

The Devilish Barrier of Bad Religion

Luke 8:10-12

June 17, 2018

When his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard, and the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so they may not believe and be saved.

"And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root. They believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that

in the good soil. They are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

In that last section, there in verses 11 to 15, Jesus has there given us the key to unlock the meaning of the parable. He has told his disciples in verse 10, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of,” the *mysterion*, “the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” And then in verse 11 he says, “The seed is the word of God.” The seed has inherent power. It has life-giving energy. It's ready to be released. It's ready to sprout. It's ready to grow and to grow up and bear fruit as it says there, “to bear fruit,” in verse 15, “with patience,” with endurance, with perseverance, bearing fruit to the end. That’s the idea.

Seed has inherent power. As Mark 4:28 says, “First the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear.” All that the seed needs to release that life-giving, fruit-bearing energy is what? Good soil. That's all it needs. Good soil. Listen, that is the key that we need to open up this secret, to

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reveal this mystery of the kingdom of God, and Jesus has just handed that key to us.

What is the secret? What's the mystery that's here revealed? Just this. The good seed must find good soil in order to produce good and lasting fruit. As Jesus tells the parable, most soils are unproductive soils even if at first they seem to so, show signs of life. Most soils are unproductive. But good seed must find good soil in order to produce good and lasting fruit.

And the knowledge of that mystery just now revealed before you has a profound and far-reaching implications for the kingdom ministry, starting with the indispensable wisdom, as I mentioned, of discernment. We need to discern the difference between good and productive fruit-bearing and that which is not. Just as the seed has inherent power, so also does the almighty word of the Almighty God.

So the seed is the word of God. It's the word that comes from God. It is the divine word. It's powerful, it's energetic,

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it's life-giving. It is transformative. It's a fruit-producing word, a fruit that lasts for the rest of the lifetime and keeps on being produced in the lifetime. That is the power of the word of God. We know that from 2 Timothy 3:16, that it's a *theopneustos*. It's a "breathed-out-by-God" word, and therefore Paul tells Timothy it's "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." All that the word of God needs to release that life-giving, fruit-producing power and energy is what? Jesus tells us plainly in verse 15 an honest and good heart.

So if the seed is the word of God, what does each soil represent? Each soil represents a different kind of heart, each heart with a different response to God's word, each one a different outcome of the seed that's sown, each one a different outcome of the word that's heard.

So as we learned last week, there is this, as verse 4 tells us, there is this gathering, growing, swelling crowd of people. They were thronging to Jesus simply because they had physical eyes to see that in him and in his ministry and in his teaching

and in his power there's something quite spectacular going on with this man.

As they came to him, though, Jesus knew they didn't come with right motives, with receptive hearts. Many in that crowd lacked faith to see anything deeper than just the spectacular. They just looked at his works. They were, their ears were tickled by his teaching. And so as he spoke to them, he sowed the word of God, and he sowed it to the only sensation that they seemed to have at the moment. He spoke audible words, and he spoke familiar words to their ears. They had ears, physical ears, the, the perception of audible understanding.

They had ears to hear something, so Jesus spoke something familiar to them. He gave them something they're familiar with. "The sower went out to sow his seed." They probably could look behind him on the hills behind him and see the terraced farming and see sowers out sowing seed at that moment. And so he told them a parable. A parable. He tucked into familiar language and imagery this sower sowing a field. What he tucked in there was

important truth for those with a heart to understand something deeper.

That's what the word, *parable*, in fact indicates. It comes from the Greek verb *parabole*, which means, to throw or to cast alongside of. So a parable is a story, a familiar story, or familiar imagery and ideas where a truth is cast alongside something that's familiar. That's what Jesus did. That's what all Jesus' parables were. Like all Jesus' parables, these are not mere illustrations that shed light on spiritual truths.

That's part of it, but parables served a dual purpose. To hide the truth from the hard-hearted is one of the purposes. To hide the truth and veil the truth from the unbelieving, that's one purpose. The other purpose is the one we're familiar with; it's to reveal the truth to, to believers, to true believers, those with ears to hear. They are the ones who hear. As we learned last week, parables are like stained-glass windows in the cathedral, dull and lifeless from the outside, but brilliant and radiant from within. That's how most of the crowd heard

Jesus, like those who were on the outside looking in and seeing and hearing something dull and lifeless to them.

That's how so many people hear Jesus' teaching today. They miss all the clues. They fail to recognize Jesus speaking about something deeper. They fail to recognize the spiritual meaning, something of tremendous spiritual significance. As it was then, so it is now. External response to God's word reveals the hidden condition of the heart.

