

THE SECRET OF SERVING THE LORD AS A SEED

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MESSAGE THREE: THE GROWTH OF THE SEED AND THE FOUR HEARTS IN MATTHEW 13

The Two Aspects of Being a Seed

There are two aspects to the secret of being a “seed” for an effective operation. On one hand, we ourselves are a “seed,” which means we are good for nothing but burial. The principle of being a seed is for us to be hidden, to be full of life, and to be ready to grow and bear fruit. This is to live the life of the Lord Jesus, who considered Himself as a seed (John 12:24). On the other hand, how do we become such a seed? We must realize that the Lord Himself is the seed within us, and we must give Him the proper way to grow. We all have the Lord’s seed abiding in us (1 John 3:9). We have all been regenerated with the living and abiding word of God, which is an incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23). Now that we have this seed within us, we need to learn how that seed can grow. The growth of the seed is a matter of having a proper heart.

The Four Kinds of Hearts

In Matthew 13:3-23 we have the parable of the sower. This portion of the word speaks of four kinds of hearts. We are all familiar with this parable. The Lord likened Himself to a sower who went out sowing seeds. Then the seeds landed on four different types of earth, representing four different kinds of hearts. But as we shall see, these hearts are actually related to one another. These four hearts can be summarized as follows: the heart with traffic (v. 4, 19); the heart with rocks (v. 5-6, 20-21); the heart with thorns (v. 7, 22); and the good heart which

bears fruit (v. 8, 23). Only the fourth and last heart gives the seed the proper growth.

We recognize that this parable shows four different kinds of hearts, but this parable shows more than that. It is actually about the growth of Christ in the heart. How do we know this? Because the thorns, which are from the third kind of heart, grow in the shallow ground, which is the second kind of heart. Thorns grow on dry, shallow places. Any soil that is rich and deep rarely has thorns. This indicates that these four kinds of hearts can be seen as progressive and related to one another. They can also be four possible conditions of the same heart.

The Definition of the Heart

First we must ask, “What is the heart?” We know that man has a body, soul, and spirit. Our spirit is made up of our conscience, intuition, and fellowship. Our soul is made up of our mind, emotion, and will. What, then, is our heart? Our heart is our soul regulated by our conscience. When a good conscience regulates a person’s soul, then he has a good heart. When a person does not have a good conscience to regulate his soul, then he has a bad heart. If we say that a certain man is evil, and has an evil heart, what does that mean? It means he has an evil conscience, and out of his evil conscience he has an evil living.

What is it to have a good heart? To have a good heart requires a good conscience, and a good conscience comes from the healthy experience of the human spirit. The experience of our spirit begins with the intuition. When we have a desire to be in the Lord’s presence, and the Lord moves within us, this is our intuition. In turn, this intuition generates fellowship, and we begin to fellowship more with the Lord. Then out of this fellowship we have a good conscience. When we have a good conscience, it means that we also have a good heart. Our conscience determines what kind of person we are. When we talk about the heart, we should realize that we are also talking about the conscience. A person who has a good heart is someone who has a good conscience operating within him.

The First Heart: The Heart with Traffic

The first heart in Matthew 13 is the heart with worldly traffic. The ground at the wayside is hardened by too much traffic, so that the seeds are not able to penetrate. This shows us that no matter how good our spirit is, no matter how good our conscience is, when too much traffic goes through us the seed does not have the place to grow properly. The growth of the seed in our heart is not just based on our desire to love the Lord and follow Him. It is based on our ability to handle the traffic. Traffic will always come. We should not decide to become a monk so that there is no more traffic in our lives. There is no traffic in a monastery, but there are no seeds either. In the church life, on the other hand, the seed is not only sown into us initially but keeps being sown into us through the constant speaking of the truth. However, for the seed to grow we need to properly handle the traffic in our heart. Many times when a lot of traffic goes through us we lose our ability to let the seed grow. We let all the things that we are doing become our priority. But we have also experienced being busy with a lot of things, yet we are still kept in the Lord's presence. This should be our normal experience. We should be able to let traffic go through us without being occupied and without being so anxious. When we let things occupy us, they can become a traffic to harden our heart. In the midst of all our activities we should tell the Lord, "Lord, keep my heart from being caught with these things, so that Your seed can grow." Then we will be saved from frustrations.

