

One Seed, Four Hearers

Radio Sermon, 24-Jul-2016

1. Wayside ground: no understanding; hard heart
2. Stony ground: shallow root, Gospel not needed, not heard as a sinner, Christ of little value; no endurance in trial
3. Thorn choked ground: desire for life and satisfaction in things material, temporal, religious over Christ
4. Good ground: Ps. 34:18; Lk. 18:13; 2 Sam. 23:5; John 6:63-69

The text of my sermon is Luke 8:4-15. Let's read it together:

“4) And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: 5) A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. 6) And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. 7) And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. 8) And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. 9) And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? 10) And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. 11) Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12) Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13) They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. 14) And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection (Lot's wife, Demas, Ananias & Sapphira, Judas). 15) But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:4-15).

The title of my sermon today is: **One seed, four hearers**

The main point of this parable is the different effects that the Gospel of Christ has in those who hear it preached.

Introduction/summary

Jesus taught by parables. In this parable there is one type of seed that is sown on four different types of ground. Jesus explained the parable. The seed in the parable is the word of God (Lk. 8:11). 1 Peter 1:25 says that this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you. We are only saved by hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Sower in the parable is the Lord Jesus Christ. Sowing represents preaching. The Lord sends His preachers throughout the world with the Gospel seed. When that Gospel is preached, it produces fruit. But it does not produce fruit in all hearers. There is no such thing as universal salvation.

Lessons

While we examine this scripture, let us keep these **four** things in mind:

1. **First, God is sovereign in salvation. Some have ears to hear, some do not.**
2. **Second, all men by nature are described by the first three hearers.**
Therefore, **God alone makes the difference in salvation, and that difference is the Gospel believed in the heart** (John 6:63; Ezek. 36:26-27; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 10:10).
3. **Third, the Gospel is only good news to sinners.** Only those who hear the Gospel as sinners are fruit to God and bear fruit as they glorify God for His mercy in Christ.
4. **Fourth, fruit is the work of the Spirit of God.** It is never the by-product of man's nature or efforts.

God is sovereign in salvation

Consider the sovereignty of God in salvation. Christ revealed His parable to His disciples. He did not reveal it to everybody. In the same way, God has mercy on whom He will (Rom. 9:15; Ex. 33:19). Not all men have faith (2 Thess. 3:2). Faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). And He gives it only because of His free and sovereign grace (Eph. 2:9).

Jonah learned a hard lesson when he was in the whale's belly because of his disobedience. He cried in his prayer, "Salvation is of the LORD." While he was in the whale's belly because of his sin, when he was utterly unable to deliver himself, there and then, God saved him! God always saves that way. Salvation is of the LORD!

When The Bible says that "Salvation is of the LORD," it means that salvation is by our triune God. God the Father chose whom He would save before the world began and gave them to Christ (Eph. 1:4 -- "*He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*"). Salvation is of the LORD means that Jesus died on the cross to redeem, to save, all those the Father gave to Him (John 10:15 -- *I lay down my life for the sheep*; 17:2 -- *thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him*; John 6:39; Eph. 5:25; Rom. 8:32). And Salvation is of the LORD means that Christ, from His exalted throne in glory, sends His Spirit to give life to those sinners that God purposed to save from eternity, and for whom He laid down His life. All of these, in time, He raises to spiritual life and gives them faith in Christ (Eph. 2:4-9). And at the end of time, He will raise their bodies and bring them to behold Him in His glory and to be with Him where He is (John 5:24-25; 11:25; 17:24).

Four hearers

The second thing we learn in this parable is that the first three grounds represent all men by nature. In ourselves, apart from saving grace, we will not hear the Gospel as good news. Yet the fourth ground teaches us that God makes a difference by causing some to look to Christ alone.

Wayside hearer

Consider first the wayside hearer. He has no understanding. His heart is hard. When the Gospel is preached, he does not understand it. Never think that you and I are not included in the picture of the wayside ground. *“The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that it was good, no, not one”* (Ps. 14:2-3). Has this truth ever come home to your heart? Has this thought ever pressed your conscience, that God searched your heart and found nothing good in you?! Note well what God says here. He did not find any that did understand. Therefore all of us by nature are wayside ground! We cannot retain what we don’t understand. If we don’t understand, it makes no impact. I used to be an engineer. Technical things were frequently discussed. But when I didn't understand, I could scarcely remember what was said. And it is certain that I was unable to make use of what I did not understand! To believe Christ, we must understand the message of the Gospel, the truth of it. But the wayside hearer does not understand. Jesus asked the blind man in John 9, *“Do you believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, You have both seen him, and it is he that is talking with you. And he said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped Him”* (John 9:35:38). Christ must make known to me the evil of my sin, God’s judgment and holy character, or I will have no need and no interest in the Gospel. The Gospel is not intellectually difficult to understand. The problem is that I don’t see a need for it when I hear it. Unless I’m a sinner, I will see no need of Christ. I will find no beauty in Him. Nothing about grace will be amazing.