When we ended last week, we ended with some questions. A general question was "How, why did Jesus speak in parables?" And then we had a more specific question: "What does this parable mean?" Same questions that we have, those are the questions on the minds of the disciples who first heard this. Luke tells us in verse 9 that his disciples asked him what this specific parable meant. And in Mark 4:10, we learned that this was a, a larger group than just the Twelve. Those around Jesus with the Twelve asked him about the parables is what Mark 4:10 says. And since they had ears to hear, they, they sense something deeper. They look for an explanation of the meaning. They look for a

right interpretation of a, of a deeper truth that they sensed was beneath the surface. They were also looking for a reason that Jesus spoke in parables to begin with. Why did Jesus speak in parables? That's another question that they had, a more general question.

In Matthew's parallel, Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked that more general question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" They want to understand not just the meaning of this parable, but why parables? Why are you telling these truths in familiar language? What is your strategic reason? What's the tactical decision you've made here that you would start speaking in parables?

So as Luke records here in verse 10, he's actually answering both of those questions. He gives us the, the reason for both. Jesus gives both answers, verse 10, "To you it has been given to know the secrets." Or another, as we said last week, another way to translate that is the word, not secrets, but mysteries. Those are truths hidden by God in ages past, but now revealed to God's elect. "To you it's been given," granted

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by grace, "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God," once hidden truths now revealed to the sons and daughters of the kingdom.

Jesus' parables therefore serve the purpose of distinguishing the regenerate from the unregenerate, as well as serving to bless the regenerate with spiritual truth. By speaking in parables, Jesus is here identifying the line that God has drawn down the middle of all humanity. He's revealing who the elect are by how they respond to the word of God. All those who respond righteously to the word, they are blessed with even more truth. But for those who stand on the outside, for those who sense nothing of spiritual significance, they are in danger of losing the truth and falling into further darkness.

And that is why Jesus warned there, down in verse 18, look at it there in your Bibles, Jesus warned, "Take care, then how you hear. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." See the two groups, there? The, haves, and the, have nots.

The haves are the elect. The haves are the chosen of God. They are the regenerate. They are the believing. They are the ones to whom God has granted the right to become children of God. They have the privilege of knowing the secrets of the kingdom of God, and if you are a fruit-bearing believer in Jesus Christ then, guess what? You are among the haves. "And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God."

Who are the have nots? Well, they're the other three soils in the parable. The sidewalk seed falling along the hard-packed path. The shallow seed falling upon the bedrock. The suffocated seed falling among the thorns.

Before we jump into today's outline, I want to begin with a question for you to think about as we walk through the outline. Of all the soils here, which group do you think is the most difficult to evangelize? Which is that, I'm not asking which is most responsive or receptive because we see different responses, but which is the group that's most difficult to evangelize? Is it (a) the pathway soil? Is it (b) the rocky soil or is it (c)

the thorny soil? Hardest to evangelize? Least responsive to your evangelism?

After all, we need to recognize, verse 12, that's why the sower sows the seed, right, to get a harvest. That's why those who preach and teach and share the word of God do all that preaching and teaching and explaining. That's why we as Christians take the time with our unbelieving friends and neighbors and family members, because we're concerned about their souls. We don't want to see people go to hell. So we teach. We preach. We share to get a harvest, so that people may believe, verse 12, so they may believe and be saved.

So which soil seems least receptive to the seed when it's sown by the sower? If you think (a) it's the first soil, the hard-packed pathway soil, you're correct. The seed that falls into the second soil, verse 13, that seed is eager to be evangelized. When they hear the word, they receive it with joy.

The seed that falls into the third soil, verse 4, verse 14, they're also those who hear. They seem to sprout up, but they

drift away later on. They seem receptive to evangelism. They want to sign the card. They want to go forward. They want to be baptized. But they drift away later on. They produce leaves, but there's no fruit.

The hardest soil, though, the least receptive to evangelism, is the hard-packed pathway soil. That hard-packed soil, they already think they have all that they need. And so they are impenetrable. The net effect is the same for all three soils, but with the first soil there's no penetration whatsoever. The first soil represents no penetration of the seed. The second and third soils represent unproductive penetration of the seed. It's only the fourth soil that is soft and deep and pure, so that seed gets in deep, into good soil, healthy soil, to result in productive penetration.

But the hardest of them all, with no penetration whatsoever, is represented by that first soil. It's the seed that fell alongside the pathway. So it's the first of those soils that's going to be the subject of our study today. They're hardened. They are hardened because they think that they have,

and so they refuse to receive the word. They see it as unnecessary, or they think, I've heard all this before. I've heard it. I've been in church. I have been listening to the sermons. I read all the good books. I know. I got it. As Jesus warned in verse 8, 18, though, "Take care then how you hear." It's not just that you hear; it's how you hear. "Take care how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given. But from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Several things I want you to see and understand this morning about the hard-hearted. First, understand that God has condemned them. It's a hard truth. God has condemned them. Second, you need to understand their true condition, and third, you need to discern the devil's involvement, that the devil attends closely to the hard-hearted.

