

1. **Introduction:** Continuing to think about Authentic Christian Living, we will look at some of Jesus' parables that contain powerful messages about life as a Christian..
 - Our Lord Jesus frequently used parables in His teaching, telling an earthly story to give meaning to a heavenly truth. He used vivid imagery that was familiar to the people of His day to teach new truths and bring new insight.
 - He used parables to illustrate doctrinal truths but not to establish doctrine.
 - NT parables can be (and have been) divided into categories in a variety of ways. One useful set of categories is (1.) true (or factual) parables, (2.) story parables, and (3.) illustrative parables.
 - Factual parables use familiar illustrations which anyone hearing the parable would acknowledge to be true to life. Such parables begin with self-evident truths portraying either nature or human life and are usually related in the present tense.
 - Story parables, on the other hand, do not rely on obvious truth or generally accepted custom to capture audience attention. Instead, imaginary events are used to attract attention to an important truth.
 - Story parables focus on some unusual event that might have happened in the past. Truth is conveyed through the imagined events. Factual historicity is not an issue.
 - In an illustrative parable, truth is taught by example. This is done by focusing directly on the character and conduct of an individual.
 - Parables were used to minor extent in the OT (for example 2Sam 12:1-4). The parables of our Lord Jesus are distinctive and unlike any others, either in composition or in the way he used them in his teaching.
2. **Jesus Interpretation of Two Parables:** The Bible includes Jesus' own Interpretation of Two Parables: His comments provide important insight for interpreting other parables.
 - We begin with one of those parables, "The Sower"(Mt 13:1-23, Mk 4:1-20, Lk 8:1-15).
 - Jesus uses the example of a farmer in his field sowing seed as an analogy of the process of bringing God's Word to people.
 - This parable consists of four ideas knit together. Each individual part exhibits one aspect of the overall truth that when the Word of God is proclaimed, the listener's response depends on the condition of their heart.
 - Four soil types are mentioned – Footpaths, rocky soil, areas of thorns, and good soil. The soil types represent hard, shallow, crowded, and fruitful hearts,
 - "Heart" is a metaphor the Bible uses to signify the hidden inner person, the "true you." It is those aspects of our person that we usually call intellect, emotions, will, and spirit.
 - The "heart" is all the non-material aspects of our being – it is invisible to other people.
 - Actions and words are observable events controlled by our "heart."

- Often people's words and actions are carefully structured to mask the true state of their heart. Each of us begins life with a "hard" heart that will not accept the gospel.
- In contrast to the heart (inner person), the outer person is the aspects of our person that can be observed by others – our physical body, our actions and our words.
- When the Holy Spirit regenerates us, our heart becomes "good soil" that receives the seed of the gospel and produces a good harvest.

3. **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."*

- Jesus says the seed in the story is the good news about the Kingdom. The different soils of the field represent different conditions of the human heart.
- Four types of soil are considered: Footpaths, rocky soil, areas of thorns, and good soil. The types of soil represent hard hearts, shallow hearts, crowded hearts, and fruitful hearts. Listeners were familiar with the effects of soil conditions on the outcome of crops.
- Most of any area chosen for cultivation would consist of relatively deep, fruitful soil.
- Also of necessity, there would be hard-packed footpaths that crisscrossed fields. Layers of limestone were often located near the surface of the soil. There were also places in fields where thorns and weeds had deep-seated root systems.
- Rain mostly came at two times during the year – "early rains" in October/November and "late rains" in March/April. Planting was done in the cool of the fall at the end of the hot summer but before the early rains of late fall. Seed was scattered on top of the ground and plowed in. Seed falling on footpaths stayed there until eaten by birds or lost other ways.
- The early rains caused seed to germinate, while late rains enabled the crop to mature. At the time of the early rains, both the air and ground were generally cool and most of the seed would not germinate until it grew warmer.
- In places where the soil was thin over the limestone base, the soil retained heat from the summer sun because of the underlying stone. That caused the seed to germinate too early. Weeds and thorns would grow quickly, overtake and begin to choke out the wheat.
- In weed-free areas of good soil, seed germination happens when the ground is warm. The plants grow and prosper, and after the late rains, they mature and produce a good harvest.
- These are the kinds of things that would have been second nature to the people listening to Jesus. They knew about seed, soil, fields, climate, and farmers.

