

How's Your Heart?

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's guidance, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 8.

The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 8. And if we just take as our text the words of verse 11. Luke, chapter 8, at verse 11.

Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. The seed is the word of God.

How's your heart? How's your heart? That's the question which my father-in-law asks me every time I see him.

He would ask me, Murdo, how's your heart? And it's such a searching and a probing question, isn't it? Because the question is always being asked in relation to the word of God.

[1 : 13] How's your heart in relation to God's word? What condition is your heart in? Because as the old saying goes, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

So, how's your heart tonight? How's your heart? And that's the same question which Jesus is putting before all the multitudes that were following him.

Because Luke tells us that the multitudes came from town after town to see him. And when they came to Jesus, it says that he spoke a parable to them.

In fact, we're told elsewhere that Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using a parable. And as we've said before, we're not to be tempted into thinking that the parables of Jesus were just sermon illustrations used to make his teaching easier to understand.

Or that they were just a little story used to entertain his crowd in order to keep their attention. Instead, the purpose of a parable was to get the listener deeply involved.

[2 : 23] And see that they are being portrayed and represented in this parable. And that when they see themselves in the parable, it will compel them to make a personal decision about following Jesus.

And Jesus often used parables by drawing them from incidents and situations in which his listeners were very, very familiar. He used things that they were seeing day by day.

Or perhaps in this case, with a parable of the sower, he was using something that they were seeing year by year. But the parables of Jesus, they were to be the test of all his hearers.

And the test was to see if their hearts were open to the truth. The test was to see if their hearts were open to the gospel. Because the parables are all about hearing.

And our response to what we have heard. Because the response of the heart is dependent upon what is heard. And so in the parable of the sower, Jesus sets out to explain that there will be different responses from people with regards to the message of the gospel.

[3 : 36] The parable of the sower, it's not actually about the man who sowed seed. It's not about the sower. The parable is about the effect that that man's labor had.

It's about the effect of the sower's labor. Because the parable, it's all about the soil. And onto what type of soil the seed fell.

And you know, you can almost imagine this sower, especially at this time of year. You can imagine the sower or the crofter or the farmer as he walks out into the middle of his field at the beginning of a working day.

And as he walks through the field, he puts his hand into his bucket. And where he's carrying this precious seed. And then he pulls it out and he begins to scatter the seed.

And he's scattering the seed as best as he can, all over his field. And this seed, it's what is precious to the sower. But what we must realize is that there is nothing wrong with the sower.

[4 : 38] And there is nothing wrong with the seed. And there is nothing wrong with the method in which the seed is being sown. Because all the efforts of the sower, they depend upon what type of soil the seed lands on.

And it was J.C. Ryle. I don't think I'll ever stop quoting him. J.C. Ryle, he said about the parable of the sower, he said, The parable of the sower contained in these verses is reported more frequently than any parable in the Bible.

It's in all of the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke. It's in those Gospels. And he says, it's a parable of universal application. It applies to everyone. The things it relates to are continually going on in every congregation to which the Gospel is preached.

The four kinds of hearts it describes are to be found in every assembly which hears the word. These circumstances, he says, should always make us read this parable with a deep sense of importance.

We should say to ourselves as we read it, This concerns me. My heart is to be seen in this parable. I too am here.

[5 : 59] I too am here. And that's why Jesus is asking us tonight, How's your heart? How's your heart?

Because Jesus wants to know whether your heart is a hardened heart, or a shallow heart, or a strangled heart, or an open heart.

Is your heart a hardened heart, a shallow heart, a strangled heart, or an open heart? How's your heart? So let's look firstly at Jesus' description of a hardened heart.

A hardened heart. He says in verse 11, Now the parable is this, The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard.

Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And what's unusual about the parable of the sword is that Jesus gives an explanation of this parable.

[7 : 07] And he explains to us that the first area in which the seed fell was by the wayside. The seed fell along the path. A path which was, it often passed right through the fields in Israel, where there would be fields on either side, and a path going through the middle of it.

And this path, it would have soil, but the soil would be trampled down and compressed and flattened, so that there would be no possibility of a seed ever taking root.

It's just like a peat root, where the ground is all hard, after tractors going over it for years. And Jesus says that when the seed lands on this type of soil, it just becomes easy food for the birds to eat.

Because as the seed falls onto the hard path, it just lies there. It can penetrate no deeper than the surface. And Jesus explains to us that this is the type of person who hears the word, but they don't respond.

They don't respond. And they don't respond because when they hear the gospel, their hearts are so hard that it can't penetrate any deeper than the surface.

