

The condition of our hearts – The hard heart

When Sir Walter Raleigh was led to the block, his executioner asked him if his head lay right. Raleigh answered, "It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, provided the heart is right." Here in the presence of God, here before him through whom are revealed the secrets of all hearts, here before the Cross of mercy and of love, what does your heart speak, how does your heart lie?

Matthew 13: 1 – 8; 18 – 23

1) A given opportunity

- The farmer scatters his seed widely, even on hard ground.
- God is merciful and affords all the opportunity to receive his Word.
- However, hard ground isn't the focus of the sower. The path, or wayside, could be the road running next to the field or the path that the farmer himself has trod, and the seeds happen to fall on them unintentionally.
 - Many times we visit someone to share the Gospel with them and someone else, who we weren't expecting to be there, is also visiting them at that time and hears the Gospel.
 - That is the grace of God towards that person.
 - Nothing takes God by surprise.
- God is an all-knowing God who does not look at the outside, but knows the heart of each person.
 - 1 Samuel 16: 7 The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.
 - Jeremiah 17: 10 I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.
- We are so often quick to judge people as been heard hearted and callous, when they may have other issues that they're dealing with as to why they don't accept the Gospel, at least openly.
- Have we considered that when some people turn in repentance to follow Christ that they may:
 - Be ostracised by their family, and possibly even killed.
 - Lose everything that they have, including their families and jobs.
 - Not have an understanding of the Gospel or their need of repentance, due to a completely different worldview.
- Not knowing the background of the person who is perceived to be hard hearted we ought to refrain from judging the person, but rather seek to understand the way they perceive their position before God.
 - We should afford every person the same opportunity to hear the Gospel.
 - Sometimes people are resistant because of their own personal struggles in life and can't see how the Gospel is relevant to them.
- When we talk about a hard heart we immediately think of the resistant homosexual, or Muslim, Hindu, atheist, mocker or a criminal or other wicked person. However, hardness of heart is also often prevalent in the church.
 - Every time we hear the word of God and reject it in our own lives and live contrary to what it says we are hardening our hearts to it.

2) Causes of hardness of heart

- The deceitfulness of sin
 - Romans 1: 24 – 27 God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.
 - We crave sin more than we crave to please God.
 - God gives people over to their sin to be consumed by it when their hearts have become hard.
- Stubbornness and lack of repentance
 - Romans 2: 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.
- Self-centredness and a lack of sensitivity to others
 - James 2: 15 – 16 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?
- A lack of understanding
 - Matthew 13: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
 - Luke 8: 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

3) Lost seed

- A hard heart means lost seed.
- Lost seed means no faith as faith comes by hearing the word of God. Romans 10: 17
- No faith means that it's impossible for us to please God.
 - Hebrews 11: 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
- At times God hardens hearts to serve his purposes as with Pharaoh
 - Exodus 9: 12 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.
- However, God gives us a choice not to harden our hearts
 - Hebrews 3: 12 – 15 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."