Our guilt and filth before God must be the issue, or God's saving grace in Christ will mean nothing to us. The gospel is only good news to sinners. If we understand this all-important point, we will understand the parable of the sower. Jesus said, "*I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (Matthew 9:13). I cannot make you know your sin. That is God's work alone. Jesus said that the Spirit of God convinces the world of sin because they do not believe Him (John 16:8–9). Therefore, before a sinner can believe on Christ, he must be convinced of his sin. By nature I do not believe Christ. I must be convinced of that. That sin must be THE issue in my conscience or the Gospel will mean nothing to me.

The devil takes away the ministry of the Gospel when any do not understand it. He cannot take away the grace of faith that God puts in a man's heart. That can never be taken away. But if God does not first give understanding, he can take away the effects of the ministry of the word.

Stony ground hearer

Jesus said that the seed that fell on the rock pictures one who, when the Gospel is preached, hears it and immediately rejoices. But when trouble comes because of the Gospel, the stony ground hearer leaves. Understand first that temporary faith is not saving faith (Col. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Heb. 3:6,14). When God gives faith, He maintains it and preserves it. "*God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent*" (Num. 23:19). Jesus told Peter "*Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that your faith fail not*" (Luke 22:31). Christ did not let Peter's faith fail because He will not lose one sheep for whom He laid down His life (John 10:15,27-29; 6:37-39). All who see and believe Him have everlasting life (John 6:40).

The Gospel never penetrates the heart of a stony ground hearer. He hears it academically and he hears it generally, but not spiritually and not personally. Because the Gospel has no deep root in him, he leaves when things get tough. He has other options. Now, you and I will never hear the Gospel with any profit to our

souls if we only hear academically. Moreover, the Gospel must be personal. I must be guilty; I must be helpless in sin and unbelief. It must be good news to **me** that Christ has done all to bring **me** to God. A shallow Gospel will never be worth fighting for. I will have only a shallow appreciation for it and a shallow tolerance for trials on account of it. Let me illustrate by an endearing example.

There was once a poor huckster named Jack. One day, Jack heard a woman singing a simple song. The song went like this: “I am a poor sinner, and nothing at all. But Jesus Christ is my all in all.” Now this poor man turned the lyrics of that simple song over and over in his mind. God used it to teach him that he was a great sinner (Ps. 25:11) and that Christ is great because He came to save sinners (Matt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15). The song helped strip away from Jack all that he previously trusted so that he might understand how sinners come to Christ and are accepted by Him.

This little song answered all of his questions. What was his confidence before God? It was not found in himself, for he himself was a great sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ was his all in all. After a time, Jack asked to join the church.

The pastor told Jack that the deacons would ask him questions.

One deacon said, “Jack, please state your experience.”

To which Jack kindly replied, “I am a poor sinner, and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all.”

Another deacon asked Jack, “Is that all you have to say?”

“Yes,” says Jack, “that's all.”

So one says, “Brother Jack, have you not many doubts and fears?”

“No,” said Jack, “I never can doubt but that I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all, for I know I am; and I cannot doubt that Jesus Christ is my all in all, for He says He is, and how can I doubt that?”

“Well,” said another, “but sometimes I lose my evidences and my graces, and then I get very sad.”

“Oh,” said Jack, “I never lose anything, for in the first place I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all— no one can rob me if I am nothing at all — and in the second place, Jesus Christ is my all in all,— and who can rob Him? He is in Heaven; I never get richer or poorer, for I am always nothing, but in Him I always have everything.”

Then another began to question him thus: “But my dear friend Jack, don't you

sometimes doubt whether you are a child of God?"

"Well," said he, "I don't quite understand you; but I can tell you I never doubt but that 'I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,' and that 'Jesus Christ is my all in all.'"