[8 : 20] And we may well ask, well, how does our heart become hard? How does our heart harden? My friend, your heart hardens when you hear the same message week in, week out, year by year, funeral after funeral, again and again and again, and you don't respond.

That's how your heart hardens. Because every time we sit under a sermon being preached, or the word of God being read, God is working.

We never leave church the same way that we came in. Because we're either softening under the message, or we are hardening under the message. As the old saying goes, it's the same sun that melts the wax, that hardens the clay.

And maybe there was a day in your life, maybe there was when your heart was more receptive to spiritual things. Maybe there was a time when you were moved under the preaching of the gospel, and you knew that you needed a saviour, and that you needed to take that step of faith.

But as the years have rolled on, you've become more and more comfortable in your position. And any interest that was once there, well, it's now gone.

[9 : 44] Where you've heard the gospel so often, but you remain unresponsive, unmoved, unchanged, unconverted. And now coming to church, it just seems like a form and a fashion.

It's just part of the routine. The monthly routine. The Sunday routine. In order to make an appearance. Where sermons are preached, but no attention is ever given to them.

And it doesn't matter what is said, or how it is said, or who it is said to. You don't respond to the message of the gospel. And it wouldn't matter if you were confronted with the gates of hell itself.

You would remain unmoved, and unchanged. But why? Why? Well, Jesus explains that the reason for this is because the devil comes and snatches away the little seed that was sown in our heart.

And it's interesting that in the different accounts of this parable, Matthew calls him the evil one. Mark refers to him as Satan.

[10 : 54] And here in Luke's gospel, he is described as the devil. And all these names, they only seek to emphasize the description of the enemy of our soul.

Because when the seed of God's word is being sown, when the gospel is being preached, the devil is at work. And he's trying everything to prevent this seed being sown on your heart.

Because just like a little bird waiting to get its dinner, the devil is waiting. He's watching. He's watching the sower. As he sows the seed, as the sower puts his hand into his pouch to scatter the precious seed of God's word, he waits and he watches to see the trajectory of the seed.

And he waits to see where the seed falls. And just as the seed hits the heart, the devil snatches it away. The devil snatches it away.

And Luke says that he takes the word out of their heart. Because the last thing the devil wants is for this seed to take root and for you to have peace with God.

[12 : 04] The last thing the devil wants is for you to listen to the gospel. And my friend, do you know the frightening thing about this enemy of your soul?

It's that he never misses church. You might miss church, but he doesn't miss church. He never misses a service. He's always here.

And he's always trying to steal the seed from off your heart. And yet this enemy not only steals the seed of God's word, he also sows his own seeds.

He comes with seeds of distracting thoughts and seeds of doubt, seeds of imagination, seeds which make us fidgety in church.

But a favorite is his seeds of tiredness. Seeds of tiredness. My friend, you have never felt tiredness until you came to church.

[13 : 04] And why is church the place where people sleep? Why do people doze off in church? Especially when they're hearing about the best message in all the world. The message of a glorious Savior who saves us from sin and eternal damnation in hell.

The reason why is because the voice of God has been silenced by the enemy of our soul. My friend, how many times has this seed been sown upon your heart?

How many sermons have you heard in your lifetime? Countless sermons, I'm sure. How many preachers have pleaded with your soul? Countless preachers, I'm sure.

How many times have people spoken to you about Christianity or Christ? How many times has God spoken to you through death or illness?

Maybe in your family or your friends or yourself. And yet, you walk away unmoved by it. How many times has this seed been sown in your hearing where the word is heard but the heart, it's hard and you don't respond to the message of Jesus?

[14 : 19] How many times? And how many more times? How long will you go on not responding to the message of the gospel? How long?

I mean, will it be said of you that by the time you walk out of here tonight, the devil will have just plucked that seed from off your heart? I hope not.

I hope not. And Jesus is saying to us tonight, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Let him hear.

How's your heart? How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Or is it a shallow heart? A shallow heart.

Look at verse 13. 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.

[15 : 27] And so as Jesus continues to explain his parable, he says that after a time of waiting, the seeds which fell into the other types of soil, they also gave their own results.

and it seems that it's as if Jesus describes these types of soil to us in the order in which the soil produced results first. And so Jesus tells us that some seed fell upon the rock.

And Jesus, he further explains that not long after the seed was sown, there were signs of life. Because the seed sprang up out of the soil.

But Jesus is also very quick to point out to us that this rocky area of ground, it isn't as good as it may seem. On the surface, everything looked so promising.