Understanding those things is going to give you discernment about the people with whom you interact. It's going to give you discernment about the people who profess Christ in your (their) life, but do not possess Christ in their life. It's going to

give you discernment about people with whom you share the Gospel. It's going to give you discernment about the people who you think are Christians and are fine, but may not be.

Let's get into point one, point one in our outline. It's there in your bulletin. The first point, the divine condemnation of a hard heart. The divine condemnation of a hard heart. Last week we talked about the reason Jesus spoke in parables, but we only looked at the first part of verse 10, there, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God." So it's, the first purpose is to us. Jesus spoke in parables to identify the regenerate as the regenerate, to bless the regenerate, to give them more truth, more understanding.

But what about the unregenerate? What about them? What's the purpose of the parables for the unregenerate? Verse 10 says, "for others." That's all the rest. Others, "they," that is, the secrets the mysteries of God's word, the kingdom of God, "they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand." That's why Jesus spoke in parables to the unregenerate, to reveal the futility of their natural ears

and natural eyes to get to spiritual truth. In order to get to spiritual truth, they need something that they do not have. They need the power of God's word.

Three purposes of parables for the unbelieving which we'll apply here directly to the hard-hearted. The first reason Jesus spoke in parables was to provoke the unbelieving to discover the truth. Parables are meant to provoke interest, to raise questions, which shows us, regardless of one's response, Jesus spoke in parables to serve what was really a kind and gracious purpose with unregenerate people.

Yes, they have physical perception of hearing even if they've missed all the clues. They could physically hear Jesus call out audibly, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What's he doing there? He's calling the unbelieving to ask and seek and knock. He's calling them to go deeper. He's calling them to inquire further. "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

He spoke to crowds in parables in order that they may not rely on their physical senses alone, their sight and their hearing, so that they might perceive something deeper beyond their natural ability, going further than their natural ability can take them, spiritual truth beyond human intuition, beyond human learning and formed by natural perception, the seeing eye, the hearing ear. They had to go deeper. This is a gracious purpose, actually, even to the unregenerate, even to the unbelieving. He's so kind, so merciful.

But that purpose leads immediately to a second reason Jesus spoke in parables, that is to, secondly, expose the unregenerate. To expose the unregenerate. They are the ones who have physical ears and eyes, yes. So they can see and hear everything that believers can see and hear on a physical level. But they have no spiritual perception. They are exposed as unregenerate unbelievers by the fact that they don't understand what believers understand, and they make no real effort to discover it.

As they face difficulty in learning, obstacles, spiritual obstacles, they turn away. As they face opposition, they, they melt away. They're distracted by other things. They peel away. They chase those distractions. That's what Jesus' parables do. They expose the unregenerate as the unregenerate. They reveal the hard-hearted as the hard-hearted. They hide the truth just enough to repel those who are not serious. Those who are not serious, for them it reveals the harrowing reality of divine condemnation. Sobering thought.

The Puritan pastor and theologian John Owen, he wrote a, a very important defense of particular redemption, one for which I've never found a refutation, by the way. Excellent, excellent work of his called, *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*. In the treatise, he begins it with an address to the reader in order to turn away the casual reader and to draw in the serious reader, and this is what he writes. He says, "If thou intendest to go any farther, I would entreat thee to stay here a little." If you are familiar with John Owen's writing, you know that readers need that kind of encouragement to stick with it. He's sometimes difficult.

Then he goes on and says, "If thou art, as many in this pretending age, a sign, or title-gazer and comest into books as Cato into the theater, to go out again, thou hast had thy entertainment. Farewell." That's probably one that today's publishers would edit out of the book because they want to sell books. But he tells them, Goodbye. That's what parables are to the casual, hard-hearted listener. They expose the unregenerate for what they are. They turn away the casual listener, but they draw the serious listener to consider more carefully.

That, reads, leads to a third reason that Jesus spoke in parables: to judge the unrepentant. So it's not only a gracious purpose to provoke curiosity and raise questions. It's not just to expose and reveal who's who. But it's also to judge the unrepentant. Parables are an indication of divine judgment on the hard-hearted. It's pretty clear in the Greek text, in fact. "To the rest in parables." And then there's a purpose clause there, *Hina*, in order that. It's a subordinate conjunction showing purpose, "in order that seeing they may not see, in order that hearing, they may not understand." And folks, that is judgment, it's condemnation.

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That's not just my word; it's from Scripture. That quotation comes from Isaiah 6:9 and 10, when after Isaiah is brought into that scene of the throne room of God, where the, the burning ones are flying around, the seraphim, saying, "Holy, holy, Holy." Isaiah says, "I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the Lord of hosts. I am destroyed." God sends one of the seraphim with a coal burning from the altar to touch those unclean lips, the most sensitive part of the body, to cauterize them, to burn them. Yes, atonement is painful.

