

THE REAL THING

Matthew 13:3-8; 18-23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13 deals with four different responses to the word of the kingdom or the gospel of Christ. Three out of four of these responses are false and only one is genuine. NOTE: This parable makes us face up to the realities of the Christian faith. It makes us search our souls to see if we have the “real thing.” It causes us to look inwardly to see if there is any spiritual fruit in our lives to prove and demonstrate that we have a true saving faith. It is a painful experience to look inwardly, for when we do we see the sin, the sham, and the hypocrisy of our own hearts. However, as we probe around on the inside more than often we will find some fruit and works that cannot be accounted for in any other way than that they have been wrought by the Holy Spirit. There can really be no gains without pains!

B. The Parable of the Sower deals with the subject of salvation and not sanctification. The emphasis in this parable is how to know whether one has a true, living, vital and saving faith. Three out of four of these soils or hearts are not true Christians. Only the good soil is truly saved because this heart produces good works to back up one’s profession of faith in Christ. NOTE: It has become popular in our day to interpret the stony ground hearers and the thorny ground hearers as carnal Christians and the fourth ground, the good ground, as a Christian who acknowledges the Lordship of Christ and is Spirit filled. However, we are definitely told that the wayside hearer is unsaved (Luke 8:12). Luke also says that the stony ground hearers are lost (Luke 8:13). However, in none of the Gospel accounts it is clearly stated that the thorny ground hearers are lost but the implication is that the thorny ground hearers brought forth no real, lasting spiritual fruit of works. Therefore, because a person cannot be saved without the evidence of good works, it is logical to conclude that the stony ground hearers are also unsaved. The context of the three Gospel accounts, and the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints do not permit a carnal Christian interpretation of this parable. NOTE: There is a Biblical teaching about carnal Christians and the loss of eternal rewards for rebellious Christians while on this earth. Yet, I am afraid that many people, who are professing Christians and deep in sin, often rationalize their sinful condition by saying, “Well, I know I am doing wrong, but I am saved, and even though I continue in my sin I will just lose some rewards in heaven.” This kind of thinking is a misunderstanding of salvation and a perversion of the doctrine of eternal security. The Bible says that sexually immoral persons, covetous people, idolaters, murders, sorcerers, liars, fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, drunkards, thieves and swindlers will have no part with Christ and His kingdom (I Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 5:5, 6 cf. I Cor. 6:11). This parable deals with professing Christians who have no changed habit patterns after their supposed conversion to Christ. It is not a few rewards that are at stake but the destiny of one’s soul!

Luke 8:12: And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved.

Luke 8:13: And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.

I Cor. 6:9, 10: Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Eph. 5:5, 6: For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

I Cor. 6:11: And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

II. THE WAYSIDE HEARER 13:19

A. The wayside hearer is a person who hears the word of the kingdom but immediately rejects the message of Christ. The seed of the gospel falls upon a hardened heart and the Devil comes and snatches away the truth of Christ and His kingdom from his heart.

B. The wayside hearer is a person outside the pale of Christendom. He is probably someone who is outside the visible, organized church. The seed of the gospel falls upon hardened ground and he is out of the place where the gospel can take root. The wayside hearer is a secular person with little or no “churchie” background. When he hears the gospel, he is very smug and self-satisfied in his secular living. He was in rejection before he heard the gospel and he is even more of a rejecter after he hears the truth of Christ.

C. The wayside hearer falls victim to the Devil. Because of his hardened heart, he rejects the truth of Christ and His kingdom and aligns himself with the Devil and his kingdom of darkness.

III. THE STONY GROUND HEARER 13:20, 21

A. The stony ground hearer is a person who hears the message of Christ and appears to accept it. There is great joy and excitement at first and the whole idea of Christianity seems intriguing and thrilling. However, after a short while tribulations and persecutions come to this professing believer because of the Word. The world hates the gospel and all those who adhere to it, so a professing Christian begins to feel the sting of persecution and the loneliness of rejection and he gives up the Christian faith.