Our problem is that we know the Lord cares for us, but we care for ourselves more. This causes our heart to be like the wayside. Many things go through us, until we are so busy that eventually there is very little chance for the Lord to grow properly. We will always have things going through us. We will always have some traffic, but our heart should still be at peace. We must keep ourselves restful before the Lord. We should not get into anxiety, we should not get into excitement, and we should not be occupied with too many activities.

When we are so busy that we are overwhelmed then we must ask the Lord for a restful heart. “Lord, don’t let my heart be crowded with so much traffic that Your seed has no place to grow.” This is to deal with our heart. When our conscience is good and we do not let the traffic affect us so much, then our heart can become the good soil.

The Second Heart: The Heart with Rocks

The second heart is the rocky heart, which is related to the self-life. The first heart is hardened outwardly, but the second heart is hardened because of rocks which are hidden inwardly. A person may be pleasant and well-behaved outwardly, but inwardly he is untouchable. It is the untouchable person whose heart is rocky. For example, suppose a brother comes to the conclusion, “I don’t need to listen to any man. I don’t need to listen to the brothers in the church. I only answer to Christ!” This means that he is untouchable. When a person says, “I am responsible only to Christ,” it really means, “I only love myself.” Such a person has not realized that Christ is also with His Body. Christ is too far away for us to be responsible only to Him directly. Of course, we surely must answer to the Lord. We must abide in the Lord’s anointing, we must let the Lord lead us, and we must do everything in His presence. But at the same time we must realize that Christ is also in and with His Body. We should not say, “I can bypass the church. I can bypass the brothers. I am responsible only to Christ!” Then we will get ourselves into trouble. This means that we are untouchable. Our heart has become hard.

How does the heart become hard? It becomes hard when the self-life is offended. When the self-life is offended there is no more room for the Lord to grow. Yet the church life is always offending our self-life. The church life can be filled with offenses. When offenses are not dealt with and become an accumulation, it means that the heart has become rocky.

We need to remember what Peter said: “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

(Matt. 18:22). What does it mean for there to be “seven times”? It means that there is a rocky heart. Perhaps a brother offended Peter, but the first time he could handle it. His conscience was still good. But eventually after a second time, and a third time, and a fourth time Peter was filled with frustrations. Within Peter a rocky heart was produced. But when he went to the Lord, the Lord told him, “I do not say to you, Up to seven times, but, Up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:23). This word must have softened Peter’s heart. Otherwise, how could the Lord still use him? We must realize that when offenses accumulate, the heart becomes rocky. When there is a rocky heart, the seed cannot grow.

In the church life we must learn how to let go of our offenses. The saints will often offend us. Those we love will offend us, and those who love us will offend us. The ones we raise up will offend us, and the ones who raise us up will offend us. It is impossible for no one to offend us. If no one offends us, our church life is actually just a social life. The church life should be like a family. In a family, the husband offends his wife, the wife offends her husband, the parents offend their children, and the children offend their parents. But in a healthy family, there is always enough love to dissolve the offenses. In the church life, however, when the offenses build up over a long period of time, there may not be enough love to dissolve the offenses. This is why we must pray, “Lord, I don’t want my heart to be rocky. I need Your mercy, so that no matter what happens, offenses do not accumulate within me.”

The moment we begin to consider a brother or sister who offended us, a little rock begins to grow in our heart. It may be small, but it still frustrates the growth of the Lord and the growth of the truth within us. We must realize that the reason we are offended is because we love ourselves. Not only do we love ourselves, but we insist on our self-life. This means that we insist on our way.