- Using their common knowledge as a base, Jesus set alongside that base for comparison new thoughts on how God's Word is received like good seed in the human heart.
- Only God can cause the seed of his Word to germinate (1Pt 1:23) at the right time to convert the heart. When we sow God's Word, we don't know what type of heart the seed will fall on, nor do we need to know – our duty is to sow God's Word. He takes full responsibility for His Word to accomplish what He intends (1Cor 3:4-9).
- Like the ground of the field, the heart "soil" varies. There are hard hearts, shallow hearts, crowded hearts, and fruitful hearts.
- In a hard heart the Word never penetrates. It lies on the surface, never sinking in, and there is a complete lack of understanding. Paul describes hard-hearted people in Rm 1.
- Repeated walking on soil makes a hard path. Repeated sin makes a human heart hard.
- Hardening of the heart often begins with suppressing truth about God that can be known from observing nature (1:18-20).
- Suppressing truth inevitably pushes a person into spiritual ignorance and moral degradation (1:21-31). Eventually, they not only practice the sins of the heathen but approve of them (1:32). Sin leads to rejection of God's truth and that rejection leads to ever greater sin.
- Paul says (Rm 1:18) that rejection of God's truth arises from a determined opposition to God's nature. He describes such opposition as human ***"godlessness and wickedness."***
- People love sin. Though light has come into the world, men love darkness because their deeds are evil (Jn 3:19). People want to make independent decisions. They don't want Christ to rule over them.
- In all ages hardness of heart is the most common human reason for people, who hear the gospel of God's grace, to reject it.
- Listeners with shallow hearts don't tend to reject the gospel. They respond in a temporary manner lacking depth of commitment. Their response is mainly emotional. They hear and rejoice but without true commitment.
- Many with shallow hearts make a profession of faith and become active, enjoying the warmth of fellowship, but the Word is never fully rooted in their heart. Shallow hearts are especially attracted to the joy and excitement of a busy church.
- When some real or imagined difficulty arises, they quickly fall away. Shallow hearts have only a superficial commitment to Christ of the cross.
- Listeners with a crowded heart are like areas of soil already filled with thorn and weed roots. Thorns and weeds represent worldly influences that will choke the growing crop.
- A person living a double life – religion on Sundays and worldly life during the week – fits the picture. Soon the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and desires for other things take over, and faith withers. The gospel message is choked out by worldly interests and bears no fruit. The harvest is all thorns and thistles.

- Fallen man's heart is sinful, and, apart from the working of God's grace, it could never receive God's Word and produce fruit for God's glory.
 - The fruitful heart is fruitful only because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The fruitful heart is receptive to God's truth. The whole being – will, intellect, and emotions – is touched and changed by that Word.
 - Spiritual growth takes place and fruit is produced. The Word is obediently heard, believed, and acted upon.
 - Interestingly, John describes one person who illustrates all four types of "heart soil." As the Lord Jesus deals with this person, changes occur in her "heart soil."
 - This Scripture (John 4:1-26) is known to us as the story of the woman at the well.
 - Initially the woman's heart is hard (true for each of us). The woman was surprised that a Jewish man, a rabbi at that, would talk to her in public, a thing just not done (Jn 4:9).
 - At that point, she had no understanding of either her need or what Jesus had to offer.
 - As Jesus talked, her heart changed from hard to shallow, and when the Lord offered her living water – she was enthusiastic in her response. Wow! No more drawing water.
4. **John 4:15:** *"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."* Her emotional response had no depth.
- Jesus began to plow deeply into the shallow soil of her heart to break up the underlying rock of sin. He said, *"Go, call your husband and come back"* (Jn 4:16).
 - Jesus' request touched the most sensitive part of her life, for she had been living a wicked life. *"I have no husband,"* she replied. Jesus said to her, *"You are right when you say you have no husband. ... you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is true"* (Jn 4:17-18).
 - She develops a crowded heart attitude, changes the subject and begins to argue about religion. Old weeds of prejudice and worldliness are growing.
 - Jesus refused to argue whether Jerusalem or Samaria was the proper place to worship.
 - It wasn't the question of where to worship that was important. Her great need was to worship God in Spirit and in Truth.
 - At that point, her heart began to be open and prepared for the truth, and she said, *"I know that Messiah ... is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us"* (Jn 4:25).
 - Jesus revealed who He is. She believed. Soon she was actively spreading the good word to the people of her village. As believers we too need to listen to the Word with the intent to obey, cultivating the good soil of our heart as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
 - The parable of the Sower teaches us that an individual's response to the gospel depends on the condition of their heart.