

“The Parable of the Sower,” Sam Ferguson, June 14, 2020.

Key texts | Matt. 13:1-17
Isa. 6:9-10

He who has ears, let him hear.

Sermon Outline & Questions.

Opening thoughts—

At Gordon Conwell Sam had a professor named Dr. Stewart. One day, Dr. Stewart was teaching on a recurring biblical theme: People have ears, but they don't *really* understand or perceive.

Jeremiah 5:21 | “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear.”

Dr. Stewart suddenly paused and said, “Let me tell you something I hope you don't forget. In life you can be sincere *and* wrong at the same time.”

In our culture, we believe that sincerity, authenticity, and passion make something correct. But it's possible to be all these things and wrong.

The parable of sower asks: Do we truly understand how to interpret ourselves, the world, and God?

Sermon Focus | *The Parable of the Sower*

Background—

This is a parable about parables. Jesus uses it to illustrate why he's using parables. His point is that parables involve hearing and *truly* understanding.

The parable involves a farmer sowing liberally and then plowing. This means a lot of seed was lost.

vv. 9-10: The disciples ask Jesus, “Why parables?”

v. 13: “I speak in parables because in seeing they don't see, and in hearing they don't hear or understand.” (He references Isaiah 6:9-10.)

Two things to learn from this:

1) Jesus' explanation is based on the parable of sower. It is a comment on the human condition. Although some hear Jesus' words, they are unable to comprehend.

Jesus asks us to focus on the **soil**. There are four soils that correspond to different types of hearing.

2) Jesus references Isaiah to make his point in the parable: you will hear but never understand, and you will see but never perceive. You have dull hearts and closed eyes.

Key question—

“Why do we hear but don't understand. Why is it that when seed is sowed, most soil won't take it?”

1) 'Knowing' is no simple matter. 75% of the soil does not take seed.

This is a hard truth. Have you ever felt like some of the soil (the 75%) that doesn't receive the word? What was your response?

What type of 'knowing' are we talking about?

Jesus is talking about knowing foundational truths about the Kingdom of God and reality at its deepest level. Not merely knowing facts, but knowing that we are made by God, and we owe him our allegiance, and that we make sense of the world by following Jesus.

These deep truths confront us and supplant our current stories and perspectives.

Example: Jesus' first listeners.

Jesus' first listeners had their own story about the messiah, who was to quickly and powerfully usher in a geopolitical kingdom. The Kingdom of God is different. It starts out small. It must have seemed pathetic/unexciting to Jesus' listeners.

In God's Kingdom, average people lead. The Messiah is an average guy from Nazareth (Matt. 13:55).

Jesus' listeners had to allow their story to *collapse*, trusting that Jesus alone can bear the weight of their broken hearts.

Accepting foundational truths is psychologically and socially painful. Jesus sows truth that turns our lives upside down

What stories of yours have 'collapsed' as a result following Jesus and his story? Are you living any stories that need to 'collapse'?

2) What does it mean to hear rightly? Three aspects of right understanding:

a) **Perspective is crucial for understanding, but only God's will do.**

vv: 10-16 shed light on how to understand rightly.

Consider the story of the three students and the man at the bus stop. Each student witnessed the same facts, but each had her own perspective of the man's problem (theological, political, psychological).

Jesus says in order to rightly perceive we must have the correct perspective.

v. 11: We must hear through "the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven" → then we have an awareness of God's kingdom and ways.

This is not merely intellectual awareness. We must embrace and receive Jesus' teachings. A person must be immersed in the reality of the Kingdom of God to rightly interpret reality.

What does it look like to have solely an intellectual awareness of Jesus' perspective?

b) The heart ultimately rules the head

v. 14: You will indeed hear never understand

v: 15 gives reason for v. 14 → “Your hearts have grown dull.”

Dull (fat) hearts are fixed on themselves.

The heart is the most important organ for comprehension. What we love influences what we understand.

Consider the story of Israel and the golden calf. The people grew impatient and made themselves an idol. Throughout the OT, God mockingly says “so you made god with your hands, but it can’t see or hear!” → Israel had become what it loved.

What we love has a profound influence on how we understand the world and ourselves.

Questions to ask ourselves—

Is there something that you’re loving that is also making your heart dull to understand?

Any narrative apart from God’s creates a ceiling for understanding God. What narrative is holding your life together?

Our minds will not accept something the heart cannot handle.

c) Knowledge is a gift from god

At several junctures in his life, Augustine held views with total sincerity that were wrong. He realized he needed something outside himself.

Peter Brown on Augustine: “He came to regard his intellectual activities as dependent on currents beyond his control; he needed a guiding principle to direct the onrush of his thoughts.”

We must be humble, desperately in need of God’s help.

What might this look like in light of NT passages, such as Paul’s exhortation to “pray without ceasing”?

Concluding thoughts—

If there was ever a time to hear and understand, it’s now. The volume is up; the stakes are high.

Most people agree that racial injustice is morally detestable, but people have different opinions on solutions and responses. Others are driven by agendas.

We must hear and understand what Jesus of Nazareth has to say. In doing so, we must resist relying on the perspectives of ideological groups. We must beg Jesus to help us understand.

Three ways we need the perspective of the Kingdom of God:

- a) The church needs to see its whole story so it can be holy. The church is not reborn every year. Rather, it is a 2,000-year-old organism.

Consider Israel, which had to continually revisit its story—the ups and the downs. It had to reckon with its sins.

Likewise, the church is an organic body, and Jesus asks it, “Do you see who you are? Do you see your part in a 400-year story of slavery?”

Jesus does not want to crush us or the church with guilt. Rather, he offers the balm of Gilead. Only in Jesus is there healing and reconciliation.

What does it look like for a church body to revisit and reckon with its past? How can a church body do this actively and prayerfully?

- b) The church must recognize that when it sees hurt and pain, it runs to it and takes responsibility, because Jesus took ultimate responsibility for us.

When we see wounds we say, “Send me.”

- c) The church must always envision God’s future, not that of a country or political party.

Jesus came to bring reconciliation. If we give ourselves to him, he’ll use us to bring healing. True reconciliation only comes through Jesus getting in between.

How does this differ from what the world tells us (i.e., neighbors, media, corporations, etc.)?

Additional Questions:

What might Christ be saying to you through this passage, sermon, discussion?

How might you live differently in light of this passage and sermon?