God asks, "Who will I send? Who will go for me?" One who has their sins forgiven. Isaiah raises his hands through those blistered lips. "Here am I; send me." So God said, "Okay, go and say to this people, 'Keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed." Isaiah knew from the very beginning that his evangelistic ministry would be a failure. And he went anyway. He's a prophet of God. He's sent to preach

divine condemnation to a people who are hard-hearted, calloused in their religion.

New Testament writers quote that text more often than any other from the Old Testament, except for Psalm 110 verse 1. But this is an oft-quoted text used by the early church often, referred to often to help them understand the rejection of the Jewish nation. Why would the people crucify their own Messiah? Oh, it's because they don't have any spiritual perception. They found no room for repentance, and the nation experienced judgment from God, a judicial blindness, a judicial deafness, a judicial hardening of their hearts. It's judgment upon people who profess themselves to understand everything perfectly. But they refused to humble themselves at the preaching of the Prophet. They refused to repent. They refused to believe.

Leon Morris put it this way, "Jesus looked for more than a superficial adherence. So he intensified his use of parables, stories which yielded their meaning only to those prepared to search for it. The parables demand thought and spiritual earnestness. They separate sincere seeker from the casual

hearer. Parables both reveal and conceal the truth. They reveal it to the genuine seeker, who will take the trouble to dig beneath the surface and discover the meaning. But they conceal it from him who is content simply to listen to the story. They are a judgment on the casual and the careless." End quote.

Parables are a divine judgment upon the hard-hearted. A casual, careless attitude is one of the many indications of an underlying hardness of heart; and in turn, a hard heart is evidence of divine condemnation on a life.

Well, with that sobering thought in mind, let's take a look now, and a closer look at the hard heart. This is a second point in your outline. Second point: the religious condition of a hard heart. The religious condition of a hard heart. Now as you look at the text, the distinctively religious nature of the hard-heartedness may not jump off the page at you, but if you look back at verse 5, let's remind ourselves of the elements in the parable.

Jesus says there at verse 5, "A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it." Two elements there in Luke's account, which you will not find, actually, in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark. There are two details that Jesus provided, which Luke records that Matthew and Mark do not record. But those two details that Luke gives us from the words of Christ help us see the nature of this heart, that it is a religious heart.

First, Jesus tells us that the seed was trampled underfoot, and second, he tells us that the devouring birds came from the air. Then, verse 12, we read, "The ones along the path are those who have heard, and then the devil comes and takes away the word," or snatches away, you could translate that, "the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved." So the ones along the path, of course, that refers to, as we said, the sower or the seed that's, that, that has fallen from the sower's hand. Instead of making it into the field, it bounces off that impenetrable surface of a sunbaked, hard-packed footpath.

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So since the seed is unable to penetrate in through the surface, it's unable to find protection from the heat. It's actually treated rather roughly, here. Foot traffic comes along, and the seed gets trampled underfoot and smashed. And then, as it's spotted by hungry birds flying around up in the air, the birds swoop down out of there. They land on the hard-packed path, and they devoured the seed.

There are some who see the hard-packed soil as present, representing here the irreligious, the, the people like who are profane by nature, who have no interest in church and religion and all the rest. One commentator who sees it that way wrote this. He says, "The first class, here, contains those who are wholly insensible to religion, who are conscious of no need, have no fear of condemnation, no desire of salvation, and consequently no affinity with the Gospel of Christ." End quote.

Now, while it is true that the irreligious may manifest those characteristics, there would have been very few, if any, irreligious people in the multitudes who came to hear Jesus on this day. First-century Palestine was a highly religious

environment. Even the foreigners who inhabited the land were religious, even if they were polytheistic and pagan, very religious.

But for the Jews in particular, their religion was part of their cultural identity. Their religion is what distinguished them from the Romans, from the Samaritans, from all kinds of other religions, isms and schisms, and all the rest. Jews were theocentric in their thinking, and I mean by that it means God-centered. They had God, even if it was the wrong understanding of God, but they still had a conception of God in the middle of their minds. It's really like going to the Middle East today, talking with a Muslim. They have a totally wrong concept of God, but the way they think about life is always in connection, never apart from their religious ideas. That's beyond question.

These people here this day, listening to Jesus, they are not irreligious. They are extremely religious. Still, even though highly religious, we can agree with that commentator when he says that "the people represented by the hard-packed soil are

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conscious of no need. They have no fear of condemnation, and consequently they have no affinity with the Gospel of Christ.”

That may be true of the irreligious, as he said, but it was profoundly true of the religious in Jesus' day. God told Isaiah, Isaiah 29:13, “Because this people draws near me with their mouth and honors me with their lips while their hearts are far from me, their fear of me is merely a commandment taught by men.” It's just something they even inherited, memorized. They don't have in their hearts. Essentially, he said to Isaiah, “I'm going to judge them with blindness, with hardness of heart.”