B. The stony ground hearer is within the pale of Christendom but is surely a lost person. He only has an emotional, religious experience but no reality of Christ because the Word of God never took root. The stony ground hearer is not willing to pay the price of discipleship and place himself under the Lordship of Christ. NOTE: He fell victim to the flesh because his faith was of the flesh and not of the Spirit. It was a faith generated by man rather than generated by the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE THORNY GROUND HEARER 13:22

A. The thorny ground hearer is a person who seems to accept the message of Christ

and His kingdom and even outwardly shows some good works. However, these works are not the result of true saving faith brought about by the Holy Spirit but are pure religious works. With the passing of time, the thorny ground hearer gets taken up with the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of pleasure. These worldly attractions subtly get to him and they choke off any reality of Christ.

B. The thorny ground hearer is within the pale of the organized church and he falls victim to the world. He is a professing Christian and a church member in good standing. But when the lures of the world come, he yields to them rather than to the Lordship of Christ. His heart never really was in submission to the King, Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: What If I Should Apostatize?

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose that next week I should fall into the anxieties of this world, fall captive to the deceitfulness of riches and begin to fill my base desires with all kinds of immoral pleasure. I begin to fall back into old patterns of life and live like all pagans and worldlings. You could not say that I was once saved and then lost, for this is impossible. Nor could you say that I was just a carnal Christian, for my lifestyle would be that of an unsaved man. As Spirit-filled fruit inspectors, you would have to honestly conclude that there was no fruit to back up my profession of faith. You could only conclude that my life was not giving evidence of true saving faith, and you would have every right to question seriously whether I was truly saved.

V. THE GOOD GROUND HEARER 13:23

A. The good ground hearer is a person who hears the message of Christ and His kingdom and genuinely accepts the truth with inward conviction and reality. He brings forth fruit or good works to prove and demonstrate the reality of a true saving faith.

B. The word of the kingdom falls upon good soil. Soil that is rich, watered and ploughed. When the gospel falls upon this kind of heart, it takes root and brings forth fruit. He “hears” the gospel and “understands” it. He not only has the intellectual facts but he gets the spiritual meaning to the gospel. Why does the good ground hearer hear and understand? Luke says he receives the Word with a “good” and “honest” heart (Luke 8:15). He has a heart that is not closed to the truth of Christ. He is open and honest before God and agrees with the message of the kingdom that he needs Christ as his King and Savior. He knows he is a sinner and separated from God. He realizes that he is lost and under condemnation. He also knows that he will be judged for all eternity unless God does a work of grace in his heart to bring him into Christ’s kingdom. The good ground hearer does not fight Christ but agrees with Him and humbly submits his will to Christ as King. Mark in his Gospel says he “accepts” the message of the kingdom (Mark 4:20). He yields to the King and His kingdom.

C. Why does the good ground hearer hear, understand and accept when the three other soils rejected? Because the seed falls upon good, prepared and ploughed soil. The Holy Spirit has been ploughing the soil of the heart to make it receptive to the gospel. The Holy Spirit is convicting of sin, wooing the heart and drawing to Christ. The Holy Spirit is preparing the heart so as to make that person ready to receive the gospel. The Holy Spirit must prepare a person to believe but this does not take away man’s responsibility to believe. A person is not saved until he hears, understands and accepts by faith the gospel of Christ. A man is not saved until he believes in Christ. NOTE: In our witnessing, we must not become impatient with people who seem to be hardened or

indifferent to the truth. We must pray and wait for the Holy Spirit to plough up their hearts to make them receptive to the gospel of Christ. We know that nothing, absolutely nothing is impossible for God!

D. The good ground hearer “keeps” or “holds fast” the Word (Luke 8:15). He latches on to the Word of God and clings to it with all his might. He sees and understands the words of the gospel are from God and that the gospel alone contains the answer to eternal life. His faith is not grounded in his intellect, or in an emotional experience or in church tradition but in the infallible, unchanging, holy Word of God. NOTE: The elect of God are known by their desire to receive and do the Word of God (I Thess. 1:4-6). True Christians love the Word of the kingdom or the Word of God, and it becomes their sole authority for life.