When we love ourselves, and we insist on our way, then that is when the rocks begin to come in. This is why some brothers are filled with bitterness, complaints, murmurings, and offenses. How can this happen? It happens when we cannot forgive the offenses, when we love our self-life, and when we insist on our

way. If this is the case, then eventually nothing can grow. Because all our love is utilized for ourselves, there is no more love to dissolve the offenses. When all our love is focused only on ourselves, then there is no more room for the Lord to grow within us. We must ask the Lord to keep our heart soft, so that the seed can grow.

The Third Heart: The Heart with Thorns

In the second heart, the heart with the rocky places, it is difficult for the seed to grow. However, it is very easy for thorns to grow. Thorns need very little dirt to grow in. We have just seen that when we love ourselves too much we can have a rocky heart with shallow ground. That shallow ground can then become the next kind of heart, which is like a field filled with thorns. What are the thorns? Thorns signify a curse, because they grew after God cursed the ground (Gen. 3:17-18). The third kind of heart is one that is preoccupied with all kinds of curses. Then the Lord told us specifically that the thorns signify the anxiety of this age and the deceitfulness of riches (Matt. 13:22). This means that everything we like, and everything we pursue, can actually become a curse to us. Thorns grow very fast, and choke whatever is healthy. Thorns are alive, but their life is a cursed life. When thorns grow in our heart it means that we are preoccupied with all kinds of curses.

What determines whether something is a curse or not? It is based on whether we know how to put it aside. A car, for example, is not a curse by itself. The Lord can provide us with a car as a blessing. But when we struggle for a car and become preoccupied with it, then it becomes a curse. Whatever we are preoccupied with becomes a curse to us. We do need certain things in our human life. First we need a family. Then we need a house. We need a car. We need a career. We need a bank account. All of these are normal. For any human being, these are normal. We should have these things and enjoy them. But when we are preoccupied with them, they become a curse. For example, we don't need to fight for a house. God will provide us

with one. To live in a house is normal, because we need a place to stay. But when we struggle for a house, then it becomes a preoccupying curse.

A person who is preoccupied cannot grow properly before the Lord. We must realize that the Christian life is a life joined to Christ. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). Our life is a life in the spirit. The Lord leads us, strengthens us, comforts us, and stands with us in our spirit. In our spirit, there is a restfulness, there is a peacefulness, and there is joy. So in our spirit we should be restful before the Lord. We do not need to be preoccupied. When we are restful in the Lord, then the thorns will not grow, because we will not be preoccupied with anything.

Thorns have a form of life. They may even be green, which is a color of life. They may seem quite harmless. But when the thorns grow in a field they quickly choke whatever is growing nearby. Everything that should grow cannot grow because the thorns are there. It is significant that the thorns are often green. This should scare us. The thorns have life. Many times brothers feel defensive when they want something in the world. They say, “This is just the normal human life. What’s wrong with it?” What they are seeking for may be normal, but if they are preoccupied with it, it has become thorns to them. It has become something living to choke what is good in them. Anything which becomes a preoccupation, no matter how normal it seems, will choke the normal process of growth.

The Anxiety of the Age and the Deceitfulness of Riches

The thorns signify two things: the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches. The anxiety of the age refers to things which are legal and which we need to survive. Even legal things become thorns when they preoccupy us. This is why the Lord told us not to be anxious over such matters as food and clothing (Matt. 6:31). He knows our needs and will take care of us. After the legal things, there is something further. This is called the deceitfulness of riches. After we have what we need, we often want something better. The Lord provided us a house, but we

want a better house. The Lord provided us a car, but we want a better car. We think that this is normal, but it is actually very deceitful. These riches themselves are deceitful. They are like thorns which are living and waiting to choke the healthy growth. Everything that we seek after is trying to cheat us, but for some reason we think that it is normal. "I should live in a certain kind of house. I should drive in a certain kind of car." These are all deceitful. If the Lord provides us something, we should take it. If we have the leading of the Lord to purchase something, we should buy it. But if we say, "That's it! That's what I want!" then that becomes the deceitfulness of riches.

