

Matthew Chapter 13 v 1 - 23

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[0 : 00] I don't know whether you found that psalm we read right at the beginning of the service to be troubling to you in a way when it closes with that discordant note, do not harden your hearts like Israel did in the wilderness as it journeyed towards the promised land.

The psalmist warned against hard hearts in the congregation of worshippers. In Matthew 13, we're told that huge multitudes, huge crowds followed Jesus.

So many that he had to use a boat as a pulpit whilst the gathered congregation listened to him from the shore. Imagine the joyful excitement of the disciples at such a throng of people.

I'm fairly sure that we also would be excited if we had so many people gather to worship God and hear his word that we had to make special arrangements for ourselves, say hiring the spa on a regular basis because this building is far too small.

Well, did you also note the disappointment and frustration of the disciples in chapter 13 in verse 10? Sometimes people criticize preachers.

[1 : 43] Well, the disciples here came to Jesus and said, why do you speak to the people in parables? It's not clear. And in Luke chapter 8 and verse 9, we read that the disciples asked him what the parable of the soah meant.

And in his reply, in both Matthew and Luke and Mark, Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah.

And this is a quotation from Isaiah 13, 14. You'll be forever hearing but never understanding. Sorry. In verses 13 and 14 of Matthew's gospel, you'll ever be hearing but never understanding.

You will ever be seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears and they've closed their eyes.

Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts. Now, it's lifted straight out of Isaiah 6. And the problem was this.

[2 : 54] Many members of the crowd had deliberately closed their hearts to what was being told to them. It all looks so encouraging.

But there's a really serious problem with this crowd gripped by religious excitement. And it's so easy to get carried away with the singing of the hymns, the choruses and so on.

And yet, have a hard heart. And this is the sort of thing that Jesus was warning his disciples about.

The people listening to Jesus were paralyzed by hard hearts, spiritual blindness and deaf ears.

There was a spiritual deadness, despite the crowd appearing to be interested in what Jesus had to say. Well, Jesus explained the parable of the sewers to his disciples in verse 18.

You're probably very familiar with it. And that's really interesting because you can be familiar with the passage of scripture and it'd be a little bit like water on a duck's back.

[4 : 14] And the parable warned against hard hearts, but promised spiritual fruitfulness in others.

Now, did the disciples apply the teaching to themselves? Did they ask themselves, I wonder, whether or not they had hard hearts?

Whether they had fruitful lives? I have a suspicion that if you take this passage seriously, those are the questions that would go through your mind.

Have I got a hard heart? Am I spiritually fruitful? Those are the questions that we ought to ask.

Shortly, we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And it's actually a very solemn time, as well as a time that brings us great joy and thankfulness as we consider our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 26] But do you remember what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11? He said, As you examine yourself before you take the bread and the wine.

Now let me remind you that those who put Jesus to death didn't see who he was. They didn't recognize the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even the very wisest of them. They were spiritually blind. Paul, the Apostle wrote, None of the rulers of this age understood it.

For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So I put it to you. When you eat the bread and drink the wine, do you see what they represent?

Do you see that they represent the body of the Lord of glory? And that body crucified for you?

[7 : 04] Now that's the sort of question that you have to, you must put to yourself when you drink the wine, when you eat the bread.

Do you recognize the body, that body which was slain for you on the cross at Calvary? Do you recognize that?

Are you thankful for the grace of God that sent him into this world to die for you? And that's the sort of question that you must put to yourself before you take communion.

Now, if you didn't, can I put it to you very seriously that you're as blind as the hard-hearted elders, chief priests and teachers of the law 2,000 years ago.

Put it to you that you might be as guilty as Pilate who was almost indifferent to what the Jews demanded when they cried, crucify him, crucify him.

[8 : 21] And the parable, therefore, that what we've been reading, is a warning to us about having hard, unbelieving hearts and seeing hearts.

But thankfully, the parable has an encouragement for us. It encourages us that the word of God in our hearts can make us amazingly fruitful.

When Graham, a little bit later on, reads from 1 Corinthians 11, we'll read this, that whenever we take of the bread and drink the wine, we proclaim the Lord's death till he come.

