

The Four Different Ways to Hear.

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Mark

4:1 Then Jesus began to teach again beside the sea. Such a large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the entire crowd remained beside the sea on the shore.

4:2 He began teaching them many things in parables. While he was teaching them he said,

4:3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow.

4:4 As he was sowing, some seeds fell along the path, and birds came and ate them up.

4:5 Others fell on stony ground, where they did not have a lot of soil. They sprouted at once because the soil wasn't deep.

4:6 But when the sun came up, they were scorched. Since they did not have any roots, they dried up.

4:7 Others fell among thorn bushes, and the thorn bushes came up and choked them out, and they did not produce anything.

4:8 But others fell on good soil and produced a crop. They grew up, increased in size, and produced 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown."

4:9 He added, "Let the person who has ears to hear, listen!"

4:10 When he was alone with the Twelve and those around him, they began to ask him about the parables.

4:11 He told them, "The secret about the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside, everything comes in parables

4:12 so that 'they may see clearly but not perceive, and they may hear clearly but not understand, otherwise they might turn around and be forgiven.'"

4:13 Then he told them, "You don't understand this parable, so how can you understand any of the parables?"

4:14 The farmer sows the word.

4:15 Some people are like the seeds along the path, where the word is sown. When they hear it, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

4:16 Others are like the seeds sown on the stony ground. When they hear the word, at once they joyfully accept it,

4:17 but since they don't have any roots, they last for only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes along because of the word, they

immediately fall away.

4:18 Still others are like the seeds sown among the thorn bushes. These are the people who hear the word,

4:19 but the worries of life, the deceitful pleasures of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word so that it can't produce a crop.

4:20 Others are like the seeds sown on good soil.

They hear the word, accept it, and produce crops—30, 60, or 100 times what was sown."

[International Standard Version]

In our last meeting, we discussed three points. We read chapter 4 of the Gospel according to Mark and looked closely at the parable of seed sowing. Then, secondly, we tried to find the secret behind this parable and thirdly, we considered the meaning of this parable. This morning, I would like to continue the discussion based on the same chapter and talk about the four kinds of listeners of the Word of the Lord—the four kinds of land.

The first kind of people are compared to the land along the path. Their hearts are stubborn and hardened. They listen to His Word, but they do not understand it.

Mark

4:15 "Some people are like the seeds along the path, where the word is sown. When they hear it, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that was sown in them."

The Word of the Lord cannot penetrate into their hearts, which are so hard and dry just like the land along the path. Their hearts are always closed and they continue to reject the invitation from Jesus. They lack the willingness to come into the light and repent.

As a punishment for refusing to repent, they are deprived of the ability to understand the Word of the Lord. Because this kind of people lack the desire to understand God's Word from the bottom of their hearts, it is no wonder that they have no chance to realize its meaning and significance.

Therefore, the Devil makes all attempts to attack these people just like a bird that comes down to steal seeds. Practically, he leads them to criticize and doubt the Word of the Lord, which causes them to strain the meaning of His Word in the Bible and finally refuse it. These people are characterized by their indifference to His Word; they do not contemplate His Word profoundly and thus, they are quick to forget what they hear. There is a verse in Luke which describes such people:

Luke

8:12 “The ones on the path are the people who listen, but then the devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”

Even after they hear about the gospel of salvation, these people do not want to repent and receive the grace of the Lord. It is so tragic, isn't it?

The second kind of people, as described in verses 16 and 17 of Mark, chapter 4, accept the Word they hear. But, they do not live according to it. Although they are so pleased when they hear His Word and accept it, it does not set root deep into their lives and their hearts.

Luke

8:13 “The ones on the stony ground are the people who joyfully welcome the word when they hear it. But since they don't have any roots, they believe for a while, but in a time of testing they fall away.”

I suppose that the so-called Bible scholars who lived in the same era that Jesus lived belonged to this group.

Matthew

8:19 “Just then, a scribe came up and told him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’”

This Bible scholar was deeply moved when he said these words, but he actually did not follow the Lord. Very often, we see some people who begin their lives of faith in the most exemplary way but when they face persecution or some difficulties in their lives, they easily break down. Many real life examples can be found in the Scripture:

Ezekiel

33:31 “Then they come to you as a group, sit down right in front of you as if they were my people, hear your words and then they don't do what you say.”

Luke

6:49 “But the person who hears what I say but doesn't act on it is like someone who built a house on the ground without any foundation. When the floodwaters pushed against it, that house quickly collapsed, and the resulting destruction of that house was extensive.”

John

6:66 “As a result, many of his disciples turned back and no longer associated with him.”

They turned back because their faith was not true. True disciples would never have turned back. They were not willing to accept the Word of the Lord. They seemed to be delighted by the Word spoken to them

and it seemed to sprout in their hearts. It makes the sowers greatly encouraged, but, eventually, that joy turns into disappointment. His Word could not strike deep root because the soil was too shallow. Therefore, this seed cannot endure long in a time of testing or persecution.

Luke

8:13 “The ones on the stony ground are the people who joyfully welcome the word when they hear it. But since they don't have any roots, they believe for a while, but in a time of testing they fall away.”

