

PARABLES | The Four Soils

Rob Rogers April 23, 2023

Introduction

According to the Institute of Organizational Development... human beings think four times faster than a person can speak, which means we need only about 25% of our mental capacity to hear the content of the message. We have 75% of our brain capacity not being leveraged... which is why all of our minds wander during a sermon.

Someone can speak between 125 – 250 words a minute, but we think at 1000 words a minute. After listening to someone, we only recall about 50% of what they said. Long term, we only remember 20% of what we hear.

This is great news for preachers...

PERSONAL: What's interesting is when Misty and I connect about how our days went... I'll mention that I had a meeting with someone... and she'll have way more questions than I have answers — and my answers are never satisfactory...

- What'd you guys talk about? ...a lot of different things.
- Why did you meet? Just to get to know each other a bit...
- How did you get connected? I don't remember...
- Who's his wife? Don't know.
- How many kids do they have? Between 0-17 kids...
- How long have they lived here? Not sure.
- Are they new to the church? Yes, I know that...
- How new are they? No idea.

Misty wants details... and I have none! What's scary is I consider myself to be a pretty good listener.

Anybody else have this problem??

Apparently, we're only retaining 20-25% of what is said in any given conversation.

And on top of that, we live at such a frantic pace, and there's so much noise and distraction in the world, that it makes far more difficult to slow down, to focus, and to genuinely hear — not only one another *but to hear to receive the word of God.*

Today, we're going to look at a parable that has everything to do with how we hear, with listening.

How you hear

Leading up to chapter 13 is a major turning point in Matthew's gospel. The religious leaders were watching Jesus perform miracle after miracle, and rather than acknowledging to possibility that this man might be

from God — they accused Jesus of performing miracles with Satanic power. Rather than welcoming, celebrating Him, they write Him off. Then Jesus turns to all those that had gathered to hear him... to check things out... curious about Jesus — then Jesus gives them this parable.

Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And He told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along **the path**, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on **rocky ground**, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among **thorns**, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on **good soil** and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ **He who has ears, let him hear.**”

“Take heed *what* you hear!” (Mark 4:24), and “Take heed *how* you hear!” (Luke 8:18)

Matthew 13:18-23

“Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the **word of the kingdom** and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along **the path**. ²⁰ As for what was sown on **rocky ground**, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among **thorns**, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on **good soil**, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Unlike a lot of the other parables, this parable *doesn't* begin with “The Kingdom of God or the the Kingdom of heaven is like...” What Jesus tells us in *this* parable is this is *how the life in the kingdom begins. It begins by how you hear... how you listen... how you receive the message of the Kingdom.*

In Matthew 13, the word “hear” or “listen” appears 19 times.

I often pray before the message that God would make our hearts good soil... because of what Jesus says in this parable...

There's the sower — who is Jesus. He's sowing seed, which is His teaching, His instruction, His word. *Then there are four types of soils that represent our hearts, how we listen.*

And Jesus knew as He taught this parable, that the majority of people in the crowd that day might be *outwardly* nodding in agreement, but *inwardly* had zero intention of following Him.

- What we often do when we come in contact with someone who won't follow Jesus... we make the mistake of trying *really* hard to convince them. I understand why. We believe the best possible thing for people would be to know, love, and follow Jesus.
- But Jesus knew that too... you know what He does? He gives this parable, looks at the crowd and says, “*If you get it, you get it.*” And then He leaves.

No altar call... no emotional appeal... he tells the parable and leaves,

And then the disciples come to him...

Matthew 13:10

Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”

This was your opportunity to rally all these people to your cause! To get them to follow you.

Jesus looks at them and says, “No... the ones who really are with me... they’re good soil. They’ll follow. But the majority won’t.” Then, He gives them a passage from Isaiah...

Matthew 13:14-15

Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “ ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

And in churches all around the world there are people gathered that might be nodding in agreement, but inwardly have no real intention of actually following Jesus. Those who might agree with Jesus... might admire Jesus... but following Jesus? Becoming like Jesus? That’s asking too much.