The third kind of heart, the ground with thorns, is made up of two items. First there is the anxiety of this age. This age makes us anxious for too many things, including many needs which are legitimate. Everyone on this earth must handle the necessities for their living. This produces the anxiety of the age. We should handle this anxiety by trusting in the Lord and His provision, and by being restful concerning all our needs. Then secondly, even after our needs are fulfilled, there is the deceitfulness of riches. Riches come in to deceive us. None of us can bypass this. Everyone on this earth desires to upgrade the quality of their living. So we must learn to be before the Lord. "I have Christ. I walk with Christ, and I enjoy the Lord's presence. Wherever I am, and whatever I have, I am totally satisfied." Such an exercise before the Lord will deal with all the thorns. This will cause us to have the fourth kind of heart, the good earth.

Responding to the First Three Kinds of Hearts

Before we come to the good earth, we must remember how to respond to the first three conditions of the heart. We should learn not to let our heart be hardened by a lot of traffic. To keep our heart from being rocky and shallow, we should not love ourselves, insist on our self-life, nor allow offenses to accumulate. To deal with the thorns, which are preoccupying curses, we should be satisfied with Christ and His provision for us. The rocks are inward, and the thorns are outward. The rocks

within us prevent the Lord from having room to grow. The thorns outside of us bring us into anxiety or deceitfulness and choke the healthy growth. So there are three kinds of hearts: those with traffic, those with rocks, and those with thorns. These three kinds of hearts all apply to us. We must be before the Lord about each condition within us.

The Fourth Heart: The Good Earth

Eventually the Lord tells us that there is a fourth kind of heart, which is the good earth. “But the one sown on the good earth, this is he who hears the word and understands, who by all means bears fruit and produces, one a hundred-fold, and one sixty-fold, and one thirty-fold” (Matt. 13:23). We might ask ourselves, is the fourth kind of heart born this way? Is the good earth born the good earth? The answer is that every human being is born with the same kind of heart in which many negative things can grow and take place. This is true of everyone. There is no exception. Everyone’s heart by nature can become like the first three hearts. So then, whose heart is the good earth? Even among us who love the Lord so much, do we feel that we already have a good heart? Isn’t there traffic going through us all the time, causing our heart to become hard? While we are so desirous to love the Lord, aren’t there many rocks within us, and aren’t these sometimes very large? Aren’t we anxious about so many things? Not one of us can say, “Praise the Lord, with me there is no traffic, rocks, or thorns. Within me the Lord is totally free to grow.”

For example, none of us has a heart without any rocks. The only difference is that some of us may have a lot of rocks, and some may have only a little. But when any of us hear a word that is not in our favor, we get offended. Every one of us is selfish. We are always looking after our own interests and insisting on our own way. This is why our hearts are rocky. Furthermore, everyone in this world is under the curse. The thorns came because of God’s curse after man fell. Everyone lives under God’s curse. Who can say that in his life he is out of God’s curse

already? That is impossible until at least the age of the millennium. Eventually we have to admit that now we live in an age of impossibility. Who can say that there is no traffic? Who can say their heart has no rocks? Who can say that the outside world has no effect on their existence? Who can say, “Praise the Lord, I have a good heart! My heart is just the good earth!” No one can. Basically we must come to the conclusion that there is no good earth. Not one of us has a good heart. In the end, it seems that we are all hopeless.

Yet the Lord did say that there is a condition of the heart which He called the good earth. The way He described it was in verse twenty-three, which we will quote again: “But the one sown on the good earth, this is he who hears the word and understands, who by all means bears fruit and produces, one a hundred-fold, and one sixty-fold, and one thirty-fold.” The Lord not only said that there is the good earth, but He showed us the process it goes through. In this verse there is also the hearing of the word and the understanding of the word. To understand here means to grasp. First we hear the word, and then we understand it. We are able to grasp the word’s meaning. Then out of this, by all means, we will bear fruit and produce something. The Lord used the words “by all means.” What does this mean? It means to make an effort, to pay the price.