You see, when God convinces us of our sin, and by his grace, convinces us that Jesus Christ and him crucified is all of our standing and the only ground of all of our hope before God, then we have nowhere else to go. Many of Jesus' disciples in John 6 heard Him say that unless a man eat His flesh and drink His blood he had no spiritual life (v53). They were offended by this. They did not understand that eating and drinking meant to live in dependence and satisfaction with Christ alone for the cleansing of all my sin and as all my righteousness and life and acceptance before God. So the offended disciples departed. They had no root in themselves. When they left, Jesus turned to the twelve. He asked them, "*Will you also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Jesus: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure (root) that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God.*" The root of the Gospel had gone deep into Peter's heart. He was a great sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ was his all in all. Christ had the words of eternal life. Peter staked his eternity on Christ and His word. The stony ground hearer cannot tolerate trouble and uncertainty because the Gospel has not penetrated his heart. Therefore, he has no rock on which to stand when the storm is high.

Take warning! The one speaking to you now, and the one to whom I am now speaking, are all included here. By nature, we have a heart of stone. God must remove our stony heart and give us a heart of flesh. God commanded Israel to circumcise their heart in Deut. 10:16! Yet He promised to do it for them Deut. 30:6. God requires that our heart be cut off -- circumcised. Therefore, it must be evil (Mark 7:21-23)! And because God promised to circumcise the hearts of His people, we must be utterly incapable of changing our own heart! Does the trouble of your sin and your heart drive you to Christ (Rom. 7:24-25)? Or, does it drive you from Him as Adam hid in the garden of Eden? Do persecutions and afflictions cause you to cry out to Him and seek His salvation more earnestly? Or, do they

cause you to leave Him? *“Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation”* (Ps. 106:4)!

Thorn choked hearer

The thorn choked hearer also describes all of us by nature. The world and its cares dominate the pursuits and provide satisfaction to the natural heart of man. In this heart, the Gospel is just another accoutrement, an addition, like diversity in an investment portfolio, another egg in my basket, something else to trust, something to add alongside other things for peace and rest... but it is not the only thing! When stressed and in trouble, the Gospel seems more important. But when trouble subsides, the things of the world become more interesting and important. Things choke the word. Saving faith never makes itself known.

This third hearer lives by sight, not by faith. The struggle of sin never drives him to Christ, never causes him to cry for deliverance (Ps. 50:15; 34:17; 65:3), never causes him to take God’s promises in prayer and plead Christ as his only hope. Christ’s promised, *“Sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom. 6:14) is never seized in prayer. He never cries with Paul, *“O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?!”* (Rom. 7:24). And with the Psalmist, never cries, *“Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away”* (Ps. 65:3)! And he never cries with Paul, *“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness”* (Philippians 3:8-9)! Things in this world are substitutes for satisfaction in Christ and His righteousness and the riches of God’s grace.

The common lesson and essential truth from the first three hearers is now come into clear focus. Our common lack by nature, and our great need, is to hear the Gospel of the grace of God as sinners. God must plow our hearts so that we see

ourselves as nothing but sin. In that fallow ground He must sow the Seed of Christ and Him crucified. Money, music and friends give pleasure and confidence in this world. But where can a sinner find refuge in his conscience from the heat of God's wrath against his sin? What goods compare to the debt Christ remitted by His blood?! What can give peace and joy and satisfy my conscience, but knowing that Christ is my answer and Advocate, and that His obedience unto death is all my standing before God?! What can enable me to endure every trial, even that trial of death and judgment, but knowing that in Christ, God receives me as Him? The third hearer never talks about how Christ is precious to his soul and conscience. Everything but Christ is the subject his conversation. There is no struggle with sin, no fear that finds all of its comfort in Christ (Isa. 40:1-2; Rom. 15:13). There is no rejoicing in Christ's triumph as my triumph over sin. There is no longing for the day of deliverance from this sinful body. There is no interest in growing in grace. The wretchedness of my person and the preciousness of Christ has not made everything else a distraction that gets in the way of knowing Him. The cares of this world all find higher priority in time and in heart over the Gospel.

Our heart is corrupt. Faith in Christ is impossible for us. *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil"* (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 8:7). A new heart must be given. Our souls must be resurrected. Christ and Him crucified must become our only trust and desire.

Honest and good heart

What is an honest and Good heart? Surely, it is not our natural heart. Our natural heart is deceitful above things. Deceit is the opposite of honest. Our natural heart is desperately wicked! Desperately wicked is the opposite of good. Scripture is full of examples that describe an honest and good heart. *"The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit"* (Ps. 34:18). A broken heart is a man that knows his heart doesn't work in spiritual things. The man with a broken heart is ready to hear the Gospel, that Christ has done all and is all for me!

The most concise example I can find of an honest and good heart is the publican. He cried, “*God, be merciful to me the sinner*” (Lk. 18:13)! Jesus said that he went down to his house justified. He was a saved man! Therefore, we know his heart was honest and good!

