

The Crowded Heart

Mark 4.1-20

One day Jesus compared life to a field, people to soil, the Gospel to seed, and eternal life to a crop of harvested righteousness.

Jesus also classified everyone on Earth as either – “Wayside” or The Hard Heart, “Rocky” or The Shallow Heart, “Thorny” or The Crowded Heart, or “Good” which is the Fruitful Heart.

That day Jesus also said that God's Word either is -- stolen away by birds (demons); or God's Word is scorched away because it is unrooted into the heart; or God's Word is choked by the world; or finally God's Word burst forth supernaturally into a fruitful to harvest.

This morning we have come to the third of the bad responses to God's Word.

Just as there are three degrees of fruitfulness in the good soil, so there are three degrees of fruitlessness in the bad soil.

This morning Jesus warned of a third dangerous condition of the heart – the Crowded Heart.

1st He warned us about the Hardened Heart. A person beaten down by the constant traffic of life, packed and hardened by time and totally untouched by God or His Word.

2nd He warned us about the Shallow Heart. This is the life that harbors just beneath its surface a massive outcropping of rebellion. Like a layer of rock, this rebellion in its many forms keeps the heart from ever being reached. Just the emotions are touched. Only the feelings get moved – never the will.

This morning He warns us about the Crowded Heart. This is the heart that has the roots of three very deadly weeds alive and poised to spring forth from the soil of that life. Please stand with me as we listen to His warnings in Mark 4.

Mark 4:7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

Mark 4: 18-19 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Pray.

Jesus reveals three symptoms of a crowded heart; three danger signs of a life that is choking God and His Word right out of existence. These three are

1. DISTRACTIONS: and the cares of this world,
2. DECEPTIONS: the deceitfulness of riches, and
3. DESIRES: the desires for other things

Crowded hearts are DIVIDED HEARTS

Weedy soil represents a heart preoccupied with worldly matters. Here the thorn bushes are not visible because they have been burned off the surface, but their roots are intact. When the seed is sown on this soil, then watered and germinated, the entrenched thorns also sprout and grow with a virulent violence, choking out the grain before it can produce any fruit. This portrayed a divided heart, a heart divided by irreconcilable loyalties.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

They are uncommitted and preoccupied with the world's pleasures, money, career, fame, fortune, or the lusts of the flesh. They say they are Christians, but they care nothing about a pure life. That is the response of weedy soil. The germinating seed that looks so good will ultimately be overwhelmed by the thorns of worldliness, and eventually the weedy heart will show no evidence that good seed was ever sown. What happens when the seed that once looked so promising is choked out? Has such a person lost his salvation? No, he never had it. The Word of God fell on a heart that was unprepared because it was full of malignant weeds. That person received the seed of the gospel but not into clean soil. The gospel germinated but was choked out before it could come to fruition. The person with the weedy heart was never saved in the first place. Weedy hearts may be willing to accept Jesus as Savior, but not if it means letting go of the world. That is not salvation. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt.

6:24). And the apostle John wrote, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Soil must be cleansed of the weeds and thorns if it is to produce a crop. ¹

Crowded Hearts are Temporary Christians

These are people who attend to the preaching of Christ's truth and to a certain extent obey it. Their understanding assents to it. Their judgment approves of it. Their conscience is affected by it. Their affections are in favor of it. They acknowledge that it is all right, good and worth receiving. They even abstain from many things which the Gospel condemns, and adopt many habits which the Gospel requires. But here unhappily they stop short.

Mark 4:19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

With everything apparently that is promising and favorable in their spiritual state, they stand still. They never come up to the full standard of New Testament Christianity. They bring no fruit to perfection. To go so far and yet go no further—to see so much and yet not see all—to approve so much and yet not give Christ the heart, this is indeed most deplorable! And there is but one verdict that can be given about such people. Without a decided change they will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ wants our whole heart. "Friendship with the world is hatred towards God" (James 4:4). ²

Crowded Hearts are Lost Hearts

For a while they look just like the rest of the field. They come to church, identify with the people of God, even show signs of growth. But they never bear spiritual fruit.

- They want a Savior without a Lord.
- They want to die the death of the righteous but live like a pagan.