Jesus recognized that about the crowds who drew near to him. He realized they had been instructed by their religious leaders, the same religious leaders that he indicted with those same words from Isaiah. In Matthew 15:79, he rebuked the Pharisees, saying, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophecy of you when he said this people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” How could that happen? How do they do that? They had no love of the truth.

Back to Deuteronomy, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God." First Commandment, Love him. If you don't deal with the love issue first, you'll never understand the truth. Their hearts are far from, they, with a lack of love they pile commandment on top of commandment, memory verse on top of memory verse. They're AWANA kids. They've got all the verses memorized. They've got gold badges and patches and trophies. They've bought everything out of the AWANA store. Perfect.

Oh, one problem down at the foundation, no love for God. With no love for God, they've got no love for people either. So they "strain the gnat out of the law while they swallow the camel." They don't understand the greater principles of mercy, and kindness, and compassion to people. They totally fail. They love Bible studies. They don't love people.

Remember, it's these hard-hearted Pharisees who just prior to the telling of this parable, Matthew 12:14, they went out and conspired against Jesus, how to destroy him. They hated him,

they wanted him dead. Why? Because he'd healed a man with a withered hand. They want to kill him. They eventually led all the people here into crucifying the one they'd come out to see.

How does this happen? Because the people had been continuously flattered by their religious leaders. Flattered. Nobody looked these people directly in the eye and said, you are a sinner and need to repent. No one took the truth that they preached and then worked it into individual lives and called people to repentance. They were flattered by the religious leaders. They were told they were great. They were told they were doing awesome. They were told, You're God's people. We have the temple. We have the law. We have Abraham. We're good to go. They were flattered.

So many churches today are flattering their people. They're insulated, then, by that false doctrine. They're insulated, inoculated by smooth-sounding words, false religious teachers teaching the people what they themselves knew, all that they knew, that it's enough to honor God with their lips, even if their heart is far from him. They pass on to the common people

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mere commandments of men, calling it biblical doctrine, and say, You're good.

And the people, most of them anyway, they accepted it. Who doesn't like to be told they're great? Who doesn't like to be told they're wonderful? Their false religion, though it was enslaving, though it's eternally damning in the short run, it's light and easy on the ears. No demands, no difficulties, no need for unpleasant personal confrontation. That's the kind of religion that creates very, very hard hearts.

As John MacArthur put it, quote, "This heart is never plowed by conviction, it is never cultivated with any kind of self-searching, self-examination, contrition, honest assessment of guilt, or true repentance. This heart is as hardened against the sweet beckoning of grace as it is against the dreadful terrors of judgment. Indifference in sensibility and a love for sin have made this person's heart dense, dry, and impenetrable."

Indifference, insensibility, and a love for sin? Does that description really fit religious people? Absolutely it does.

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Religious pride is one of the ugliest sins in the entire world. We all sense it. We all see it. We hate religious pride. But how often are we guilty of it? We can sometimes identify in others what we struggle with the most, can't we? This religious pride describes most of the scribes and the Pharisees perfectly, along with the priests and the Sadducees too. Highly religious and wickedly hard-hearted.

Folks, there are religious people in our own day, there are religious people within our own theological camp who manifest the sin of religious pride in spades. They talk a lot about what they know, a lot about what they're doing, a lot about who they listen to, what books they read. But there's very little love for Christ, very little love for people, very little sacrifice for others, very little service and submission to the church. They sit and they listen. Oh, and by the way, they judge and criticize, but they sit and they listen. But they do not do. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does," what, "does the will of my father who is in heaven." Be careful how you hear.

Scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus Day weren't satisfied until the rest of the Jewish people followed them down into the same pit, turning them into twice the sons of Hell as they themselves were, right, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. They were inoculating these people against the truth. People were self-satisfied. They're falsely assured. They landed on the self-deceptive judgment that they're doing just fine. Like the hard-baked footpath, the hearts of the Jewish people had become crusted over, thick, thick crust with a hard religious shell virtually impervious to the good seed of God's word. Their malady was the religious condition of their hearts, bent on unbelief and idolatry.

Some of the seed bounces off. You know who comes trampling that seed? They're teachers. You know who comes swooping down to pluck that seed, to make sure they never hear it or consider it? Demons. Demon-inspired teaching. That's what false religion is. It's bad religion, folks.

What does a hard heart look like? How do those of the hard heart react to the sower and the seed he sows? Several

reactions. You might want to write these down, 1, 2, 3, and four. Number one, sometimes they demonstrate hard-heartedness by just bypassing the message and resenting the messenger. They just don't even listen the message. They just look at the messenger and they judge. They criticize.

They're just like the Pharisees, who refused to reckon with Jesus' actual teaching, and instead they try to find cause to discredit him. If they can poison the well, they can be sure that no one will drink from it. Hard heart ignores the word, places blame on the one who preaches and teaches the word. Look, it's not the vessel. It's what's in the vessel. It's the content. Deal with that.