Proclamation, that's a sermon, isn't it? And so when we look, when we have the bread and the wine before us, it's preaching to us that Christ died, that he died for us, that he took in his own body our guilt, our sin, and he paid the whole price for us.

So how do you listen to that sermon? That sermon which is portrayed in symbols as opposed to a sermon that's proclaimed in words.

[9 : 34] Well, we must take the warning seriously. And we look at the warning in Matthew 13, first of all, he was warning the crowd, but would it be that they would have ears that listened?

If only they listened to those warnings to repent that they heard time and time again. But instead of this, they hardened their hearts. They were heading for judgment.

And we know the judgment that came upon Israel at that time when Jerusalem was sacked in AD 60. And in the Old Testament, our pastor's been reminded us of Pharaoh of Egypt.

Remember Pharaoh, how he hardened his heart? And judgment fell upon him and came upon his people. But judgment also fell upon the people of Judah themselves, upon the Israelites.

They hardened their heart at the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah. You remember how it was that God sent the Babylonian army against Jerusalem and Jerusalem was sacked.

[10 : 47] It was burnt, destroyed, and many of the people killed and carried away. The cream of the Jews were taken into captivity and Jerusalem was left as a pile of ruins.

And Jeremiah and Isaiah preached to them. They preached to them about the danger of a hard heart. Jeremiah was told this in Jeremiah chapter 5 and verse 20.

Announce this, Jeremiah, to the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah. Hear this, you foolish and senseless people who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear.

Should you not fear me, declares the Lord? Should you not tremble in my presence? Now they ought to have loved the Lord with all their hearts, with all their soul, with all their strength, with all their mind.

But they didn't. They wouldn't. They couldn't. They were defiant and rebellious. Their hearts were hard. Their minds were clouded. They should have trembled in God's presence.

[11 : 59] But they didn't. They were spiritually dead. And their hearts were like stone. Their ears were deaf. And Jesus used exactly the same language as Jeremiah when he spoke to those crowds around the Lake of Galilee.

Both groups were guilty of spiritual blindness and deafness. Both groups had hard hearts.

Both groups were heading for judgment. And some of the hearers of Jesus would recognize Jeremiah's words. And the word ought to have come to them with even greater impact.

But we're no different, are we? Don't we hear God's word urging us to repent, urging us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

So have you got a hard heart? Is your heart like stone when you listen to the gospel?

[13:06] Jesus spelt out in very graphic terms what it meant to be a hard heart, to have a hard heart. His parable of the sower used a vivid picture of what it is to have a hard heart.

And that those who listened to him would be reminded of his parable every time they saw someone sowing seed.

Now the parable tells us that there are four different kinds of soils. Three of them describing hearers that did not, could not, would not receive the word properly.

And one of them representing a heart that truly received the word. So three warnings and one note of encouragement. What does spiritual hardness of heart look like?

Well first of all it involves the mind. Some seed fell by the wayside and the birds came and devoured them.

[14:20] This is what Jesus said in verse 19 about that. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

So as you listen to a sermon and you find there's something in that sermon you don't understand and then the sermon comes to a conclusion and you're still not understanding, that's the sort of situation that Jesus is talking about because what so often happens is that you start talking to someone and you forget what you didn't understand or it loses its force and its importance.

Now does that happen with you? The words you heard are lost on you because something assumes much greater importance. And in your pride, in your indifference, you think it doesn't matter.

And you go on and build what you think is your Christian life but something vital is missing. And you have years or perhaps decades in a spiritual wilderness.

It might be worse than that. It might be a whole lifetime in a spiritual wilderness. It might be even worse than that. It might be eternity in a spiritual wilderness.

[16:02] Now the disciples came to Jesus and they asked what it meant. How wise they were. They weren't content in just not understanding.

There was something that they needed to know, something they needed to understand, something that they'd missed.

And it might be possible that when you listen to a sermon, there's something absolutely vital that you miss. I'll put this to you.

Is that missing element Jesus Christ himself? You don't recognise him and you're attempting to build a Christian life without him.

Now Jesus spoke about the wise men of his time, the scribes, the Pharisees and so on. And he said that essentially they're like someone trying to build a house without a foundation.