As we look more deeply at the four soils, I want to invite you to simply ask the Lord to speak to you about which soil you are. Jesus says, the Kingdom comes through hearing.

Have you really heard?

What Jesus is saying, “Unlike other kingdoms that are very obvious... and come through power, and might, and coercion — My kingdom is different. It’s not obvious... it’s subtle. It’s very easy to miss. And it’s very easy to reject. You have to really listen. Really think. You have to take it in. As a result, *there are many people who think they’re in the kingdom who are not, who think they have heard Me, and they haven’t really heard Me.*”

It’s a bit unnerving if you read the New Testament, because Jesus is always saying to people, “Have you really listened? Have you really heard me?” For example, in Luke 9, a man comes to Jesus and says, “*I will follow you wherever you go.*”

- Now the **typical earthly leaders**, when someone comes and says, “I’m sold out for the cause. I’m all in. I want to be in the movement. I want to follow you wherever you go!” What’s the typical response? “I’m so glad to hear that! Welcome aboard! Let’s go!”
- **What does Jesus say?** He says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”
 - Jesus just puts them off.
 - “I want to follow you Jesus!” “*Oh really? Do you also want to have rocks for pillows? Because that’s what it’s going to be like.*”

Jesus is asking, “*Do you really know what you’re getting into? Have you really heard me? Are you really ready to enter my kingdom, or (and here’s the question) are you just trying to get me to serve you in your kingdom? Are you really all about Me? Or are you just using me to be all about you?*”

The whole principle of the parable of the Sower of the four soils is to say, “*Have you really heard? Do you know you’ve heard and understood?*”

Which soil am I?

Hard Path

Any seed sown on a hard path isn't going to accomplish much. The power, the life of the seed will remain dormant as it lays on the surface of the path, and the birds come and devour the seed.

Matthew 13:19

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

It's possible to sit in church week after week, to hear the word, and even be glad about it for other people... but for you... your heart has become hardened and cold toward God. Your understand of the message isn't personal... it's theoretical... maybe even intellectual, it's philosophical... but it's not personal.

People who have actually experienced the power of the kingdom in their lives are people who have moved from seeing Christianity as theoretical or intellectual to suddenly seeing it as deeply personal.

Has there ever been a time in your life where the word of God moved from simply information — to where it seems to be leaping off the pages of scripture and grips your heart! You recognize that God put it in there for you! He's speaking directly to you! And it feels like you didn't know it, but you'd been sleeping for a long time and only now are starting to wake up! Maybe you'd read or heard that verse 1,000 times, but now, it's like it has your name on it!

If that's never happened for you... chances are your heart is like the beaten path. And the personal nature of the word of God for you has never impacted you.

Rocky soil

Matthew 13:20

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

This is hearing with a shallow heart.

There are people who get very excited about Christ. They have moved beyond the theoretical. They have said, "Christ has changed my life." They're excited about him. They do feel like He has opened their eyes.

But their roots are shallow... there's no depth. And as soon as hardship comes into their life, or they begin to pay a price for being associated with Jesus, their response is like, "Well what good is following Jesus if I'm going to have suffer? What use is Christianity if I can't have what I want?"

They want a blesser, not a savior. They want a God to be an add-on to their life — a little side benefit that they can get excited about... *as long as **they** are still on the throne of their life.*

When the heat comes with the sun... they shrivel up. They're excited about Jesus, willing to be associated with Jesus — as long as Jesus allows them to have what they really want — *which isn't really Jesus.* So, when hardship comes, they don't last. They *hear* with a shallow understand of God, and a shallow understanding of their need for salvation from sin, not just a solution to suffering.

Thorny soil

This is one is scary...

Matthew 13:22

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

This is hearing with a divided heart.

The third group is rooted. There's some level of depth to them... it's not just emotional, or theoretical... and they don't get scorched in the heat... they don't get devoured by the birds... they're hanging in there. But thorns are choking out their life... they're not bearing fruit... they're not productive or beneficial...

These people are seemingly committed to Christ, but Christ is not on the *throne* of their life... at least not Christ alone. People's allegiances are torn. There's a division. They worship God. They worship Christ, *and* they chase after all these other things — the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. There's a division.

