

# **The Parable of the Sower**

The State of the Heart & How God deals with it

## **1. Understanding the state of the heart through the Parable of the Sower**

The Parable of the Sower:

*‘Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty’ (Matthew 13: 18 – 23).*

We read the same parable in Luke 8.

In verse 15, we read:

*‘But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience’ (Luke 8: 15).*

- **The good ground**

The first point that I want to highlight is that the fruit that the land bears which can be hundredfold, sixty, or thirty is related only to the good land not to any other kind of land.

We read that those who have this type of land are those who keep the word of the Kingdom which they heard. Their heart is good, and they have patience.

The level of patience and the degree of keeping the word differs from one person to the other; and so, the fruit can be hundredfold, sixty, or thirty, accordingly.

Let us look at the other kinds of land:

- **There is a type of land which has thorns.**

These are people who gave a chance to the cares, riches, and pleasures of the world to enter in. Their heart was divided; therefore, the word was choked.

Their responsibility lies in their divided heart! They want God but they also want the world; part of their heart is preoccupied with God's matters and the other part is preoccupied with the cares of the world.

This clarifies to us the significance of being set apart for the Lord. It means that one should separate himself from the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches.

- **There is also the stony ground.**

This indicates that part of the heart became hardened like stone.

Those people were given an opportunity to hear the word. They rejoiced in it and were enthusiastic about it; yet, the following day, they forgot it: *'they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness'*. Yet, *'they have no root in themselves'*. This means that they do not allow the word to be deeply rooted and established in them.

Therefore, when this person faces any difficulty or tribulation, he does not find anything firm or deeply rooted and established in him; and so, he feels unable to walk in that path.

God would then give him other opportunities; yet, the same thing would happen on and on where the person starts by being enthusiastic; yet, when the tribulation comes, he says that he cannot bear this path.

His heart becomes hardened because of this fluctuation and lack of steadfastness.

- **The wayside**

There is another type of land where one listens to the word; yet, he does not understand it; and so, Satan takes it away from him.

In the gospel of Luke, this type of land is described as follows:

*‘Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved (Luke 8: 12).*

Here, we see the description of someone who kept his heart open upon the world, like a wayside. He did not have any walls around his heart. He speaks and deals with the world without any reservations, though he knows God and has heard His word.

Therefore, Satan finds an open door since this heart is totally exposed like a wayside; and so, whenever the word is sown, the enemy takes it away.

*It is therefore clear through all these types of lands that what happens is the responsibility of the person himself.*

## **2. Understanding the person's responsibility regarding the state of his heart:**

*The responsibility of the person regarding the state of the heart is confirmed and clarified more through the introduction which Jesus mentioned before saying this parable.*

Let us read this part in Matthew 13:

The ministry of Jesus followed a certain pattern for two years. Then, in the third year of His ministry, He changed His approach and started to use parables. So, the disciples asked Him why He started to speak in parables:

*'And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"'* (Matthew 13: 10).

Jesus answered them saying:

*'He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables"'* (Matthew 13: 11 – 13).

Then, Jesus started to quote from Isaiah the prophet, saying:

*'Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them"'* (Matthew 13: 13 – 15).

It is clear here that Jesus was saying that these people heard a lot.

They hear; but, they pretend that they have not heard because they do not want to listen and understand. If they understand, they will be convicted; and so, they will repent and be saved.

They see; but, they pretend as if they have not seen; they close their eyes lest they should see. This means that the scenes are before them, but they consider themselves to have not seen.

We sometimes do similar things.

Here, there is a danger that God wants to warn us off as well.

***What is this danger?***

*When the person is given opportunities, one after the other; yet, one does not respond to them appropriately, the heart becomes dull and its sensitivity weakens.*

For example, some years ago, when we heard a spiritual message, our heart used to respond fervently and with tears of repentance. Five years later, this fervent response became less fervent. Ten years later, it decreased even more and became much less. And now, we hear the message and say: *'Oh, yes, I know all this; but, I am waiting upon the Lord to help me. What can I do? I tried. I will keep trying.'*

This happens because the heart has lost its sensitivity!