[17:11] and the apostle Peter took this up and in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 6 Peter says this, for in scripture it says, see I lay in a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

Now to you who believe this stone is precious but to those who do not believe the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

Understanding the gospel is essential to believing it. You must not let words enter your brain and not understand those words.

True faith involves listening, understanding, believing and trusting. Now you believe that Jesus died and rose again.

That's very good. But why did he die? What's that got to do with you? How does that help you? It might be that you understand a little more that he died for sinners.

[18:33] Now it clearly doesn't mean that he died to save everyone because there's a judgment to come. There's a hell as well as a heaven.

So how did his death save you? Do you realize that he died in your place?

That he died to pay the punishment that you deserved? And you must understand that he loved you so much as to lay down his life for you.

Not primarily to win you but to save you. To complete that salvation that's necessary for your sins to be forgiven, blotted out so there's no longer any condemnation for you.

No, it wasn't just the Jews who hardened their heart against Jesus and refused what he had to say.

[19 : 42] The Gentiles of Paul's day were equally hard-hearted. Paul wrote to the Ephesians chapter 4 verse 17, I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

So Jews, Gentiles, religious, irreligious, educated and otherwise have a problem, a problem with a hard heart.

Notice that Paul identified the cause of the ignorance. He said this, the ignorance that is in them is due to the hardening of their hearts.

When Jesus explained the parable, he said that that willful ignorance has an accomplice. Who is the accomplice?

[21 : 04] Well, Jesus said the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. Do you let this accomplice interfere with your understanding of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul said if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled to those who are perishing. The God of this world, who is he?

He's the devil. The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

So have you understood the gospel or have you closed your eyes to it? Are you intent on rejecting the gospel message today as last week, as the week before, as the year before?

Or does it give you life and hope and peace and joy every time you hear it? Now Jesus went on to describe another kind of hard heart.

[22 : 23] The picture put before us is this seed lying on top of very thin soil. Thin soil that covers hard, impenetrable rock.

The seed immediately sprouts up, but when the hot sun beats down upon the seedling, it perishes, it withers in the heat. Now this sort of person has the ability to understand the gospel, that's good, and it might for a time thrill that person, whether it's him or her, whether it's you or someone else. It might seem like a good thing to bring others to hear the gospel. That sort of person might even preach the gospel or teach it to others, but it only affects the mind.

They're dead from the neck downwards. The word enters the mind, but the heart, the will, the affections remain unchanged.

It's possible to love the truth, but love ourselves more. What sort of heart have you got? What happens to you in time of testing?

[23 : 39] It's in times of testing that we see what sort of heart we have. It's one thing to have a clear mind, it's another thing to have a heart that's truly dependent upon God.

It's one thing to know a doctrine, it's another thing to know the Lord. If you know him, you stand in awe of him.

you fear him more than man. Remember the very clear teaching that Jesus gave the disciples that he sent out, Matthew 10 verse 28, do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

We can all be very sure of ourselves and self confident when things are easy, each one of us. But what will we prove to be like when and if the sun of persecution beats down upon us for days, for months and years, just like it has in North Korea?

Remember self-confident Peter. Peter said to Jesus, though all men deny you, I shall never deny you.

[25 : 07] Remember what happened to Peter? He went on to deny the Lord three times to a servant maid at the time that Jesus was arrested. But his fall was temporary.

He had real faith, but the word of God was not sufficiently deep within his heart to keep him.

Sometimes there's a complete disconnect between the mind and the heart and there never was a connection.

In the early part of the 16th century in France, there was a bishop called Brissonnet and he was impressed by the gospel. In fact, he was so impressed by what he understood that he gathered a significant number of evangelical leaders to him, so they could join him in preaching the gospel to the people in and around Moe to the northeast of Paris.

And of course, that was very good, very thrilling. But then a political change took place in France and the enemies of the gospel in Paris became much more threatening and Brissonnet

compromised and went so far that he became a persecutor himself.

And some of those that had believed under his ministry were sent to the stake because of who Brissonnet had become. And there was never any sign that he repented.

