

MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23

HEARING THE WORD

Now, this text isn't a lesson on how to plant fields, but it does use much of that imagery, as does Jesus use that planting and harvesting imagery in many of His teachings. Our Old Testament reading uses that imagery, but let's not be distracted thinking we know what Jesus is talking about because you're farmers or have grown up in a farming community. Jesus ends the parable in the first half of our text saying, "He who has ears, let him hear."

Did you hear our readings today? Did you understand them? That's another phrase that Jesus uses in our reading. When you hear the Word of God and do not understand it – the devil takes it away from you. Yet when you do understand it, you bear fruit. There are four different plots of ground on which the Word of God is sown in our reading, and yet it's the same Word.

To help us to hear this Word of God and understand it let's reflect on our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. God begins by saying: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (55:10-11).

God's Word goes out and accomplishes His purposes. His Word is going to do what He desires it to do, but not always as we might imagine or wish, not with immediate results as we would like. Seeds don't produce crops immediately or equally. It may be that something which you said years ago to a child, friend or spouse bears fruit years later.

Sure, this is easy to understand that seeds don't immediately bear fruit. You can't pull the plant up out of the ground, or a whole ear of corn out of one kernel. These things take time to grow as God designed them. And just as little seeds need to be nurtured, so does faith. The rain of God's Word comes to people, softening their hearts like the water softens the ground, and then it can find the tiniest filament of a root of faith and give life.

This seed, this Word of the Kingdom that our text refers to is the Word of God: Jesus Christ Himself. He came to this world, died on a cross as the weed killer for all sins, and then He was planted like a seed in the ground and sprouted up three days later.

This Word of Kingdom, do you understand it? According to Jesus, those who don't understand it, it will be taken away from them by the devil. There are two other places in the Gospel of Matthew that we can go to, to help us to

understand what Jesus is saying here, and hopefully that will open up the rest of the text for you, and the devil doesn't take the Word of God away from you.

First, we turn to Matthew 4:23. There Jesus begins His ministry by going "throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom". Jesus' teachings is the Word of Kingdom that He refers to in our text. What you're to hear, listen to and understand are all of Jesus' teachings. Our text is basically referring to any Word from the Bible because "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). So all Scripture is God, Jesus the Son of God speaking to you, teaching you about the Gospel of the Kingdom. In our text Jesus is encouraging you to hear and understand Him.

To understand this phrase let's turn to Matthew 7:24-27 and listen to another parable. Here Jesus says, "Everyone then who **hears these words of mine** and **does them** will be like a **wise man** who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who **hears these words of mine** and **does not do them** will be like a **foolish man** who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

The foolish man doesn't understand the Word that he hears from Jesus and he does not build his house, his life, upon the Rock. The Rock in the Bible refers to Jesus. It refers to Jesus' Gospel teachings. It refers to His Word. This is more than an intellectual grasp of the teachings in the Bible. If Jesus was referring to intelligence when He talks about understanding the Word of God then only the smart people would get to heaven. What Jesus is talking about is doing something with this Word once you've heard it. He's saying that the Word that's only heard is easy pray for the devil. The Word of God needs to be planted and lived in your lives.

So that's plot one of our four plots of ground for God's Word. The other three should be easier to reflect upon now. The second plot is rocky ground. Bad things are happening in your life. Your life is a struggle. It's not all easy going because of the rocks in your life, and so when you hear Jesus' Word this sounds like good news to you and you rejoice. But when you become a Christian your life doesn't immediately resolve all its problems. It might get harder for you because the evil one doesn't like it when you receive God's Word with joy. You might endure those hardships for awhile, waiting for God to do something about them, praying, but nothing happens except things get worse and people make fun of you because of your new faith, and so you give up and walk away from God and the church, because God didn't do for you what you wanted Him to do.

Onto plot three – the thorns. People say that God didn't promise us a rose garden. I say that God did promise us a rose garden. Roses have thorns and sometimes manure to make them grow. Thorns and manure can be unpleasant. Here the thorns represent the ways and cares of this world that are opposed to the ways of God. If you live in filth long enough eventually you'll no longer smell that filth. You'll think it's normal. You'll think it's pleasant. The cares of this world can lure you away from God. In our text the only care that's mentioned that can choke out the Word of God is the deceitfulness of riches. Riches aren't bad, but when they lead you away from God, they're deceitful. Yet, there are other cares of this world that can occupy the lives of a great number of people.

While I was on vacation two Sundays I went to church, and two Sundays I didn't go to church. It wouldn't take a genius of understanding to know on what Sundays I saw the most people. It saddens me that there are so many out there who don't hear the Word of God, they don't understand it, or put it into practice in their lives. Hardships lead them away from God, and the cares of this world lead them astray, and their interests are turned away from God.

Thankfully there's a fourth plot of ground that has good soil. In this fourth plot of ground people hear the Word of the Kingdom of God and they understand it. They try to live their lives by it. They try to build their lives on the teachings of Jesus. On this good soil hardships still come, but when people lean upon one another and help one another those hardships can be dealt with. People can be helped through their struggles in life. People are given hope for a better life to come in the Kingdom of God.

In this Kingdom of God the cares and the riches of this world will fade away. Yet, now we still experience the temptations of this world and the hardships of this world, but in this good soil we build our lives on the Rock of Jesus the Christ, and not on the sand of this world.

The good soil is the church. The seed is the Word of God planted in you. You hear the Word of God here. Some churches have a hundredfold, some sixty, and others about thirty people in them. Yet even with only thirty people here some Sundays, this is still good soil. Here you can come to understand that the greatest doing of this Word of God was done by Jesus Christ. We slip up and fail throughout our lives, but Jesus has completed all goodness for us. Jesus has removed your guilt for what you've failed to do correctly, or even tried to do. Jesus the Word of God paid the penalty for all your sins. And Jesus the Word of God has built a house for you on the Rock of His Word in heaven that will never fall.

As Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6). The Seed of the Word of God is planted here, watered here and grown here in this church. Amen.