On the surface, there are signs of life, and on the surface, there are signs of growth. But under the surface, under the surface, he says there are problems. And Jesus says that the reason why the seed was hindered from growing and germinating and bearing fruit was because when the seed was sown on the rock, it didn't have depth.

[16 : 42] And the reason the seed sprang up quickly was because it didn't have a root. And what caused the seed to wither quickly was that it didn't have any moisture.

And so the problems which this seed had when it landed on the rocky ground is that it had no depth, no root, and no moisture. No depth, no root, and no moisture.

And what's sad is that this soil, it looked so promising at first. The signs, the first signs of the seed were maybe coming through and breaking the soil towards the light, but all the time what's going on under the soil was unknown to the sower.

And the sower, well, he may have thought to himself, it's going to be a good yield this coming year. It's all looking so promising and so hopeful. But the closer the seed, the plant, was rising to the surface, the more the sun revealed the true condition of the soil.

And it soon became apparent that this soil had no depth, no root, and no moisture. And because of all of these problems with this soil, the sown seed, it burns under the hot sun and eventually withers and dies.

[18 : 03] And Jesus says this soil, it's very familiar to the first soil, where the shallow heart, it's very like the hardened heart. Because in the case of the hardened heart, the seed just lands upon the soil and it's impenetrable.

The heart is impenetrable, it's too hard. And that describes the person who doesn't respond to the gospel. But in the case of the shallow heart, Jesus explains that it refers to those who don't understand the gospel properly.

because Jesus says that this type of person, when the word of God is sown in their heart, they hear the word. They receive it with joy.

And in those initial stages, there are signs of life. There is enthusiasm and excitement and the enjoyment of coming to church and gathering for worship and being amongst God's people.

But when the seed lands on a shallow heart, that joy and enthusiasm and excitement, he says, it only endures for a while. Jesus says that those who have no root believe for a while and in time of testing, they fall away.

[19 : 17] But the reason why the shallow heart only endures for a while is because the heat of the sun, it reveals that there is no depth, no root, no moisture. We all seem to be going well and seem to be looking so promising.

But when the heat of temptation comes, the shallow heart quickly withers. Because the shallow heart soon realizes that following Jesus, it requires commitment, it requires counting the cost, it requires denying yourself, it requires taking up your cross and following Jesus daily.

And because the word of God demands that Christians are to live a distinct lifestyle, the shallow heart begins to feel left out and they try when they try to take their step of faith in following Jesus.

Because they know that in doing so they will lose their friends that they spent so much time with. And even though the new things begin to replace the old things, it only lasts for a while.

Because the person with the shallow heart has a love for the world that is far greater than their love for Jesus. And there is still a part of them that wants back to the old things, back to the world, who are coming out from the world and being separated.

[20 : 42] It's a real challenge. And it causes such a strain because the shallow heart still wants to hold on to the old lifestyle that they once had. but when the heat of the sun finally reaches its peak, the shallow heart says, too much.

Too much. It's too much for them. Too much of a commitment. Too much to give up. Too much to lose by becoming a Christian. But they wouldn't say that if they had roots.

They wouldn't say that if they were watering their heart with the word of God and with prayer. And you know, there are so many shallow hearts in evangelical churches today where their shallow hearts are attracted by all the noise and all the excitement of a large church where a lot is going on and they hear the gospel.

They seem to fit in. Maybe even they make a profession of faith. But the shallow heart, which still wants the best of both worlds, it's described by John Calvin as one who has temporary faith.

And there's one sure sign that someone has temporary faith because temporary faith doesn't like to be tested. Temporary faith flourishes in the summer but it doesn't like the winter.

[22 : 12] Temporary faith loves the nice warm days of sunlight but it doesn't like the long cold nights of winter. temporary faith loves it when everything is going well and when they can ride on this emotional high of excitement and buzz and be drawn in by the crowd but have no root.

But when you lose the emotions, take away the excitement, go through difficult experiences, face loneliness and bereavement and pain and heartache and loneliness and temptation and chastenings and trial and persecutions under the heat of the sun and then see that there is no depth of earth because of all the barrenness of the soil and all that grew upwards it withers because it didn't grow downwards.

It didn't grow downwards. My friend, temporary Christianity has a shallow heart heart and Jesus is asking us tonight how's your heart?

How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Is it a shallow heart? Or is it a strangled heart? Is it a strangled heart?

Because he says in verse 14 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.

[23 : 49] And so Jesus says that the next seed to germinate was the seed which fell among the thorns. And it's clear that this soil is different from the last two soils because this type of soil it allowed the seed to grow.

