

What kind of hearer are you?

I'm very thankful for hearing tests. Have any of you had a hearing test before? Some of you have hearing aids – so I know you have. I had my first hearing test when I was 4 during my preschool screening. A nurse put these earmuffs on me, and they would beep – high tones and low tones, one ear then the other – and I was supposed to raise my hand when I heard a beep.

I'm very thankful for hearing tests. Because here's the thing – hearing usually gets bad over time, and so you can be losing your hearing without even realizing it. And that's what was happening to me at age 4. I had had multiple ear infections that left fluid in my ears, and I was losing my hearing. Thankfully, that nurse caught the problem in time for me to get treatment.

This morning, Jesus gives us a hearing test of our own. Not how well we can hear sounds – he wants us to examine how we are hearing his word. Because believers can start to develop hearing problems over time without even realizing it – not problems with God's Word entering our ears, but with what happens next in our hearts – problems that can even lead us to lose our relationship with God.

That's why Jesus tells us a story that helps us test our hearing. He takes us to a field and shows us a farmer sowing seed on the ground – but it's really a story about how God sows his saving word on human ears and in human hearts. And with four different types of soil, he illustrates four different hearers of God's Word.

And the question he wants us to ask is: Which one am I? What kind of hearer are you?

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear."

¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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 his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who

received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it (accept it – Mark). He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Can you picture the scene in your mind’s eye? In Jesus’ day, farmers didn’t usually insert seeds into the ground to plant them. They’d till up the soil, then carry a bag of seed on their hip, grabbing handfuls and scattering them over the broken ground.

So, can you picture it? Follow this farmer as he scatters his seed. As you do, you notice some of the **seed falls along the path**. Then you look up and notice birds circling overhead, looking for a meal. As soon as the farmer steps past the seed he sowed, they swoop down and **eat it up**.

Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging as to what it means: **When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.** Jesus says the evil one – the devil – is like a bird who is circling overhead every time people are hearing God’s word. This shouldn’t surprise us. The Word is the only thing that creates and strengthens saving faith in Jesus – without it we die spiritually. So if there’s one thing the devil wants more than anything else, it’s to snatch that Word out of people’s hearts before it can do that. Maybe he does that by convincing people it’s all just fairy tales. Maybe he does it by getting them to think it’s not important – they can worry about spiritual things later. Whatever the case, the word is heard, but it doesn’t sink in; the devil snatches it before it can.

So, what kind of hearer are you? When you’re here in God’s house, when you read your bibles at home, the devil is circling overhead, trying to snatch the word out of your heart. Is he succeeding? Maybe he simply does it by distracting you, getting your mind to wander – hearing but not really hearing. Maybe he gets you to forget what you heard Sunday morning by Sunday afternoon. Maybe he’s doing it even more slowly, as those bible verses you once stored away in your mind are slowly fading away.

Let’s move further down the field with the farmer – he’s still scattering his seed. You notice that some of it falls on shallow, **rocky soil**. And here there’s kind of a photo time-lapse in Jesus’ parable. You see that seed **springs up quickly...**but when the hot sun beats on it, the plant withers, **because it has no root**.

Again, Jesus gives us the explanation: **The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.** ²¹ **But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.** This kind of hearer hears the Word, and faith springs up at once with a burst of joy. But the growth slows and stops; the roots never go down deep. And then the heat of hardship comes, they experience trouble in life, and their faith can’t withstand it, because it has no roots.

So...what kind of hearer are you? Jesus loves us. He never wants any hardship to wither our faith. So he wants us to have deep roots – and that takes time spent studying God’s Word. But are we as concerned about growing deeper roots as our Savior is? Or are we content with how deep our roots are – know enough to get by? And is that leading us to study God’s Word with less and less urgency and frequency? Were you once joyful to be in the bible...but now are losing your zeal? When you studied to

become a member, you had classes each week...are you still attending bible class with the same frequency?

Back to the farmer in the field – he’s still sowing his seed. You notice that in this field, the tilling didn’t quite get rid of all the weeds – some tiny thorn plants were left. The next handful he throws, some of his seed **falls among** those **thorns**. You see the plant spring up and grow, but as we know, thorns grow faster – and they choke the plant out. Jesus says, “**This is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.**”

So...what kind of hearer are you? I don’t think it’s hard to see ourselves in this one, either. When our very busy schedules keep us out of God’s Word...when we’re so concerned about providing for our families physically that we’re neglecting providing for them spiritually...when making ends meet, or living comfortably, is more important to us than growing in our faith...then the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth are working to choke out our faith.

If you’re anything like me, this hearing test hurts, doesn’t it? You can’t help see yourself in these first three hearers. What kind of hearers are we? The only way we can answer is: Clearly not the kind of hearers God expects us to be.