Matthew 7:16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

This is Satan's most subversive tactic of all. These people hear and accept the word and allow it to take root in their hearts, giving hope of a harvest. But *thorns* grow up and choke out the growing seed. Thorns rob nutrition, water, light, and space from newly sprouting seeds. Distractions and conflicts rob new believers of time to reflect on and digest God's Word in order to grow from it, as well as robbing guidance and support

¹MacArthur, J., F. 1997, c1988. *The Gospel according to Jesus : What does Jesus mean when he says "follow me"*. Includes index. (Electronic ed.). Academic and Professional Books, Zondervan Pub. House: Grand Rapids, MI

²Ryle, J. C. 1993. *Mark*. The Crossway classic commentaries. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Ill.

from interaction with other Christians. Jesus described the thorns: *worries of this life; deceitfulness of wealth; desires for other things*;

Taken at face value, the message of the parable of the soils is clear: of four soils, only one is good. Only one produces fruit, and thus it alone is of any value to the farmer. This good soil pictures the believer. The weedy soil and the shallow soil are pretenders. The soil by the wayside is an absolute rejecter. Indeed, fruit is the ultimate test of true salvation. In the harvest, weedy soil is no better than the hard road or shallow ground. All are worthless. Seed sown there is wasted, and the ground is fit for nothing except burning. It cannot picture salvation. ³

Hebrews 6:8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

Warren Wiersbe understands the issue clearly: It is important to note that none of these first three hearts [the soil by the wayside, the shallow soil, and the weedy soil] underwent salvation. The proof of salvation is not listening to the Word, or having a quick emotional response to the Word, or even cultivating the Word so that it grows in a life. The proof of salvation is *fruit*, for as Christ said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16)⁴

Can a Believer have a Crowded Heart?

Yes for a time, but not permanently.

The four soils represent four different ways people respond to God's message. While Jesus was talking about four different kinds of hearts and each one's readiness to receive the gospel, his words could also apply to us in two other ways:

- (1) different times or phases in our lives;
- (2) how we willingly receive God's message in some areas of our lives and resist it in others. For example:
 - You may be open to God about your future, but closed concerning how you spend your money.
 - You may respond like good soil to God's demand for worship, but be like rocky soil with regard to helping people in need.

We need to strive to be like good soil in every area of our live at all times.⁵

HOW DO WE RESIST THE THORNS OF THE WORLD?⁶

We must welcome God's Word exclusively so nothing stifles or distracts us. We must weed out or avoid the thorn patches. As James wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" ([James 1:22 NIV](#)).

³MacArthur, J., F. 1997, c1988. *The Gospel according to Jesus : What does Jesus mean when he says "follow me"*. Includes index. (Electronic ed.). Academic and Professional Books, Zondervan Pub. House: Grand Rapids, MI

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Meet Yourself in the Parables* (Wheaton: Victor, 1979), 27.

⁵Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

⁶Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

BEWARE OF THE THORN

DISTRACTIONS – or the WORRIES OF THIS LIFE.

Society says, "Take care of yourself; no one else will."

REALIZE THE PROBLEM

Fear of persecution for being identified with Christ can neutralize people who are worried that they will be ridiculed. Daily concerns, schedules, and pressures can snuff out our time and energy to grow. Worry consumes our thoughts, disrupts our productivity, and reduces our trust in God. **cares of this world.** Lit. "the distractions of the age." He or she is consumed with the cares of this age. A preoccupation with the temporal issues of this present age blinds a person to any serious consideration of the gospel (cf. James 4:4; 1 John 2:15, 16). This heart makes some gestures toward Christ, but "the worries of this life" (literally, "the distractions of this age") draw it back. It is pulled in other directions, leaving no room for spiritual concerns. Worldly worries (no matter how important or how minor), Daily routines overcrowd believers, *making it* (that is, God's Word) *unfruitful* in their lives⁷. "Thorn patch" people, overcome by worries and the lure of materialism, leave no room in their lives for God.⁸

SEE CHRIST'S SOLUTION

- [James 1:12](#), "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation" (NRSV).
- [Philippians 4:6](#), "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers" (TLB).
- [Matthew 6:31](#), "Therefore, do not worry" (NRSV).

DECEPTIONS – or the DECEITFULNESS OF

WEALTH. Society says, "Wealth brings security, power, and happiness."