The publican was honest. He was convinced that he was a sinner. Be merciful to me THE sinner! He could find no one worse than himself. He therefore had only one plea: that God would have mercy upon him in Christ, for Christ’s sake alone and not for anything in himself; not now, not ever! He was honest in this; he was convinced of it.

And his heart was good. How was his heart good? He understood and was persuaded (believed) that for God (unlike men) to be merciful to a sinner like him, He must satisfy His own justice and glorify His own righteousness in his salvation. Daniel prayed, “*Oh Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away*” (Daniel 9:16). The truth is this: As a sinner, I cannot have peace in my conscience until I know that God is at peace with me in His justice. The Publican had a good heart because he asked God to look upon the sacrifice of Christ, and receive Christ’s offering as full compensation and satisfaction for his sin. This is what the word “merciful” means in Luke 18:13. It means “*propitious*:” that is, to be gracious on the ground of God’s satisfied justice. **The good heart, therefore, is a heart that looks to Christ alone.** Abel had a good heart. He offered a more excellent sacrifice. If God accepted the sacrifice, He accepted him who offered it. Now, no man offered Christ. He offered Himself to God. But He offered himself for His people. And God commands us to look to Him and come to Him by His blood (Isa. 45:22; Heb. 10:19). God said to Moses, “*When I see the blood, I will pass over you*” (Ex. 12:13)! It’s what God thinks of Christ that saves, and what He thinks of Christ alone. My sincerity, my experience, my works and all else that has to do with me is worth less than nothing! The Publican’s prayer is the prayer of an honest and good heart. This is what faith is. Faith looks only to Christ and comes to God by him. Faith excludes itself. A good heart believes that only by the death and burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ will I ever be pleasing and acceptable to God. The Gospel is about God

providing and working out all that is necessary to save a hell deserving sinner like me and accepting me in His Son and in His offering. The only issue in salvation is this: did God accept the sacrifice? Rom. 4:25 gives the answer: "*He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification!*" Christ, made atonement on that day! When He had by Himself purged our sins, He rose from the dead! God is satisfied with Him. By His resurrection God justified Him and all for whom He died because God saw His blood and is satisfied! God received His Son from the dead, and received all for whom He died with Him. Christ now sits on His Father's right hand. He rules over heaven and earth on heaven's throne! He is now bringing those whom He justified by His blood, to see their justification, and to receive it by faith. Christ has died. God is satisfied. All Christ died to save are justified. The faith that He gives His people looks to His glorious achievements for sinners, and receives in its conscience what is true of them in heaven. Faith in Christ is the deep root that grows in an honest and good heart.

Fruit

Finally, what is the fruit that is produced by this root of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

First, believers themselves are fruit to God. In the Gospel ministry, God's word always accomplishes His purpose. (Isaiah 55:11). Colossians 1:5-6 says "...the word of truth of the gospel which is come to you as it is in all the world and brings forth fruit, as it does also when you, since the day you heard of it and knew the grace of God in truth." When we know the grace of God in truth, in Christ, as revealed in the Gospel, we ourselves are fruit to God.

Second, believers also bear fruit to God. They do not produce it. The Spirit of God produces it as the believer looks to Christ (Galatians 5:22) "*He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it onto the day of Christ Jesus*" (Php. 1:6). "*We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Cor. 3:18). The root produced by the Gospel in the heart of a believer is faith. And faith works

by love (Galatians 5:6). Faith expresses its fruit as love to God and love to others, especially believers. *“We love him because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). Believers love because their sins are forgiven them for Christ’s sake. *“I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live”* (Psalm 116:1–2). The woman in Luke 7:47 loved much because she had been forgiven much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. God forgives all of the sins of His people. It cost Him the blood of His Son! If Christ must die to take away your sin, how evil must be your sin, and how great must be your debt?! Such a payment could only be demanded where there is great debt! Therefore, if you have been forgiven little, you have not been forgiven at all.

Faith loves Christ for bearing my sins in His body on the tree. And love is in proportion to our faith. Some seed produced a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty-fold. Every believer is given a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3; Eph. 4:7). In terms of quantity, we have different measures of faith. But in terms of quality, we all believe the same thing: One Lord, One faith, One Christ (Eph. 4:4-7)!

“Lord, increase our faith!” “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24)! *“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned”* (1 Tim. 1:5).

This is Rick Warta, praying that God would give you and me and honest and good heart, that we might hear the Gospel as sinners, own our sin and come to God by Jesus Christ, glorifying God for His mercy. You may obtain a copy of the sermon by visiting our website at ysgracechurch.com.