in our hearts. Which kind of soil will we prove to be? This parable, in other words, challenges us to examine our heart response to Jesus' teaching. How appropriate for a summer-time meditation since our recent sermons on John 6:22ff. involve the shocking hardness of heart of Israel towards Jesus' teaching. May our cry ever be that, by a constant openness to the hearing of the Word of God, our hearts may be ever softened and kept from the calloused condition produced by a refusal to hear God's Word.

### Monday: Read Matthew 13:10-15

### Hardened or Softened?

In the Parable of the Sower, hardness of heart is the key quality lying behind each "soil of apostasy." For example, the description of Israel (vs. 15) in her inability to understand Jesus' teaching: "Their hearts have become callous." That word literally means to make something "fat, thick, insensitive or calloused." The effect of Israel's consistent refusal to hear the Gospel Word from God's messengers throughout the centuries. As the Apostle Paul says, quoting the same verse:

"Go to this people, and say,  
'You will indeed hear but never understand and you will indeed see but never perceive.'  
For this people's heart has **grown dull** and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them." (Isaiah 6:9-10, quoted in Acts 28:27)

**Meditate and Pray:** The heart-hardening of those who fall away from Jesus' teaching is a mystery. The word of Gospel seed is snatched from their stony hearts, withered, and choked. Note Jesus' verdict on such poor receivers of the Gospel: they are those who have "not received the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" and who therefore "do not have" the treasure of kingdom salvation. As God's people, they possessed for a time great privileges and promises in the Old Testament. But now, because they reject Jesus, even what they have will be taken from them!

Oh, how we need God's grace to handle such a sober truth: that the very heart-melting warmth of Jesus Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness," can also harden the hearts of those who refuse Him, like clay hardened by the heat. Use hymn # 545 as your prayer to be kept from such a terrible destruction:

*When this passing world is done,  
When has sunk yon glaring sun,  
When we stand with Christ in glory,  
Looking o'er life's finished story,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I hear the wicked call,  
On the rocks and hills to fall,  
When I see them start and shrink  
On the fiery deluge brink,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I stand before the throne,  
Dressed in beauty not my own,  
When I see Thee as Thou art,  
Love Thee with unsinning heart,  
Then Lord, shall I fully know—  
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*Even on earth, as through a glass  
Darkly, let Thy glory pass,  
Make forgiveness feel so sweet,  
Make Thy Spirit's help so meet,  
Even on earth, Lord, make me know  
Something of how much I owe.*

**Tuesday: Read Matthew 13:11-15****The Gift of Listening**

What a difference between the calloused, unbelieving heart and the heart which God has opened to His Word of saving Gospel truth. But what exactly is the difference? Look again at Paul's words in Acts 28, focusing today on the contrast between the Gentiles and the Jews (emphasis added):

“Go to this people, and say, ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ For this people's heart has **grown dull**, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eye, and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

**Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.**” (Acts 28:26-28)

**Meditate and Pray:** Oh how important listening is! Repeatedly throughout the parables, Jesus says: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mt. 13:9); “Hear what the Parable of the Sower means” (Mt. 13:18). In fact, in Mark's version of these parables (Mark 4:1-25), there are at least eight times that the command “to hear” is used! This, then, is the theme of the parables, and the key to our entrance into the Kingdom of God: Do we hear Jesus clearly? Ask the Lord to give you a receptive, perceptive and hearing faith, so the voice of the Son of God might be clearly heard and received by you. In fact, “hearing the voice of the Son of God” is actually the most important activity for believers! Look at how Jesus promises that He will enable His own to hear His voice. Here is John 5:24-25, quoted from the 1599 Geneva Bible, with footnotes:

<sup>24[a]</sup>Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but hath passed from death to life.

<sup>25 [b]</sup>Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour shall come, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear it shall live.

**Footnotes:**

- a. John 5:24 The Father is not worshipped but by his Son's word apprehended by faith, which is the only way that leadeth to eternal life.
- b. John 5:25 We are all dead in sin and cannot be quickened by any other means, than by the word of Christ apprehended by faith.