It wasn't hard but soft ground and it was a ground which was full of moisture. It had lots of earth, it had depth and it was able to put down roots. And it seems that this soil had everything that the seed needed to grow but it also had too much.

It had too much because as soon as the seed began to put down roots, the roots of the thorns they began to wrap around the seed and started to choke it.

but with this soil the problem is not so much as what was taken away as it was with the other ones. It's the fact that all the other things are crowding in.

Because as the seed puts down roots, Jesus says the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of other things they crowd in and choke the word.

[25 : 03] And it becomes unfruitful. And so the strangled heart is someone in which cares have crowded in, riches have crowded in, and pleasures have crowded in, and it's all at the expense of crowding out the word of God.

And what Jesus is saying is that the strangled heart, it's someone who has trust issues. The strangled heart is someone who has trust issues, where they feel safer and more secure when they're trusting in their things and the things of the world rather than trusting in God.

And Jesus warns us that there is a danger in care. There's a danger in anxiety and worry. The Bible says that we're to be anxious for nothing.

It never says be careless for nothing. It does say be careful for nothing. Don't be so full of care that you forget that God is sovereign in all aspects of your life and that he's promised to be with you and help you and provide for all of your needs according to his riches and glory.

But there are others, says Jesus, with a snare as wealth. And when it comes to wealth, no one ever says they have a problem. They never have a problem spending money.

[26 : 30] Money is not a problem in the purse. It's a good thing to have money in the purse. Money is only a problem in the heart. Because it's not money that's the root of all evil.

Says Paul, it's the love of money which is the root of all evil. It's not wealth that's the problem. It's the love of wealth and the love for more and the covetous desire for more.

That's the problem, says Jesus. That's the problem with a strangled heart. It has too much. It has too much. And you know, Jesus, he once told another parable in which he described a man with a strangled heart.

Maybe we'll come to him soon. It's the parable of the rich fool. And in that parable, Jesus explained that there was a man who had a dilemma.

A real dilemma. He didn't know what to do. Because he had yielded such a large crop. And he had far too much to cope with. And instead of giving away what he had to the poor or selling it, the man decided that it would be far better for him to tear down his little barns that have served him well and build bigger and better ones.

[27 : 47] But what was wrong with that was that this man's heart had become so strangled by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of things that it had tempted him to the place where it leads countless millions in this world.

The place of a false sense of security. security. A false sense of security. Because there are many people who have their job, their money, their status, their property, their wealth, that's their security.

And they don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with having any of these things. Nothing wrong at all. Nothing wrong with having a secure job or money or property or wealth.

That's not the issue. the issue of a strangled heart is where do you find security? Where do you find security? Who are you trusting in?

What are you trusting in? And people often say that having all these things, it doesn't satisfy. Having money and job and the property and the wealth, they say it doesn't satisfy.

[29 : 06] The problem is it does satisfy. It does satisfy. Wealth satisfies many needs and many desires. Wealth does satisfy. That's why there are so many people in our nation and even in our own island who don't see the need of God or the need of church or the need of salvation because their satisfaction has led them to a false sense of security where they feel so secure and so satisfied by what they have and what they've earned and the empires that they have built for themselves.

That they act like the rich fool who decided to take life easy and enjoy the pleasures of life to the point that they say to their soul, soul you have many good things laid up for you for many years.

Eat, drink and be merry. But the problem is the strangled heart although it may appear secure on the outside and slightly religious in its actions.

It has in fact crowded in everything else and crowded out the word of God. And when the word of God speaks to a strangled heart which has been led into a false sense of security, all God will say is fool.

tonight your soul is required of you. My friend Jesus is asking us, how's your heart?

[30 : 46] How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Is it a shallow heart? Is it a strangled heart? or is it an open heart?

Is it an open heart? If you look at verse 15, 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.

the last type of soil which Jesus mentions in the parable of the sower is the good soil. And Jesus explains the difference between an open heart in comparison to the hardened heart and the shallow heart and the strangled heart.

And the difference is that an open heart hears the word with a good and honest heart and keeps it. the open heart keeps the word.

It retains the word of God. The open heart holds on to the word of God tightly and trusts it. The open heart takes God at his word.

[32 : 04] But what's interesting is the way in which Luke records this parable. Because he describes the different outcome of the seed with each soil.

He says that the first soil which was the hardened heart he says that that seed fell by the wayside. And the second soil which was the shallow heart he says that that seed fell onto the rock.