- Wealth can take God's place in our lives. It can become an idol—the focus of our activities and devotion. It tempts us to deny our dependence on God, taking our eyes off eternal values. Wealth leads to pride.
- **The deceitfulness of riches** is a perfect description of a worldly person—one who lives for the things of this world. Not only can money and material possessions not satisfy the desires of the heart or bring the lasting happiness they deceptively promise, but they also blind those who pursue them to eternal, spiritual concerns (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).⁹
- "The deceitfulness of wealth" ("keeping up with the Joneses") draws them with the promise of great good. This involves buying things you do not need to impress people you do not like with money you do not have.
- This is a divided heart—like the heart of the girl to which a young man once proposed. He said, "Darling, I want you to know that I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to marry me. I'm not rich. I don't have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Brown, but I do love you with all my heart." She thought for a minute and then replied, "I love you with all my heart, too, but tell me more about Johnny Brown."⁷
- A heart which is overcome with a love for riches and the things of this world is *not* a believing heart. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24). Many began well, and it looked like they were believers, but the love of the world has strangled all vestiges of Christianity from their lives.¹⁰ the false sense of security brought on by (or merely promised by) prosperity,

- [Jeremiah 9:23](#), "Do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth" (NRSV).
- [Luke 12:34](#), "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (NIV).
- [1 Timothy 6:6](#), "Now godliness with contentment is great gain" (NKJV).
- [1 Timothy 6:10](#), "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (NKJV).

DESIRES: or the

- Indulging our desires leads to all kinds of problems.
- [Romans 13:14](#), "Rather, clothe

⁷Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

⁸Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

⁹MacArthur, J. J. 1997, c1997. *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) . Word Pub.: Nashville

7 7. Walter Underwood, *The Contemporary 12* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), pp. 86, 87.

¹⁰Hughes, R. K. 1989. *Mark : Jesus, servant and savior*. Preaching the Word. Crossway Books: Westchester, Ill.

LONGINGS FOR OTHER

THINGS. Society says, "Indulge yourself; try it all; get all you can."

It weakens our will power, stifles our spiritual growth, and leads to companions who will pull us down.

- **desires for other things.** including anything that serves to distract a person) plagued first-century disciples as they do us today. Materialistic pursuits distract believers, *making it* (that is, God's Word) *unfruitful* in their lives¹¹.
- Such a person's chief pursuit is a career, a house, a car, a hobby, or a wardrobe. Prestige, looks, or riches are everything to the weedy heart. Have you known people who fit this category?

yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (NIV).

- **1 Corinthians 15:33**, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character' " (NIV).
- **1 Peter 1:13–14**, "Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance" (NIV).

Remember how Jesus started this sermon? It was verse 9 Listen He said, Open those ears!

The hearing Jesus wants from us is not the kind we use to listen to background radio music or when someone starts to recount a long story we've already heard. To hear Jesus' words is to believe them, to use them immediately in decisions and attitudes, and to base life on them—our recreation and work, family plans and money matters, schooling and voting, praying and singing. To hear Jesus' words is to make Jesus our true Lord. What is Jesus saying to you? ¹²

¹¹Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

¹²Barton, B. B. 1994. *Mark*. Life application Bible commentary . Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, Ill.

You may be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23).

CAIN: GENESIS 4:6 -- SELF RIGHTEOUS

Acquisition

- ✓ He wanted to worship God without faith in God's way!
- ✓ He was used as the introduction to God's detective sin

Genesis 4:6-7 So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

And so let me warn you of the hideous monster of sin. Sin wants to master you. This very moment it is crouching in Hideous, merciless, brutal savagery outside of the doors of our wills. The Cains, Balaams, Achans and Genazi's are sobering proof of the end of those who do not flee sin!

*"Sin is a monster of such awful mien,
that to be hated needs but to be seen,
but seen to often familiar with face –
first we endure, then pay ... then embrace?"*

Cains sin was he sought God Cains way - without faith in God's way. Thus trusting his own righteousness.

BALAAM: NUMBERS 22-24 -- DISOBEDIENT

Pilgrim of Lord

He wanted to be God's man without obedience to God's Word.