The Good Earth: A Heart Ready to be Plowed

How does this apply to us? We need to simply tell the Lord, “Lord, I may have a heart with traffic. I may have a rocky heart. I may have a thorny heart. But Lord, I will pay any price so that my heart can be the good earth. Lord, I am ready. I am willing.” The good earth is a heart that is rich and moist. It is a heart that has the readiness to bear fruit. What does this mean practically? This means that the heart is ready to be plowed. If we want the fruit to come out of us, our heart must be ready to be plowed. There is a verse in the Psalms, “the plowers plowed upon my back” (Psa. 129:3). This means that when God works with us, and deals with our person, He is actually plowing us. To plow is

to take away all the frustrations which can hinder the growth of the seed. To be plowed is to be purged of stones and thorns. God has a way to purge us out. When we have a lot of stones in our heart, then God will come in to plow. He will allow some environment to come. He will arrange some situations. He will work out some experiences just to purge the rocks within us. If we want to be the good earth, and our heart is truly ready, it means that we are telling the Lord, "I am ready for you to plow."

It is easy for God to come in and plow when our heart is ready. He will take away whatever the obstacles are which frustrate the growth of the seed. When we have too much traffic and our heart has become hard, then God will soften it. When we have rocks within us which make our heart too shallow, then God will purge them out. When we have thorns outside of us which are choking our growth, then God will clear the ground. He will plow us and purge us. He will take care of our heart, and make it the good earth.

No heart is automatically ready for the seeds to grow. We should not take this parable in a doctrinal way. We should not think that there are four kinds of hearts, and ask, "Which kind of heart do I have?" All of us have the first three hearts. We have a heart of traffic, a heart of rocks, and a heart of thorns. But we may not have the fourth heart, the good earth. So we must tell the Lord, "I know I have the first three hearts, and Lord, I'm not the good earth. So Lord, have mercy! I give myself to You. By all means, do whatever You want to do in me. I consecrate myself to You. You can plow me. You can purge me. You can do whatever You must do. You can arrange all the environments, arrange all the situations, give me all the leadings, and do all the things within me so that my heart can be a place for You to grow." Then our heart can become the good earth.

The good earth is not what we think. It's not that our heart just spontaneously becomes the good earth. Every person has the characteristics of the first three hearts, but no person naturally has the last one. No one has a good heart. A good heart means a tender heart. Again, this comes from telling the Lord, "I give You the freedom. By all means, I endeavor to work with You. Whatever You desire, I will cooperate. I have no murmuring, no blaming, and no complaining. I will not exercise self-effort. I

will just submit myself to You. Lord, by all means, do something within me. I will pay the price to become fruitful.” Only this kind of person can become the good earth for the seeds to grow.

Bearing Fruit to Meet the Needs of God and Man

We should also remember that when the seeds grow and bear fruit, they produce a hundred-fold, sixty-fold, and thirty-fold. These numbers are significant. To produce thirty-fold is to meet God’s need, because three is the number of God. To produce sixty-fold is to meet man’s need, because six is the number of man. And to produce a hundred-fold is to meet both God and man’s need, because ten is a number of fullness. That is why the good earth is so valuable.

When our heart is the good earth, it will bear fruit thirty-fold to meet God’s need, sixty-fold to meet man’s need, and a hundred-fold to meet God’s and man’s need in a full way. Eventually our existence becomes so precious and so valuable to the Lord in His economy.

When we consider these four hearts, we must tell the Lord, “Lord, I am hopeless, but I am also thankful. I can completely give myself to You, so that You may by all means be able to work with me. I would like to be the good earth for the seed within me to grow. I pray that I can become a blessing to Your economy. I pray that I can bear fruit to meet Your need and the need of mankind.” How wonderful this is! May the Lord have mercy on us, that we would allow Him to make our heart into the good earth.

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