***In order to understand this matter more and know the reason behind all this, let us go back to the prophecy of Isaiah, in Isaiah 6, which Jesus quoted.***

Isaiah went into the temple and as you know the coal touched his lips and purified him; and then, we read:

*‘Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” (Isaiah 6: 8).*

God sent Isaiah and then He told him what his ministry or mission would be. We often take the first part about: *‘here am I; send me’*; but we do not pay much attention to the mission itself. In fact, Isaiah’s mission was so difficult. God told him his mission, as follows:

*And He said, “Go, and tell 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 shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6: 9, 10).*

### **3. How does God deal with the heart? Understanding the biblical principle:**

*Here, we understand one of God’s ways in His economy of salvation, showing how God deals with the human heart.*

God gives the human heart numerous opportunities and when He finds that the heart of the person has reached a point where he started to despise the grace and to care less about what is offered to him, like Esau, God starts to do a clear, specific, and important thing.

#### **In the book of Isaiah:**

God proclaims a *temporary judgement* on this heart.

He told Isaiah to go and harden this heart; shut their eyes; and make their ears heavy because they will not respond anymore. In other words, God told him to proclaim a judgement over them.

There will, of course, be consequences for that – because this person has cut himself off the paths of God’s salvation. A person is responsible for the area

where he lives; therefore, if a judgement is proclaimed over this person's heart, this will certainly have consequences in the area where he lives so that he would start to become aware.

In fact, he would be totally unaware of his state at that point. The closing of his heart made no difference for him because from the start he was not responsive to God's dealings with him.

Isaiah then told the Lord:

*"Lord, how long?"* (Isaiah 6: 11).

In other words, if I will make this declaration of judgement, how long will this last for?

The Lord replied saying:

*'Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land'* (Isaiah 6: 11, 12).

Will the person remain unaware, not sensing anything after all this; or, will he start to be aware?

Everything will be destroyed around him; and so, he will surely wonder what is happening. He will start to sense and be aware and wonder.

Actually, this will be the harvest of what has been happening before.

Isaiah then asked the Lord for how long should this continue:

*'But yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump'* (Isaiah 6: 13).

God told Isaiah that this should continue because if He lifts up the judgement at that point, the people will go back to the same state because their heart had been hardened so much. God had been patient with them for a long time and they had used up all their chances.

Isaiah was shocked and he asked the Lord what would that mean and if this meant that Israel would end!

God told him: 'No, this will not be the end of Israel. There will be a stump which will remain. When the scene is cleansed, I will let this stump grow and become a new plant.'

This is actually a biblical principle.

Before I explain how this principle was fulfilled in history, I want to mention other references to the hardened heart in the bible.

Other examples of the hardened heart in the Scriptures:

### **In the book of Exodus:**

This was when the strikes on Egypt started and they were meant so that Pharaoh would respond to them. The strikes are mentioned in Exodus 7 – 11. When we read these chapters, we notice that Moses would bring about the strike that God told him about; and then, the bible would mention the phrase: *'Pharaoh hardened his heart'*.

Then, another strike would come and Pharaoh would say that he had changed his heart and would ask Moses to pray that God would lift up the strike. The strike would thus be lifted up. Yet, the bible would tell us that Pharaoh hardened his heart again.

Towards the end of the strikes, we notice that the bible says that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is different. At the beginning, God gave Pharaoh

one chance after the other. But when Pharaoh insisted on hardening his heart, God put upon him the judgement of a hardened heart, a heart that does not respond.

**Similarly, the parable in Luke 13, highlights the same point:**

*‘He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down’ (Luke 13: 6 – 9).*

Three years indicate that the person was given a full and complete opportunity. [Number three, in the bible, means complete.]

The person was given the full opportunity; yet, he did not respond. Therefore, he was told that this was enough because why would the use of the ground be hindered and delayed: *‘Why does it use up the ground?’*

If we connect this with other passages in the books of Moses and the prophets and also the epistle to the Romans, we will understand that the ground cries and groans before the Lord seeking Him to lift up this burden.

Paul mentioned that the ground and creation groan<sup>1</sup>. This indicates that the ground and the whole creation converse with God. It is astonishing that the whole creation knows its role; but, man does not! The ground knows that its role is to bring fruit to mankind. We all know that when any seed is sown in the ground, the ground has a role in this process of its growth. That is why they fertilise the soil. The sun also has a role. The water has a role, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8: 22

Thus, the ground is here groaning and telling the Lord that it is delayed because it wants to bring forth fruit; yet, the tree is not responding. It is asking God to remove this tree and plant another one.