His life was characterized by hearing and knowing the WOG but not obeying:

- ✓ *Numbers 22:12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they [are] blessed." (NKJV)*
- ✓ *Numbers 22:19-20 "Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me." 20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise [and] go with them; but only the word which I speak to you -- that you shall do." (NKJV)*
- ✓ *Numbers 22:32 And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because [your] way is perverse before Me. (NKJV)*
- ✓ *Numbers 24:13 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak?' (NKJV)*
 1. He wanted to die the death of the righteous while living the life of the wicked. And God did not accept him because of that wrong and unbroken desire.
 2. He wanted to be God's man without obedience to God's Word
 3. His life was characterized by hearing and knowing the Word of God but not obeying:
 - 22:12 "Do not go with them"
 - 22:19-20 "The Lord relents if obeys – outward conformity
 - 22:32 "Thy way is perverse before me" God knew his heart -tries to kill him
 - 24:13 "I must say only what the Lord says" – But only with words
 4. He is later killed in the conquest and named in the hall of fame in Jude
 5. Balaam's sin was he wanted to be God's man *without obedience to God's Word.*

He is later killed in the conquest and named in the Hall of Flame in Jude.

Balaam's sin was he wanted to be God's man with obedience to God's word.

ACHAN: JOSHUA 6-7 -- WORLDLY

Trouble

He wanted to be in the center of the camp of God while having the world in the heart of his home!

Joshua 6:17 "Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who [are] in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who [are] with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. (NKJV) irrevocably given to the Lord we too must be and any who give their flesh to the evil of this world

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you are. (NKJV)

Holiness (resisting and turning away from sin) and salvation go hand in hand thru God's Word: God called Enoch to walk with him and it was a lovely walk by men's standards. But think - he walked with God. Noah was one of eight who alone were righteous in the whole world! What a picture God painted of the rapture for us coming = Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - dwelt in tents as strangers and pilgrims, Elijah alone, David, Daniel and on and on. God saves to separate from this world!

Achans sin was that he wanted to be in God's camp with out separation from the world!

Bring the world into your home and it will defile your children. Books - magazines - TV - guests - games- Busy procuring provision for this physical frame. Man only lives in this body!

✓ - Therefore lost life, family, home, people of God defeated

GEHAZI: II KINGS 4-5 -- GREEDY

Diminisher or Denier

He wanted to be a servant without sacrifice!

There was a progression in his life of decline.

- ✓ 2 Kings 4:27 Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul [is] in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden [it] from me, and has not told me." (NKJV) lack spiritual understanding shown as he pushed grieving shumanite away
- ✓ 2 Kings 5:20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but [as] the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." (NKJV) lack of surrender to things - ran after and sought wealth!
- ✓ 2 Kings 5:20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but [as] the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." (NKJV) lack of speaking truth - my master sent me

Gehazi's sin was that he wanted to be a servant with out sacrificing all wants.

1. There was a progression in his life of decline:
 - A. 4:27 – lack spiritual understanding – pushed grieving shunamite away
 - B. 5:20 – lack of surrender to things – ran after
 - C. 5:22 – lack of speaking truth – my master sent me

4:10 Demas. He had been one of Paul's closest associates along with Luke and Epaphras (*see notes on Col. 4:14; Philem. 24*). **forsaken.** This Gr. word means "to utterly abandon," with the idea of leaving someone in a dire situation. Demas was a fair-weather disciple who had never counted the cost of genuine commitment to

Christ. His kind are described by our Lord in Matt. 13:20,21; cf. John 8:31; 1 John 2:1. **loved this present world.** See *notes* on James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17.

Did you know that there is more said in Scripture about Balaam than there is about Mary, the mother of Jesus? There is more said about Balaam than about any of the apostles. The New Testament mentions him three times, and each time it is in connection with apostasy. In 2 Peter we are told about the *way* of Balaam. In Jude we are told about the *error* of Balaam. In Revelation we are told about the *doctrine* of Balaam.

This Balaam was a Midianite. He was a prophet with a wide reputation. He got results. Was he genuine? Let's read his story before we evaluate him.¹³

Paul gave the reason: Demas “loved this present world.” He had, as a believer, “tasted... the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5); but he preferred “this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). In his *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan pictured Demas as the keeper of a silver mine at the Hill Lucre. Perhaps it was the love of money that enticed Demas back into the world. It must have broken Paul's heart to see Demas fail so shamefully; yet it can happen to any believer. Perhaps this explains why Paul had so much to say about riches in his pastoral letters.

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¹³McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

¹⁴Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.