Second reaction. Hard-hearted reaction to the sower, the seed he sows, second. At other times, though they failed to find fault with the messenger, because they failed to find fault with Jesus, eventually they demonstrate their hard-heartedness by reacting with hostility to the message itself. If they consider it, they consider it through, through darkened understanding through a, a precommitment to criticism and hatred.

It's like the legalists of our own day, who misunderstand the law, and they condemn the innocent for rejoicing in God's grace. Or it's like the antinomians of our day, who misunderstand grace altogether, and they condemn the righteous for doing works of grace. Both of them respond with hatred to a message they've misjudged through deaf ears, blind eyes, a dead heart of unbelief. They misjudge and misinterpret a message because they are predisposed and precommitted to hating it.

Third reaction of a hard heart. A hard heart can be demonstrated by a cold indifference, turning away, ignoring. Many refuse to listen because they don't want the hassle of thinking. Don't make me think, look. Reading on the Internet. Those people make it so easy. Google, they, Facebook, it's so nice. So pleasant to look at. So many bells and whistles to attract my attention. And then I, I just have to read a little bit. Just a caption is all I really need to understand. Don't trouble me with deep thought. They're just well-satisfied with the simple things, well-satisfied with the headline, well-satisfied with the summary. The Cliffs Notes version, that's all I want.

They're satisfied with their religious position. They're too far gone in their religious, false religious understanding. They feel, sadly, feel a sense of self-assurance and peace. And so they don't want to think about these things any further. To do so is to disrupt their sense of assurance and peace. And they gather around them teachers who say, Peace, peace. There is no peace.

We might add a fourth reaction, generally, among those who are so involved in false religion that they actually make their living through it. Here's a fourth reaction. They react in hatred and hostility, and all you need to do is look at the scribes and the Pharisees. They've got a lot invested, a lot to gain, and very much to lose.

So considering the claims of Christ, engaging in self-examination, for anybody who's invested in false religion, that means the loss of money and power, and people and prestige. Or worse, just simply this, they might have to admit they're wrong. That's what makes Nicodemus so remarkable. He repented, he came

GRACE CHURCH

to Christ, along with Joseph of Arimathea. Incredible grace of God. When it's a religious pride, there's nothing more blinding. There's no condition more dire than that, a religious blindness. Grace Church, take note and beware.

So the reactions of resentment, hostility, indifference, hatred, those reactions demonstrate hard-hearted unbelief. Those reactions are a trampling underfoot by religious people. They're religiously devoted but hard-hearted. They do not know God at all. God warned Ezekiel about false religionists in his own day. Same variety of people about whom Jesus was speaking.

They exist in our day as well. Their orthodoxy is just a mask for their idolatry, and that's revealed in Ezekiel 33. "They come to you," God tells Ezekiel, "they come to you, Ezekiel, as people come. They sit before you as my people, they hear what, they hear what you say, but they will not do it." Ezekiel 33:31 and 32: "With lustful talk their mouths, in their mouths, they act, their heart is set on their gain, and behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a

beautiful voice, and plays well on an instrument. For they hear what you say, but they will not do it.”

You see that? They say one thing, they pretend to love the truth, but their hearts are revealed as hard because they will not obey and practice the truth. They're fully responsible, aren't they? Entirely culpable for that hard-heartedness calloused by a love of gain.

There's a chilling reality though, about the condition of the hard-hearted, and that's point three in your outline. We noted the divine condemnation of the hard-hearted, the religious condition of the hard heart. The condition is virtually incurable when you consider the involvement of satanic forces, which is point three: the devil's attention to a hard heart. The devil's attention to a hard heart.

Look again at verse 12. It says, the hard-hearted, “they are the ones along the path and they are those who have heard. And then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts.” Jesus hasn't been explicit about the connection, here,

but the devil and his demons are pictured by the birds of the air. They're like devouring birds that swoop down, land on that hard, impenetrable heart, and completely consume the seed that's sown. And when they're done, there's going to be nothing left of the word of God. Sown on that hardened, sunbaked, dry, hard-packed soil, nothing left.

Fascinating, that it is here with, with false religion, which inoculates the hearer with an impenetrable barrier of this hard heart, it's here that we find, we find here the involvement of spiritual forces. Jesus refers to this spiritual enemy of God's word in several ways. Matthew records him as the "evil one." Jesus calls him "the evil one" in Matthew 13:19. Mark records Jesus calling him by his name, Satan, Mark 4:15, and then he's here called the devil. And we need to realize, as Jesus makes very clear to us, that the enemy of God's word is not an impersonal temptation or an impersonal world system. The enemy is a personal devil, whose name is Satan, and who is characterized by evil.

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The devil despises the word of God, and that's why he has spread this false religion to mask the truth. He does not want any of the good seed going in through false religion, so he plucks it out, devours it, eats it. He hates the word of God. He is opposed to the original sower of the seed, Jesus Christ, all through his ministry with murderous intent.