Then the third soil the strangled heart the seed fell among the thorns. But this soil the open heart the seed he says fell into the good soil.

The seed fell by the wayside onto the rock among the thorns and into into the good soil. The seed of God's word fell into an open heart that was honest and good and ready to receive it.

And that open heart he says it closed up and it kept the word. It kept the word and would not let it go. The open heart held onto the word of God tightly and it bore fruit.

[33 : 21] And what Jesus is saying is that those who have an open heart they respond. They respond because the open heart it accepts the word.

It receives the word. It keeps the word. It welcomes in the word. and it gives the word the place of priority in the heart. The open heart says I'm a sinner in need of a saviour.

The open heart says I'm in ruin and I'm in need of a remedy. The open heart says he must increase, I must decrease. My friend, the open heart gives the word of God the greatest position where Jesus is placed upon the throne of our heart.

The open heart responds to the word. Which is nothing like the other types of heart. The word is ignored by the hardened heart.

The word is undermined by the shallow heart. The word is overcrowded by the strangled heart. But with the open heart, the open heart hears the word and keeps it and it bears fruit.

[34 : 36] Now the amount of fruit produced by an open heart is mentioned in Luke's account like it is with the other accounts. But what Luke tells us is how the fruit is produced.

Because he says that it is produced with patience. With patience. And what Jesus means is that an open heart may have slow growth.

But slow growth is good. patience is required.

good fruit takes time. It needs patience. The results, as he knew, they weren't instant. And all crafters and gardeners know that waiting is part of the process.

Patience is required. And that's what it's like with an open heart. Growth is slow, but growth is good. Open hearts and good fruit takes time.

[35 : 44] It needs patience. patience. And you know, that's what Paul told the young minister, Timothy, when he was encouraging Timothy to be faithful throughout his ministry.

Paul said to him, preach the word. Be instant, in season, and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all doctrine, he says, and patience.

Patience. Growth is slow. But growth is good. Open hearts and good fruit takes time.

And once again, Jesus wants to ask us, how's your heart? How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart?

Is it a shallow heart? Is it a strangled heart? Or is it an open heart? You know, when J.C. Ryle concluded reflecting upon this parable.

[36 : 48] He said, let us leave this parable with a deep sense of danger and responsibility of all the hearers of the gospel. There are four ways in which we may hear.

And one of these four, of one of these four, only one is right. There are three kinds of hearers whose souls are in imminent peril.

How many of these kinds, he says, of how many of these kinds of hearers are to be found in every congregation? There is only one class of hearers which is right in the sight of God.

And what are we, he says? Do we belong to that one? Do we have an open heart?

Do we have an open heart? My friend, how's your heart? Is it a hardened heart?

[37 : 49] Is it a shallow heart? Is it a strangled heart? Or is it an open heart? house your heart?

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that thou art one who is willing to speak to our heart.

And we do pray that thou wouldst open our hearts to receive thy word. Lord, that thou wouldst bless thy truth to us. Make us, O Lord, we pray thee, ready to receive it.

That we might grow and that we might germinate and bear fruit to thine own glory. Bless thy truth to us, we ask, and help us to apply it in our lives. Go before us throughout this week, a week that is known to thee.

And Lord, we give thanks to thee that thou art the one who does know. Because we are often reminded of the uncertainty of life. We are often reminded of things that we never planned.

[38 : 56] But help us to trust in the God who never changes. Go before us then, we pray, and do us good. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We shall conclude by singing in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51, page 281. Psalm 51, singing from verse 7 down to the verse marked 13.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Psalm 51 from verse 7.

Just a point to note, this Psalm is what changed my life. Verse 10 became my prayer, that the Lord would create within me a clean heart.

God. So if I'm telling you it does work, it does work. If you have any doubt whatsoever for the Lord cleansing your heart, that prayer works, and the Lord will answer it.

[40 : 16] So if I want to tell you anything tonight, claim that as your own. Psalm 51, verse 10, create a clean heart, Lord renew, a right spirit, me within. Psalm 51 from verse 7, Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me, I shall be cleansed so.

Yea, wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow. Down to the verse marked 13. We'll stand to sing to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[41 : 20] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. That so these heavy bones which the past broken Mary joins. All mine iniquities brought out thy face, hide from my sin.

Create a clean heart, Lord, with you. Arise with me within.

Cast me not from thy sight, nor take thy Holy Spirit away.

Restore me thy salvation's joy, with thy free spirit me stay.

[42 : 48] Then will I teach thy grace unto those of transgressors be.

And those that sinners are shall then be turned unto thee.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.