

38. Heart check

July 17, 2016

To survive, we require a specialized pump that can deliver life-giving blood to all our body parts, day and night, year after year, without fail. To get the job done within the body of a living organism, the heart must overcome some incredible engineering challenges.

A constant flow of rich blood must reach cells throughout the body, delivering oxygen and essential nutrients to our extremities, while removing waste products like carbon dioxide. Stop the flow for just a few minutes, and life will cease.

How did the Lord ensure a steady flow? He gave us a pump made of soft flesh, not of hard steel. Estimates vary, but this powerful muscle pushes blood through at least 1,500 miles of blood vessels, some as narrow as one red blood cell. The heart must keep beating 100,000 times a day without tiring or malfunctioning.

As important as it is for our physical survival, our spiritual heart is far more important. Because our physical heart will stop one day if the Lord tarries His return. But our spiritual heart will continuously go on without stopping throughout our eternal life.

Last Sunday we learned about our spiritual self-evaluation. But this morning, we are going to ask the Lord our God, the Greatest Physician in the universe, who knows all things to do our heart check so that He can reveal to us what kind of heart condition we have.

A. THE PARABLE OF THE SOIL

Mark 4:1-2 And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. 2 Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:

At this point, the author Mark introduced a new word – ‘parable’. Jesus explained God’s truth, not by giving a lecture on theology, but by painting pictures that captured the attention of the people and forced them to use their imaginations and think.

Our English word ‘parable’ comes from two Greek words that mean “to cast alongside”.

para: alongside

ballo: to throw or cast

A parable is a story or figure “placed alongside a teaching” to help us understand its meaning. It is much more than “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning,” and it certainly is not an “illustration” such as a preacher would use in a sermon.

A true parable gets the listener involved deeply and compels that listener to make a personal decision about God’s truth and his or her life. Jesus’ parables are so penetrating and personal that after the religious leaders heard only a few of them, they wanted to kill Him!

I love the way one of my favorite Bible commentators, Warren Wiersbe wrote, “A parable begins innocently as a ‘picture’ that arrests our attention and arouses our interest. But as we study the ‘picture’, it becomes a ‘mirror’ in which we suddenly see

ourselves. If we continue to look at the 'mirror' by faith, it becomes a 'window' through which we see God and His truth. How we respond to that truth will determine what further truth God will teach us." How true!

We are going to do some 'Leap Frogs' in this parable study. Since Jesus didn't leave room for an explanation of this parable to the imagination of preachers, we must hear from Jesus Himself.

According to Jesus, there are four kinds of hearts and they respond to God's message in four different ways:

1) The hard heart

Mark 4:3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

Mark 4:14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

The seeds we see here is the Word of God and the soil is the heart of a person. 'The hard heart' resists the Word of God and makes it easy for satan to snatch it away. Often 'birds' represent satan and his demons in the Bible.

Soil becomes hard when too many feet tread on it. Those who recklessly open their hearts to all kinds of people and influences are in danger of developing hard hearts. Hard hearts must be plowed up before they can receive the seed, and this can be a painful experience.

Some of you might fit into this category. You come here and listen to the Word of God and walk out that door without being changed because of your hard heart. When the time of the Great White Throne Judgement comes, you cannot blame anyone for not telling you about Jesus. It's your own decision that rejects God and sends yourself to hell.

2) The shallow heart

Mark 4:5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.

Mark 4:16-17 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

Some people are like the ground that is rocky, but covered with a thin layer of topsoil. They receive the seed of the word with a short-lived gladness that goes from an exciting flash to a mere flop in a nano second.

Some professing Christians have no root in themselves. Their spiritual root is in their parents, or in the Christian friends, or in the pastor. It is easy for fallen human nature to counterfeit "religious feelings" and get a spiritual false confidence.

Again, some of you might be in this category. Just because you came to the church this Sunday morning, you feel like you are fulfilling your religious duty and somehow thinking that God is obligated to you with something nice. If that is your thought, here is a surprise for you. He doesn't owe anything to anyone, not a squat. We owe Him everything, including the very life we are allowed to have.

3) The crowded heart

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.

The crowded heart pictures the person who receives the truth from the Bible, but does not truly repent and remove the 'weeds' out of his or her heart. This hearer has too many different kinds of 'seeds' growing in the soil – worldly cares, a desire for riches, a lust for things – and the good seed of the Word has no room to grow in there.

This person wants to walk the worldly way and God's way at the same time and it cannot be done. That person must choose one or the other.

To be honest with you, I see that many Christians fit into this category. They are fearful with the things of the world. They toss and turn all night long to come up with their own ways to overcome whatever the problems they are facing instead of trusting the Lord. They don't have the peace of God that passes all men's understanding. They don't have faith in God, because they don't want to trust God's power since they cannot see it.

Do you know what the bottom line is in this category of people? They don't have the Word of God in their hearts. They say, "I pray daily." I am sure that they do while they are in a tight corner. They say, "I read the Bible." I also am sure that they do it as some sort of a magic spell that might help.

Since the Lord Jesus used the word 'the seed' for the Word of God, let me put it this way. You can study the Word of God, categorize it, analyze it, or even love it. But if you don't put it into your heart and believe that God will do the rest, nothing will happen and you will still be fearful for everything and you should.

4) The fruitful heart

Mark 4:8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

Mark 4:20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

The one who hears with thankfulness and joy; and receives the Word of God into his heart. He trusts the Lord and starts to serve the Lord and His church. That person will have the peace that comes from God alone in spite of all difficulties around him. That person will bring the glory to the Lord with his witness at his workplace and home. That is a process of becoming a mature Christian. I've never seen any mature Christian who doesn't trust the Lord and serve Him consistently.

Each of the three fruitless hearts is influenced by a different enemy: the hard heart – the devil himself snatches the seed, the shallow heart – the flesh counterfeits religious feelings, the crowded heart – the things of the world smother the growth and prevent a harvest. These are the three great enemies of the Christian: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

By now, some of you might wonder if these first three categories of people are saved or not saved. First of all, it is not my place to judge whether they are saved or not. And that is not the point we are learning here. The main point is to find out how our heart is: Is our heart a hard heart or a shallow heart or a crowded heart or a fruitful heart?

Let's not give ourselves extra points when we are examining our hearts. Let the Lord evaluate it. But the soil of our hearts can be changed by receiving the Word of God into our hearts daily and trust the Lord in spite of the circumstances around us.

I believe the v9 is an appropriate one for this:

Mark 4:9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

B. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLE

Mark 4:10-13 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. 11 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, 12 so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.'" 13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

Jesus used parables both to hide the truth and to reveal it. The crowd did not judge the parables. The parables judged the crowd.

The careless listener, who thought he knew everything, would hear only a story that he did not really understand. In result, his life would be judgment. But the sincere listener, with a desire to know God's truth, would ponder the parable, confess his ignorance, submit to the Lord, and then begin to understand the spiritual lesson Jesus wanted to teach.

The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay. So the very same Gospel message which breaks down honest hearts and leads to repentance, hardens the hearts of the dishonest and confirms them in their path of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:12 For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In this sense, the parables of Jesus were not illustrations that make difficult things clear to all who heard. They were a way of "embedding" God's message so the spiritually sensitive could understand, but the hardened would merely hear a story and they don't get the true meaning.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches.

The truth can be right in front of a person and speaks to him directly and loudly. But if the person chooses not to hear, because he turns his spiritual deaf ears on it, no one and nothing can make that change.

2) We need to keep our hearts as fertile soil to receive God's Word daily with gladness and willingness, so that we may grow in Him and serve Him.