In this parable, we see the divine intercession for the tree to be given an additional chance.

This biblical principle is mentioned in several books of Scripture and it has its application.

- **Understanding the application of this biblical principle through an example from the Scriptures.**

Let us look at the application of this principle:

### **With the children of Israel**

God made the children of Israel enter the Land of Promise through many miracles that He made with them. They were supposed to declare Him to the nations around them, as part of the Covenant that God made with them (mentioned in Exodus 19).

Yet, they did the opposite of that; and so, God sent them the prophets. They did not listen to the prophets; but, they stoned them and killed them. God sent them one prophet after the other and gave them one opportunity after the other until they used up all their chances; and there were no more chances left. Then, the bible says that the land started to expel them; and they actually went into captivity<sup>2</sup>.

When the judgement is declared, it has to reach its fullness. In their case, it was seventy years<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Into Assyria & Babylon (2 Kings: 17:7 – 23)

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:2

The books of Leviticus, Jeremiah, and Daniel clarify to us why the years of captivity had to be seventy years, according to God's calculations<sup>4</sup>.

It was not just a random choice of the number of years of the judgement; but, God explained to them the things that they had broken and which amounted to these seventy years that they had to live outside their land.

The land had to enjoy its neglected Sabbath years, as we read in Leviticus 26.

The people had broken the commandment of keeping the Sabbath, where the land had to rest every week on the Sabbath, on the 7th year, and on the 50th year.

This made the land as though crying out. Therefore, the years - during which they had broken the commandment related to the land and did not give the land the rest that was due to it - had to be calculated and the land had to rest for this length of time in order to restore the rest that was not given to it.

When these broken Sabbaths were calculated over the number of years the people had broken this commandment, this amounted to 70 years. Thus, God was not randomly punishing the people and allowing them to be taken into captivity for 70 years in a random way; but, these years were calculated in a righteous way.

On the other hand, the people themselves needed this time so that their hearts would start to shake off all the iniquities of their fathers. Therefore, these years were a restoration for the people themselves as well.

This point is also relevant and related to understanding the concept of completing our repentance. Repentance starts at a certain point; and at that point, the sin is forgiven; however, the effects and results of sin require time to

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<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 26: 40 – 45.

be dealt with so that the person would become free from any effects that result from this sin.

Sin causes the land of our life to have thorns and thistles. These years are a time for purifying the land from the thorns and thistles.

Because God is merciful, He told the people that after they complete these years of judgement, He will give them another chance. This actually happened and God brought them back to their land after their time of captivity.

When this purification had happened, the people would return to the land and they themselves would be freed and cleansed from any effects and results of sin. They would be redeemed and their land also would be redeemed. Through this process, they could start the new phase.

This new stage was the stage of the preparation for the coming of the Messiah. And in fact, after the people returned from captivity, it is true that they committed other sins; yet, they never went back to worshipping idols. This was the stage of returning from captivity and the preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

### **Other examples from history**

Those of you who know history would know that Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Roman(Byzantine) Empire and there were many great and wondrous divine work and dealings in it.

History also tells us that before Constantinople fell and was taken by the Turks, the spiritual state of the people was at its worst and the spiritual shepherds and leaders were in a lamentable state.

For example, it was found out that one of the bishops owned 13 different watches and many service garments woven with golden. They lived in great earthly luxury and their spiritual life was very poor.

God sent them several warnings; yet, they did not care or take heed.

Finally, the Turks invaded them and humiliated them. The stories of history show the savage treatment and persecution that the Turks showed to Christians.

The same story happened in Russia. Russia used to have deep spirituality; yet, the same thing we mentioned above started to happen with the leaders of the church; then, the congregation was affected; and finally the spirituality was replaced by a worldly life. At that time, they also connected with the enlightenment movement in Europe.

Some of the Czar(Russian emperor), who were supposed to be Christians, were the ones who started to close monasteries saying that there was no need for monks; and even some of them took serious measures against the church.

It was a judgement.

This finally ended with Communism which also humiliated and persecuted Christians in a very harsh way. You may know what happened in Russia during the time of Communism. All the monasteries were destroyed, and the churches were closed and were turned into museums.

This situation continued for a number of years because they had to complete their time of judgement.

Will it be our turn next? And, when?

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