**Wed/Thurs: Read Matthew 13:11-19; Romans 9:1-5 & Mark 3:20-21****Jesus Calls Us**

Sadly, many who hear the Word of Christ prove to be so obtuse, stubborn and willful in their blindness and sin that they prove to be *incapable* of receiving the Word into their hearts. Though at first they listen, they in the end prove unreceptive.

Believers often have this experience of *seeing a diminishment of interest in the Gospel* on the part of some with whom they share this good news. For a while, such folk walk with us in faith, sharing the joy of what we have discovered of God's forgiving grace. They may sit and discuss with interest the truths of God's word. They may attend; they may worship; they may sing the hymns of Zion. They may make an initial profession of faith. But they possess only the outward blessings of God's covenant of grace as those blessings are described in Romans 9:4-5. That generation enjoyed the name of belonging to God's favored people; they heard the thunder at Sinai and saw the glory of God descend to give the Ten Commandments; they received the law and perhaps delighted in the outward morality of it; they loved the trappings of worship; they even boasted of having Abraham as their father!

But in the end, a deep, personal, living relationship with Jesus smacks of too much religious enthusiasm. The calling of discipleship, by which we are summoned like the first disciples to forsake all in order to follow Christ (Mark 3:14-19)? That is just too much. A Savior who demands us to forsake all in this world? He must be out of His mind (Mark 3:21). Thus such false professors draw back and reject the Gospel seed of salvation. To them the blessings of the mystery of the Kingdom of God are not given – a fact they prove by their rejection of Jesus and all He stands for.

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask the Lord, whose mighty voice can split the cedars of Lebanon, and whose single word of command can create the cosmos, to be persistent in His speaking into your life through the voice of His Son, our Savior, as that voice is heard in the Scriptures. Please God, never abandon us to the sinful voice of despair which constantly resides in the remnants of our old sin nature! Speak over the waves and tumults of our lives. Use hymn # 591 in our red Trinity hymnals as your prayer:

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult  
of our life's wild, restless sea,  
day by day his clear voice soundeth,  
saying, "Christian, follow me;"*

*In our joys and in our sorrows,  
days of toil and hours of ease,  
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,  
"Christian, love me more than these."*

*Jesus calls us from the worship  
of the vain world's golden store;  
from each idol that would keep us,  
saying, "Christian, love me more."*

*Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,  
Savior, may we hear thy call,  
give our hearts to thine obedience,  
serve and love thee best of all.*

**Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 13:10-17**

**A Prayer for the Hard-Hearted**

The disciples asked Jesus, "Why do you use so many parables?" Jesus explained that the parables were a judgment against His own hard-hearted people. Time had run out for Israel in Jesus' day. After all, Jesus began with a clear Gospel summons to Israel to repent and believe in the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 4:17). He clearly taught about the nature of citizenship in that Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), followed by a clear explanation of the nature of discipleship in Matthew 10. Even more than Gospel proclamation, Jesus demonstrated the power of the Kingdom of God through the saving miracles He performed. But now in Matthew 13, having rejected such clear deeds and words, Israel will experience what it means for Jesus to hide the truth through the use of parables. In this way, the parables serve a judicial purpose, condemning the calloused heart (Mt. 13:15).

To prove that the refusal of His message was prophesied in the Old Testament, Jesus turns to Isaiah 6:9-10. Originally, Isaiah applied these words to those in Israel in his day who rejected the grace of God. As John Calvin says on Isaiah 6: “When reprobate men have by their own wickedness rebelled against God, they subject themselves to the vengeance of God.”

**Meditate and Pray:** This is sobering. The very same parables which opened the eyes and ears of saving faith also served to further harden those who had already turned their back on Christ.

“Lord, in our day the love of many grows cold, and the desire for other things, the cares of this world, and the deceiving power of Satan hinder so many from a clear profession of faith. Please have mercy on us, and grant us eyes to see by faith, and ears of faith to hear. Impress on us the need to cry out to you on behalf of the lost and the wayward, with the words of Trinity Hymnal # 381. Amen.”

*Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord our God;  
Will you pray with all your power, while we try to preach the Word?  
All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down;  
Brethren, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.*

*Brethren, see poor sinners round you slumb’ring on the brink of woe;  
Death is coming, hell is moving, can you bear to let them go?  
See our fathers and our mothers, and our children sinking down;  
Brethren, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.*