E. The good ground hearer “bears fruit,” which indicates that his profession of faith in Christ is real and the Word took root. Fruit obviously refers to good works (James 2:26; Eph. 2:10). Without good works flowing from a professing Christian, there is really no evidence for true saving faith. Good works are not nice but necessary to salvation. A person is not saved by good works because salvation is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Nor does a person keep himself saved by doing good works or this would be salvation by works. A person is saved by God’s grace and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in him and from his life flows good works produced by the Holy Spirit. A Christian does not work for salvation but he works because he is saved. NOTE: Spiritual good works flow from true saving faith which is generated by God the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8, 9). In the mysteries of God’s sovereign purposes, a man’s faith is a gift from God and since faith is a gift from God then a man cannot lose that faith. Grace gives true saving faith and from true saving faith comes true spiritual good works. ILLUSTRATION: “I Know Whom I Have Believed.”

1 Thess. 1:4-6: Knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you, for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

James 2:26: For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Eph. 2:10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

John 3:5: Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Phil 1:29: For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

Eph. 2:8, 9: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

ILLUSTRATION: We all have sung the hymn “I Know Whom I Have Believed” but how many of us have ever listened closely to the words: “I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart” or in another stanza it says, “revealing Jesus thro’ the Word, Creating faith in Him.”

F. The good ground hearer also brings forth fruit “with patience” according to Luke (Luke 8:15). The word “patience” could better be translated “endurance” or “perseverance.” He labors, endures, works at producing spiritual fruit. As a truly saved person, he gives diligence to do good works. NOTE: This doctrine is called the perseverance of the saints, for a true Christian proves and demonstrates the reality of his faith by his good works. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints says that once a person is truly saved he can never be lost, but once a person is truly saved, he can never be the same again as he was as an unsaved man. The true Christian pushes on and perseveres in the faith to the glory of God and to please his Savior.

G. The good ground hearer produces good works but notice carefully that all do not produce the same amount or degree of good works. Some produce a “hundredfold, some sixtyfold and some thirtyfold” but all DO produce. The degree or amount of good works produced is directly related to how well each person perseveres in faith and obedience.

VI. THE LESSON FROM THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: The lesson that we are to learn from this parable is that only one of these four hearts is genuinely a saved person. The good ground hearer has works to back up his profession because he perseveres in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The sowing is not salvation. Nor is hearing the gospel salvation. Many hear, but they are not Christians. Even the sprouting or germinating of the seed of the Word is not salvation. The enthusiasm, the joy with which it is received, the immediate, apparent results in life are not yet salvation. Salvation is known when the fruit starts to come into the life. Nor is salvation living out the externals of Christianity which is apparent fruit, but underneath the externals there is no reality at all and no genuine commitment to Christ. Fruit appears when the will is genuinely yielded to the Lordship of Christ, when the Word is welcomed and nourished and acted on and allowed to grow into fruition. Salvation is casting ourselves upon the Savior, submitting to Christ as King and serving Christ as loyal subjects on His kingdom.

VII. CONCLUSION

A. In this parable, our Lord is describing hearts and not lives. He is not saying that once a person is like a certain kind of soil he is unchangeable, that his life is forever like this. He is saying that his heart may be like this, but hearts do change.

B. You may have a heart that is hardened to the gospel, shallow in the gospel, worldly toward the gospel but God can change the condition of your heart. He can plough it up and make you ready and willing to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. God is the Sovereign Creator and He is able to change your heart no matter what its condition may be at this moment.

C. Ask God to save you from your sins and the certainty of eternal judgment yet to come. Ask God to grant you the faith to lay hold of Christ that you might be forgiven your sins and be granted eternal life. Ask God to break your stubborn will and plough up your hardened heart so that you might discover the “real thing” in Christ. God who is rich in mercy and love can and will give you real salvation if you will but receive Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and King of your life!