The devil attempted to destroy Jesus at his birth, inspiring King Herod to kill all the babies in and around Bethlehem. The devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, attempting to thwart his messianic mission before it even began. The devil attempted to turn Jesus' own disciples against him, including Peter, influencing Peter to turn Jesus away from the cross. He was even successful in tempting Peter to abandon Christ in the hour of darkness. The devil, fully turned, Jud, Judas Iscariot through selfish ambition and greed, eventually inhabiting him personally.

All along the way, the Devil and his demonic hordes are always flocking around the religious leaders. Whenever you read in the text, scribes and Pharisees, think demons hovering over,

over them. You can hear their wings fluttering like bat wings over the scribes and the Pharisees. They hated Jesus. They wanted him dead.

In fact, turn over just quickly to John 8. John 8. I want to show you this. Such a powerful scene here as Jesus is preaching. Notice how Jesus identified in the scribes and the Pharisees and in the Jewish leaders, the satanic source of their ire and hatred against Jesus.

There in John 8:37 and following, he says, "I know that you are offspring of Abraham," that is, you're physical offspring of Abraham, verse 37 chapter 8 of John. "Yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my father. And you do what you have heard from your father." They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' So Jesus said to them, 'Oh no, no, no. If you were Abraham's children, you'd be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You're doing the works your father did.'

"They said to him, 'We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one father, even God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your father, you would love me. For I came from God and I am here. I came out of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth because there's no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Keep that in mind and go back to Luke 8:12. Consider how the devil and his demonic hosts are always hovering around the hard-hearted, and not just among the religious leaders, but among the common people, too. Could have had you turn there, but in John 10:19 to 20, you hear this insinuation of confusion and suspicion among the crowd, just coming out of the crowds. Why? Because they are listening to their father, the devil, about Jesus. Many of them said, "there was, there was a division among the Jews," John 10:19 and 20, "a division among the Jews because

of these words that Jesus spoke, and many of them said, 'He has a demon, he's insane. Why listen to him?'"

Are you serious? Come to that conclusion about Jesus' teaching? Insanity, really. It's not the words of a crazy man. That kind of demonic influence is always there to oppose, to raise questions, to stoke the embers of offense, to fan the flames of hostility, ultimately, to perpetuate hatred. Like hungry birds, demons are there to snatch any remnant of the word of God, lest that powerful word penetrate that hard soil.

Somewhat chilling to think about that, isn't it? The devil is so eager to look after the religious, to keep them religious, to keep them attending church, doing good things, listening to easy-sounding teaching. He looks after the religious, even those who self-identify and check on all the surveys, Protestant, Evangelical. If they have no interest in obeying the word of Christ, then they're numbered among the hard-hearted. The devil is always with them. He's always hovering around them. He's always attending to strengthening the protective barrier that they have in their hearts against the power of God's word.

One more point for today. The devil attends to the hard heart. He strengthens it, steels it against the truth. He imprisons souls within the walls of pride. He reinforces that by a distorted perception of religion that's satisfied with mere hearing and no doing. No submission to authority, no obedience to the truth. It's a clear indication of divine judgment as God hands the unbelieving over to the devil, and just that devil feeds the deceptive desires of a hard heart.

It's so tragic because of point four, point four, the Satanic intention for a hard heart. The Satanic intention for a hard heart. You think he intends good? The hard-hearted have no idea what Satan, the false shepherd of their souls, what he has in store for their future. He does not have a wonderful plan for their life. Look at verse 12. It's not just the result and consequence of a hard heart. It reveals to show us how God works out the judgment Jesus spoke of in verse 10. Jesus spoke parables to the hard-hearted in order that "seeing they may not see hearing they may not understand."

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In an act of hardening judgment, God hands the hard-hearted over to the murderous will of the devil, verse 12. "The ones along the path," those who've heard, "the devil comes, takes away the word from their hearts, so that," here's the purpose, "they may not believe and be saved." Pretty interesting, isn't it, how clearly and simply the devil sees all of this, how clearly and simply he sees the way to salvation.

The devil knows that receptivity to the word of God united with a believing heart is going to result in salvation. He sees that the power of God's word is unstoppable. The seed has its own power. He sees that the end of God's saving power is fruitfulness. It's irreversible. So he enters into the middle of that process. He disrupts it by snatching the seed, by preventing it from reaching the soil. That can only happen in a heart that is disinclined to believe, one that is unwilling to repent of sin, one that's unwilling to humble the self, one that is unwilling to trust in God.

Jesus said John 8:44, "The devil has been a murderer from the beginning." He is history's most successful mass murderer.

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He is still out there, still on his killing spree. The clearest indication of his handiwork is in the hard-hearted center, the religious person, listen folks, the evangelical, who worships but does so not in obedience to the truth. It's evident in a self-willed life, it's evident in one that's not in submission to the authority of God's word, God's people. It's pretty common in this very self-willed, independently minded age and country we live in.