[26 : 43] Listen to what Jesus had to say about people like Brissonnet. the one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. So is there anything we can do in order to help us stand in the hot winds of trial, whatever those trials are?

David described the heart of the godly man in Psalm 1. He said this, His delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

He's like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Not seed on hard rock but drawing nourishment from rivers of water. How? By meditating on the word of God constantly.

[28 : 03] David made it clear that ungodly people are not like that. They're like the chaff that the wind blows away. So the message here is don't be shallow.

superficial Christians. Remember the words in the Church of England prayer book read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the word.

Part of who heard those words read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the word. Well so wrote Archbishop Crennard who was to bravely face the stake when he died in the 16th century.

So are you allowing the word to penetrate deeply into your heart? Put down deep roots. Some preachers talk about certain families, villages, towns, cities, countries as being very hard to minister to.

And what they mean is that the people have particularly hard hearts. Yet the seed is sown to hundreds and thousands of children and young people perhaps in those countries, our own country perhaps you recognise it.

[29 : 26] We've got camps and beach missions, schools and university CUs, millions of people receive leaflets, attend evangelistic services and so on. Yes and we're encouraged by conversations that we have at places like Christian Answers and bookstalls and agricultural shows and so on.

It seems as real interest and the word seems to be having an effect. In Jesus' parable the seed sprouts up but is choked by thorns, thistles, weeds, just like a badly attended allotment.

And if you talk to people who no longer go to church at all, they might well say to you, well, yeah, I do believe, I haven't lost my faith, but life's so busy, so many things to think about, so many things to worry about, family, school, jobs, gardens, cars, paying the bills, paying the mortgage, what's my investments in the financial part of the paper or on the internet?

It's so hard to keep up with my friends on Facebook. book. Now, of course, none of those things are wrong, but it's a matter of priorities.

Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God, and without that, there'd be no fruit.

[30 : 57] fruit. But there is fruit to be had by the sowing of the seed. Jesus himself was a master sower as he purposefully went around Galilee and Judea.

The master sower himself promised this in chapter 13, verse 23, he who receives seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirtyfold from one seed, one grain, if you like, ears of corn absolutely loaded with ears which are eatable where you can get your flour from, from one single seed, an unbelievable harvest of wheat.

Isaiah 55, verse 10, my word, God speaking, my word is that which goes forth from my mouth, it shall not return to me void, what an encouragement, but shall encourage what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it, for you will go out with joy and be led with peace, the mountains and the hills will break forth into singing before you, wonderful poetic language, got the fruits there of peace and joy and singing, does it remind you of the fruit of the spirit, the fruit of the spirit that Paul describes in Galatians 5, verse 22, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, this is what makes all the difference, it's the spirit, it's the spirit that makes soil good, and if you're concerned about your heart, whether you're fruitful or not or will be fruitful or not, remember this, it's the spirit, that can

change your heart, and Jesus said you must be born again, the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes, so is everyone born of the spirit, so have you been born again, have you been born of the spirit, have you been regenerated by him, have you been remade by him, the apostle

Paul said this, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, behold all things become new, so have you got new life in Christ, perhaps you're not sure, perhaps you cannot see the fruit in your life, life, in the well-known picture that Jesus drew about the vine and the branches and its fruitfulness, Jesus said this, abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you, if you desire to be fruitful, ask him, but note the link, if my words abide in you, that's what

Jesus said, without him you can do nothing, but with him all things are possible, even fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold in your life, and so the challenge of the passage to us is this, are you good soil?

[35 : 19] Has the word penetrated your heart? Do you understand it and has it gone down to the very depths of your heart? Are you bearing fruit or is your life a spiritual wilderness full of rocks and thorns?

and thistles? Let's pray. Amen. Lord and Father, we thank you for your word, your word which is so faithful, so penetrating to our minds and to our consciences.

Lord, we confess that we are not the Christians that we would like to be. We're not as fruitful as we long to be, and yet we thank you that you have the plan, you have the purpose for us that we might bear much fruit and bring glory to you.

Pray that you'll help each one of us to understand your word, to receive your word in our deepest hearts, and that we might know your spirit coming upon us and changing us.

We ask that you would do these mighty things for the glory of your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.