As a result, they don't see their lives being changed. Healing is not taking place. There's no real power to their Christianity... they even doubt at times if their faith is even genuine.

This is probably the most common one that we can fall into...

- Some of you are committed to Christ, and yet you care so much about what other people think about you, that it's paralyzed your spiritual maturity.
- Others of you are committed to Christ, but you're still holding God at arm's length as it relates to certain areas of your life, like your finances or your sexuality... and you're miserable because you already know what God thinks.
- Or you're so caught up in being relevant to the world around you that you've been compromising the character that God is trying to grow in you.

Those in the first group and the second group eventually think that Christianity is a bunch of nonsense, and they depart from the faith.

But the third group... you're deeply miserable people. Because you know too much! You know God is real, you know Jesus saved you, you know you were blind and now you see... but you haven't taken that final step and thrown off the cares of this world... you're not going forward. But you know you can't go back... and so you're *paralyzed*. You're *stunted*. And other things are choking the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit out of your life.

And you want both... you're divided.

Psalm 86:11

“Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; **unite my heart** to fear your name.”

Good soil

Matthew 13:23

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

The byproduct of a life wholly surrendered to Jesus, sold out for the Kingdom is what? **Bearing fruit, and multiplication.** The kingdom spreads through the one who truly understands. It's the person who says, “My life is not my own, I've been bought with a price.” No longer is it, “**My will be done— but THY will be done.**”

When you hear... when you listen, have you predetermined that you will obey whatever it is Jesus tells you, whatever He reveals to you?” That's what Jesus means when He says, *take heed how you hear.*

- Some of us are miserable in life because we've been hard-hearted toward God... and our relationship with Him has grown cold and dead.
- Others of us get really excited about Jesus... but when things don't go the way we want them too, or hardship comes our way... we just shrivel up... we're uprooted.
- Others of us are so divided with the cares of the world that our abiding in Jesus is being choked out.
- **How are you hearing?**

What kind of soil are you?

Some of you are miserable because you've forgotten that **you're the soil and he is the gardener.** You're thinking, I've got thorns in my life... I have rocks taking up space.... I know my heart is hardened toward God right now — and I don't know what to do about it.

The soil's job is not to get rocks out, the soil's job is not to pull thorns up; that's the gardener's job. **It's your job to receive the seed. It's to hear the Word.**

In other words, unless you go to the Gardener right now and say,

- “O Lord, I'm the hardened path, break up the ground! Till up the soil! Make me fruitful!”
- “Lord, I have so many thorns in my life. Please take them out.”
- “I have rocks in my heart. Please pull them out.”
- “I will go back to the Word. I will hear it. I will listen to it. I will reflect on it. I'll think out the implications, and I'll obey it. I'll give myself to it so I can see the power of the kingdom come into and through my life. I'll hear you. I'll listen to you, but *You have to till the soil, pull the thorns, and You have to pull the rocks.*”

What's the Gardener going to say? “Finally. I've been waiting.”

If you say, “I don't know if Jesus is that good, or that gracious... would He really do that?” Think about it this way —

You're asking Jesus to break up the hardened path.

He walked the hardest path to Calvary's Hill while carrying a criminal's cross.

You want Him to pull up the thorns?
He took the thorns as crown on his head...

Remove the rocks?

He was buried beneath One, and not even the tomb could contain Him.

If He's done all that for you already... doesn't it prove what He'll do in the soil of your heart, if you'll simply invite Him in?

The Kingdom of God comes by hearing, so take heed how you hear.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jesus tell the parable to the crowds — without interpreting its meaning?
2. Why did Jesus mean by the admonishment, “He who has ears, let him hear”?
3. How does the life of the kingdom *begin* with how we hear and listen, how we receive the kingdom?
4. Who do you know who is a seed on the hard path? How do you communicate with them?
5. Who do you know who is a seed in the rocky soil? What are some truths you can share with them?
6. What does it mean that a seed in thorny soil is “hearing with a divided heart”?
7. What is the job of the seed?
8. What kind of seed are you?

NOTES