Accepting His Word and taking it into your heart is just a first step of the life of faith. If there is no root, it won't last long but will wither away sooner or later.

Furthermore, these people neither clearly stand at the side of Jesus nor act definitely as His witness. Just accepting the Word of the Lord is not enough, but it needs to be patiently obeyed.

We are all living with various problems and face hard days all the time but actually, these problems are placed there in order to test our faith. I have seen many people who after sincerely seeking His Word, gladly accepted it and determined to live in obedience to Jesus. However, after a while, they suddenly stopped coming to the assembly in spite of our joy. Some have even lost their faith in Jesus.

According to Luke chapter 8, verse 13, they actually believed for a while. Their seed certainly sprouted once, but, just like others, their lives of faith fell by the wayside. When they are faced with various testings and tribulations, if they give in to them and give up their faith, they deprive the Word of the Lord a chance to reveal its power. Peter wrote to the believers of his time:

2 Peter

2:21 “It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and turn their backs on the holy commandment that was committed to them.”

In actuality, these people, instead of being saved by hearing the Word of the Lord are judged by His Word.

The third kind of people are explained from verse 18, chapter 4 of Mark:

Mark

4:18-19 “Still others are like the seeds sown among the thorn bushes. These are the people who hear the word, but the worries of life, the deceitful pleasures of wealth, and the desires for other things come in and choke the word so that it can't produce

a crop.”

Luke

8:14 “The ones that fell among the thorn bushes are the people who listen, but as they go on their way they are choked by the worries, wealth, and pleasures of life, and their fruit doesn’t mature.”

The third kind of people maintain their faith longer than the second kind of people. But, they cannot bear the fruit of the Spirit after all. It is because the worldly matters occupy a very large part of their lives. They devote themselves to their jobs and their minds are preoccupied with worldly desires. There seem to be three obstacles that hinder them from bearing fruit.

Firstly, it is the worries of life. Secondly, it is wealth and thirdly, their desires. Even after they accepted His Word, they cannot throw away all their worldly desires from their heart. The Word of the Lord cannot grow in a heart that is filled with worldly desires. What is special about these people is that they easily compromise with this world and they are preoccupied with their own worries; they are putting their hearts into making money or fulfilling their mundane desires. Now, let us quickly summarize what we have discussed so far.

Three things are listed that oppose the Word of the Lord, which are the bird, the heat of the sun and thorn bushes. The bird represents the Devil who deprives the people of the power to understand the Word of the Lord and take it away from their hearts. The heat of the Sun symbolizes the hostility from people. And fear of other people always has a negative impact on the growth of our faith. The thorns represent worldly wealth, which also tempts our hearts. This way, we are surrounded by many things that tempt us, which are the Devil, other people, and desires that reside within our hearts.

How about the fourth kind of people? According to verse 20, they accept His Word and bear fruit. Good soil refers to the ground that is well cultivated and is prepared for sowing seeds. If His Word is sown in the heart of such people, their hearts will open to the Lord and will be filled with the willingness to seek the Lord alone.

Luke

8:15 “But the ones on the good soil are the people who hear the word but also hold on to it with good and honest hearts, producing a crop through endurance.”

It is only those who are prepared to endure everything in order to remain in His Word and fight the battle against all worldly desires using His Word that bear

fruit by the Word of the Lord. We have been discussing what is represented by the four kinds of lands. Now, we have to consider here, which kind of land, our own hearts belong to.

We are always prepared to listen to His Word and accept it. However, as we seriously reflect on the state of our own minds, we cannot help but realize that very often, the Word we heard and accepted is not bearing any fruit at all and that sometimes we even get stumbled to His Word.

From this fact, we have to admit that, we have some pieces of all four kinds of land in our minds being mixed up with each other. What matters is which kind of land occupies the largest portion of our hearts.

Is it the good soil? Are our hearts prepared to serve the Lord and filled with the love and respect to Him alone? Hearing His Word and accepting it is just the beginning. It then needs to sprout and strike the root in order to bear fruit. This fruit refers to the salvation mentioned in the Bible.

1 Peter

1:9 “Because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

The outcome of our faith is the salvation of souls. The faith that leads to the salvation is the faith in which the seed, which refers to Word of the Lord grows up and finally bears fruit. However, in order for the seed to grow, it first needs to die. Let us look at this famous verse:

John

12:24 “Truly, I tell all of you emphatically, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a lot of grain.”

It is the Word of the Lord that gives the power that is required for humans to be reborn. However, it is possible that even though they gladly accept His Word, it is not allowed to convert their minds. Not all lives that are conceived in their mothers' wombs grow, mature, and are delivered into the world.

There is a danger of miscarriage and the baby might die before the delivery. Thus, if people are seriously seeking the Lord, instead of acting on their own human decision, they need to experience the true rebirth.

Verses 21 to 25 of the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 4, explains how the Word of the Lord works. After all, nothing is more important than having ears to hear. Because there definitely is the right way to hear

His Word and there is the wrong way to hear it. Let us discuss how the parables in the Bible work; it is how the Word of the Lord works on us. Let us begin with the importance of hearing the Word in the right way. The seed is, of course, the Word of the Lord.