Listen, Jesus' disciples desperately need to understand this lesson, to gain discernment about the kinds of people thronging around to see Jesus. And frankly, beloved, we all need to understand this lesson, to grow in discernment for ourselves as we examine ourselves for any signs of a hard heart.

But also, as we pursue Gospel ministry, we need to understand discernment. First of all, it's important for us, for ourselves, to grow in understanding of all this, to grow in discernment, to be on guard for ourselves, to make sure we're quick and regular and examining ourselves lest we prove to be hard-hearted and not true followers of Christ. We're going to

have a chance to do that in a few minutes as we come to the Lord's Table.

But secondly, we need to realize when we interact with others, especially the religious, the hard-hearted in the parable of the sower are religious people. They're people. They're churchgoers. They attend church. They're involved in so-called ministry, but when push comes to shove, they will always react against the truth. They will always react with either, either indifference or hostility against conviction and eventually turn away and walk away.

The more they come to understand the actual demands of Christ, the more they come to understand the true teaching of God's word, that Christ requires full absolute submission to his word and that means he demands complete obedience, he demands a lifelong service and worship, the hard-hearted turn away. They have all kinds of ways of turning away, but they turn away. They can't obey what Jesus says in Luke 9:23: "'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

So beloved, don't be fooled by church attendance. Look at your loved ones. Look at your coworkers, your friends, and don't be satisfied just because they go to a church. Ask questions. See if they react well to the conviction that comes from God's word. Don't be fooled by enthusiasm, eagerness, emotion, religious activity. Those are not certain signs of conversion. What matters is a transformed life, one that is demonstrating increasing growth of Spirit-produced fruit, which cannot be counterfeited. Only the Holy Spirit can produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control as defined by Scripture.

Those who claim to follow Christ, those who attend church even attend regularly, they may identify outwardly with the church and with Christians, but if they are at the same time proud and unteachable, if they are unwilling to serve Christ, if they're unwilling to obey God's word, no matter what they say, no matter what they profess, they are hard-hearted idolaters. That's just, that's under the just condemnation of God.

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As we close, let's listen to, consider a warning from J. C. Ryle. J. C. Ryle wrote about the influence of the devil, and he wrote about it where it's most uncomfortable to us, in the midst of our church. He writes and warns this, "The devil's influence, no doubt, is everywhere. That malicious spirit is unwearied in his efforts to do us harm. He is always watching for our halting and seeks any occasion to destroy our souls. But nowhere, perhaps, is the devil so active as in the congregation of Gospel hearers. Nowhere does he work so hard to stop the progress of what is good and to prevent men and women from being saved. From him come wandering thoughts, sleeping eyes, fidgety nerves, wearied eyes, and distracted attention.

"In all these things, Satan has a great hand. People wonder where they come from and marvel how it is they find sermons so dull and hardly remember them. They forget the parable of the sower. They forget the devil. Let us take heed that we are not wayside hearers. Let us beware of the devil." End quote.

Let us beware, indeed. As we enter into our time of fellowship and communion together with Christ around the Lord's

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

table, would you prepare your hearts and bow with me for a word of prayer?

Our God and our Father, we pray that by your Holy Spirit and with the interests of the great name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in mind, we ask that you would cast Satan from our midst, that you would keep him from pecking away the seed from any hard heart here. We pray that you would remove the rocky bedrock in any heart here with, that creates a shallow heart, one that seems eager at first and grows up quickly, but really has no root. We pray that you would destroy that barrier, that bedrock.

We, we pray that you would remove all thorns and all distractions and worries and cares and pleasures and ambitions, that you would remove all that from the soil of our hearts. We pray, Father, that you would work here even today, and work through our churches, preaching and influence and teaching and through the Brumleys in their ministry in Haiti.

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We pray that, for all Gospel-preaching churches, that you would work in and through us and that you would lead us to ones that have been prepared, ones that have been plowed up and are not fallow, hardened ground, ones that go deep with rich thorn-free soil, pure and unmixed. We pray that you'd lead us to those good hearts, and that many would be saved, you would sanctify many, that they would bear fruit for eternal life, reveal that they truly do belong to you.

I pray that for all those here that you would give us who belong to you, you'd give us a great assurance by your Holy Spirit that we do belong to you, that we are repentant of sin, humble, soft, teachable, willing to yield, that we're not the armchair critic. We're actually the productive doer here, we're the ones bearing fruit. Help us to have great assurance before you.

Help us to have a love and a joy in you and a gratitude that we have been saved, that our hearts are not hard, that our hearts are not shallow, that our hearts are not impure, mixed with distractions and cares and pleasures and worries. As we

GRACE CHURCH

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come before the table, heavenly Father, I pray that you help us to ask good questions of ourselves and that we would come as a congregation assembly in worship and praise of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose atonement has saved us, reconciling us to you. In Jesus' name, amen.