But let’s shift focus for a second. We’ve been focusing on the hearers, the soil; let’s focus on the farmer for a bit. Can you see him in your mind’s eye? He’s still sowing seed. Let’s ask a different question: What kind of farmer is this? I mean, does it strike you as strange – that he’s scattering seed in places like this? You’d think he’d be a little more careful with it. Scattering seed that lands in places where it doesn’t produce fruit is pretty costly for a farmer, right? But this guy’s throwing it on the path, on the rocky soil, among the thorns.

What kind of farmer is this? You know the answer, don’t you? This farmer is your God. And what’s behind his sowing the seed is his love. His love that, at a cost all to himself, won forgiveness and eternal life for every single human being. His love in scattering that message abroad, because he wants not a single soul to be lost, wants all people to come to faith in Jesus and have the forgiveness and eternal life he won for them. Even when people despise and reject his Word, he doesn’t stop sowing, because he doesn’t stop loving and longing for this world’s salvation.

You can see God’s love in the sowing. You see it more clearly still in what he did for you in Jesus. We are not the kinds of hearers of God’s Word he demands us to be. But you know what? That’s why God became one of us. That’s why Jesus took on human flesh like ours – to be not just the sower, but the perfect hearer of God’s Word in your place. And he always did that, and his perfection covers your failures. And on the cross, he took your place, too. All the times you’ve failed to hear God’s Word as you ought, and all the times I’ve done the same – Jesus stood in our place as God punished him with what we deserved for those sins. At a cost all to himself, he took those sins away – for you, me, the world.

What kind of a farmer is this? The God who loves me. The Jesus who gave his life and saved me. The One who, no matter how rocky or hard or thorny your heart is, is sowing his seed in your heart right now as he says to you, “Your sins are forgiven!”

But this farmer is one more thing: He’s also the farmer who makes your heart good soil. That, after all, is the fourth kind of hearer Jesus mentions here. **But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it.** Important to note: This isn’t any of us

by nature. We don't have good soil that hears and believes God's Word when we come into this world. We have hearts that are so hard, rocky, and thorny that nothing should grow there. But the same powerful Word God sows changes that.

Isn't that precisely what your Savior has been doing for you by telling you this parable – giving you this hearing test? He's been at work in your heart. Tilling the soil. Removing the rocks. Rooting out the thorns. Leading you to repentance and giving you good soil – hearts that want to and are able to be the kind of hearers Jesus describes here, who **hear the word and understand it** eagerly, frequently, joyfully.

And when you do, he grows you. When you do, he sends your roots down deeper. And he makes you fruitful, producing **100, 60, 30 times what was sown**. God's Word has amazing power to change your life. Paul describes the fruit Jesus produces in you in Galatians 5: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That's what Jesus wants you to have more and more of. To be honest...isn't that what we all want more of?

Well, then, Jesus says, "**He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**" Hear often. Hear eagerly. Hear attentively. And the farmer will make your heart's soil richer. And he'll grow you in faith and in fruit – to his glory, and to your joy. Amen.

Have you ever experienced a hearing test? Maybe you've never had hearing problems, so you've never had the pleasure. When I was four, I had ear infections and my mom started to notice I wasn't hearing her well. She took me in to the doctor, and he put these rubber earmuffs on me. And they would make these beeping sounds – some in the right ear, some in the left; some high, some low – and every time I heard a beep, I was supposed to raise my hand.

This morning, Jesus wants us to do a hearing test of our own. Not how well we can hear sounds – he wants us to examine how we are hearing his word. He takes us to a field and shows us a farmer sowing seed on the ground – but it's really a story about how God sows his saving word on human hearts. And with four different types of soil, he illustrates four different hearers of God's Word.

So...which one are you? It's an important question – because hearing problems can cause problems in these relationships. But, as Jesus warns us here, they can lead us to lose this relationship. And Jesus doesn't ever want that to happen. So listen as his parable leads us to ask, "What kind of hearer am I?"

- I. The seed snatched by birds
 - A. True in others...
 - B. True in us...
- II. The seed on rocky soul...
 - A. True of others
 - B. True of us
- III. The seed among thorny soul
 - A. True of others
 - B. True of us
- IV. What kind of hearer are you? Not the kind of hearers that God expects us to be...
- V. Better question: "What kind of a farmer is this?"
 - A. Scattering seed pretty recklessly, if it's falling where it won't grow.
 - B. Scattering his word pretty recklessly, so often it falls on poor hearers.
 - C. God, whose love is reckless, and wants all people to be saved.
 - D. God, whose love is costly – and saves us from our "poor hearing."
- VI. God who *makes* good soul.
 - A. Jesus accomplishes with this parable.
 - B. Makes us eager hearers.
- VII. God's Word powerful to make Good Soil, and give fruitful growth.
 - A. His purpose in

Jesus doesn't specify how the devil does that. Maybe he convinces a person that religion is all just fairy tales. He might get another to ignore the message thinking it's not important; he'll have time later to worry about spiritual things. Whatever the case, the Word is heard, but it doesn't sink in, because the devil is snatching it away.