Mark

4:23 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen!"

Just like there is the right way to hear the Word of the Lord, there is the wrong way to do so. So, now, I would like to pick up some examples of hearing His Word rightly and hearing it wrongly.

Let us begin with the first example of hearing it in the wrong way. King Agrippa, who lived in the era of the New Testament was one of such people.

Acts

26:28 'Agrippa asked Paul, "Can you so quickly persuade me to become a Christian?"

Paul asked King Agrippa whether he believed the prophets or not.

Acts

26:27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe them!"

Although King Agrippa heard the Gospel, he could not make a decision which was necessary to have a firm faith in the Lord. After all, the Word spoken to this King was wasted vainly.

The second example can be found in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 24, verse 25:

Acts

24:25 "As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and said, 'For the present you may go. When I get a chance, I will send for you again.'"

This man certainly heard the Gospel too. But, he was caught by fear and could not make an instant decision. He just made excuses. As a result, he apparently lost the opportunity to accept the Gospel forever. The Lord is always demanding us to make an instant decision as to whether we accept His Word or not.

The third example is the young man who appears in chapter 18 of Luke. He was a rich man:

Luke

18:23 "But when the official heard this he became sad, because he was very rich."

Although this rich young man was ready and willing to make the decision until this moment, he could not give up what would be taken away from him by that decision. In his case, the Gospel he heard developed into nothing.

The fourth example is Pilate.

Matthew

27:24 'Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was about to break out instead. So he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Attend to that yourselves."

Pilate certainly met Jesus. He heard the Word of the Lord in person and he was given a chance to understand what the Gospel was. But, still he did not choose to stand on the side of Jesus. What he heard was wasted after all.

Fifthly, it is written in the Scripture about the Jewish leaders in Galilee:

John

6:41 "Then the Jewish leaders began grumbling about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'"

These Jewish leaders in Galilee heard the Gospel indeed. But, they stumbled on it.

The Bible also mentions the superficial disciples as the sixth example:

John

6:60 "When many of his disciples heard this, they said, 'This is a difficult statement. Who can accept it?'"

They did not hear the Gospel with honest and humble hearts. They also were not prepared to accept what Jesus rigorously demanded of his disciples.

People in Athens are the seventh example.

Acts

17:32 "When they heard about a resurrection of the dead, some began joking about it."

Athens was the center of a new culture and people were always curious about something. But, when they heard about the Gospel, they began joking about it according to this verse. After all, it was just meaningless for them to hear the Gospel.

The occult practitioner called Elymas is the eighth

example.

Acts

13:8 "But Elymas the occult practitioner (that is the meaning of his name) continued to oppose them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith."

This Elymas thoroughly denied the gospel he heard.

The ninth example is the believers in Antioch.

Acts

13:46 "We had to speak God's word to you first, but since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life."

Jewish people who lived in the town of Antioch rejected the Gospel. It was for this reason that they could not receive eternal life.

The people of Nazareth are the tenth example.

Luke

4:28-29 "All the people in the synagogue became furious when they heard this. They got up, forced Jesus out of the city, and led him to the edge of the hill on which their city was built, intending to throw him off."

The people of Nazareth, where Jesus was born, not only refused to accept the Gospel, but they were filled with such fierce anger and hate against Jesus that they drove Him away and even attempted to kill Him.

I would like to mention the Jewish people in the town called Ephesus as the eleventh example.

Acts

19:9 "But when some people became stubborn, refused to believe, and slandered the Way in front of the people."

When the Jews of Ephesus heard about the kingdom of the Lord God, they intentionally hardened their hearts.

The twelfth example is the religious leaders of those days, the so-called Pharisees who thoroughly studied the Scriptures.

Matthew

12:24 "But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

Most of the Bible scholars of those times were aware that Jesus was the Son of God, but they still claimed

that He was working in association with the Devil.

Nothing the Lord said was empty and meaningless. His Word is always by itself the revelation of the Lord God. Our attitude to the Word of the Lord in the Bible reflects our attitude to Jesus Himself. All the people who appeared in the twelve examples mentioned above certainly heard the Gospel. However, everything they heard was wasted and meaningless. The Word of the Lord encourages listeners to have three things.

Firstly, repentance. Secondly, faith. And thirdly, obedience.

If some people, after hearing the Word of the Lord, refuse to repent, refuse to believe in His Word and refuse to sincerely obey Him, they are not hearing His Word with the right attitude. Having ears to hear is unthinkable important. Because, as there is the right way to hear His Word, there certainly is the wrong way to hear it. Samuel is definitely one of the most important figures in the Old Testament.

Through him, people of the entire nation received the blessing of God. Why was that? He was as young as 15 or 16 years old. He could have been even younger than that—around 12 or 13 years old. Still, he said, "Speak, Lord, because your servant is listening." When we have an attitude like this, we certainly give the Lord the chance to work on us, so that His glory is revealed.

End