

23.2.25 am

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Date: 23 February 2025

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0:00] Good morning. A warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see some visitors or returning friends who are back with us this morning as well. Tea and coffee at the end of the service as usual as you know and please stay behind if you're able to do so.

Notices have been on the screen before the service began. I'll highlight just a couple of them. First of all to say that there'll be no evening service here tonight. The communion weekend is over in Leverborough this weekend and so we usually don't have a service in the evening on the communion weekend for Leverborough so those who are able to go over can head over south if the wind has eased somewhat hopefully. Tomorrow morning, tomorrow from 12 to 2 is the community lunch, the monthly community lunch so you're all welcome to that. On Friday, this coming Friday the 28th of February in Cere Scott School in the Sports Hall there's a big YF. Those of that age have been told about it so you can take note of that and those who are not of that age, myself included, we can be praying for that. Also if anyone is able to provide some baking, juice or snacks please complete the sheet and the vestibule. All the young ones thank you in advance and if you have got questions you can speak to Joyce about that. A church clean and tidy is scheduled for this coming Saturday, 1st of March, inside and outside. If you can be here at 10 o'clock, the more hands, the less time will be spent so please, please help there if you're able to. And also to note that the communion weekend is the 7th to the 9th of March so it's a wee bit away but it's not far away. 7th to the 9th of March, I think the details have been on the screen. We've got the Reverend Donald MacDonald, as we know him, taking the garlic service on Friday at 12 and then Ian McCritchie who we know well, who was in Graver and now is in Greyfriars, is returning back to the island and he'll be taking the services Friday through Sunday. So please be praying for that and for those who may be hearing the call to come forward and profess faith for the first time, be encouraged to come and speak sooner rather than later. The session are approachable at any time, not just over the couple of days in the communion weekend. The rest of the notices you can read and note at your own convenience. Let's begin this time of worship and let's sing to God's praise.

We'll sing from Mission Praise 51, Mission Praise 51 and we'll sing the whole of this hymn.
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

Lord, be all else to be with you.

[illegible]

- [4 : 11] Thou, my great Father, I, thy true Son. Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.
 Be thou my battle-shields or for the fight. Be thou my dignity, thou my delight.
 Thou my soul, shelter thou my idol. Praise thou be heavenward, O power of my power.
 Which is thy thee, Lord, your man's empty praise. Thou my name, let it is now and always.
 Thou love are only first in my heart. I think of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- [5 : 34] I think of heaven, after winter we won. May I reach heaven's joy, O bright and sun.
 Heart of my own heart, whatever we fall. Still be my nation, O ruler of all.
 Let's unite our hearts in prayer.
 Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather together this your day.
 In the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour.
 We thank you that you've given us the desire to be in this place. We thank you that you've
 given us the measure of health and strength that we enjoy to be able to come out and be
 encouraged by being in your presence and by being together with your people.
- [6 : 51] And we ask, Lord, that you would bless us as we wait upon you. We pray also for those
 who are not in the building this morning. We're conscious with the weather as it has been.
 There may be many more who are watching at a distance this morning. And we pray that
 they too would know your presence with them. That they would know the ministry of God,
 the Holy Spirit, as they meet in their own homes.
 We thank you that when we have a desire to know you, when we have a desire to receive
 your blessing, you are the God who reaches out to us.
 And you are the God who has promised that when we draw near to you, you will draw
 near to us. So whether we are here in the building or whether there are those at a
 distance, we pray that you would bless them, that you would bless us.
 We pray for others as well, many others who may have health and strength and who have
 the freedom to be able to come together in this place to worship or open their Bibles in
 their own homes, but have no desire to do so.
- [7 : 59] And we ask, Lord, that you would work in their hearts. We don't look with a critical eye or a
 judgmental spirit upon anyone who has not got that desire because we remember that we
 were in that place also.
 And it is only the work of the Holy Spirit who is able to awaken souls and revive souls that
 have become lukewarm and drifting.
 So we pray, Lord, for those whose desire may be low or may be absent this morning. And
 we ask, Lord, that you would work in their hearts, Holy Spirit, that you would awaken, that
 you would quicken, that you would revive, that you would work for your glory and for the
 blessing and benefit of the souls of all those that we bring to you in prayer.
 We ask, Lord, that you would help us even as we think about the words that we have
 sung. And we confess that often, Lord, our vision is not on you.
 Often, Lord, we confess we are so distracted by the things of this world. Often we confess
 that we are so distracted and absorbed in ourselves that our vision drifts from you.
- [9 : 15] And so we pray that you would forgive us for our sin. As we confess the sins of the last
 few days, even since we were here together last, we pray that you would cleanse us in the
 blood of Jesus.
 We thank you for the consciousness that we have of sin. We thank you that you are a God
 who in your mercy and in your love you convict us of sin. And you impress upon us that
 sense of guilt so that we will not remain in despair, but that we will come to Jesus seeking
 forgiveness, seeking peace for our souls.

So cleanse us, we pray, in the blood of Jesus. We thank you for the cross that we return to week by week where we see that Jesus died to make it possible for us to be forgiven.

And we pray for that forgiveness. We pray, Lord, that you would touch our hearts, that you would readjust our vision, that we would fix our eyes once more upon Jesus.

We pray, Lord, that you would be at work as we have thought about communion weekends. We pray for those who will gather around your table in Leverborough this morning. We ask, Lord, that you would bless them.

[10 : 29] We pray for John Lachie, your servant, as he opens your word also. And we ask that you would bless him and that he would know the help of the Holy Spirit as he preaches. And that your people, Lord, this morning and evening would be encouraged as we come together in worship.

We pray also for our own communion weekend, for the Reverend Dolan and Ian McCritchie as they prepare to come. We pray for ourselves as we anticipate that weekend.

And we ask, Lord, that you would be working in the hearts of each one of us, that we would remember over that weekend the Lord Jesus and all that he did for our salvation.

We pray for any who do remember, who do trust in Jesus, who are forgiven, who are saved, but have never yet professed that. For those who, like the woman who was healed, know that they have been cleansed through the touch of Jesus, but have not yet come forward.

We remember how Jesus called and called until she came forward trembling. And we ask, Lord, that there may be some, even in the room this morning, who would come forward and express a desire to be obedient to the command of Jesus to do this, to take the bread and to take the wine and to remember him.

[11 : 51] We pray, Lord, for the young folks, for the big YF this coming Friday. We ask that it would be a well-attended event. We pray that the young folks would enjoy being together.

We pray that the word of God would go forth in power and that young lives would be transformed through that ministry. We pray for every effort on our notice sheet and on every notice sheet to reach out with the gospel.

Help us, Lord, we pray. We confess, we acknowledge that apart from you, we can do nothing. We pray on for those who are sick, for those who are grieving, for those who are struggling in different circumstances.

And as we remember their need and our need, we pray, Lord, that you would meet each one at the point of need. And that they, that we would know the help of God, the comforter in our struggles, in our difficulties.

We thank you that the truth that we know is that God is our refuge and our strength and ever-present helper in times of trouble. And we pray for our world and for a nation that is so filled with trouble.

[13 : 01] We think of countries, we think of situations, we think of news reports where we have seen such suffering. And as we gather them together in our mind's eye, we bring them to you and we ask, Lord, that you would intervene, that you would be at work in the world that you have created, in the world that you love, and in the world that you have promised that you will come back, Lord Jesus, to redeem when the time is set.

So hear our prayers. Take away our sin. Lead us and guide us in worship, we pray. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Boys and girls, would you like to come forward, please?

Oh. Just enjoy it, Iona.

I do. I do. There'll come a time when they won't. Okay. How are you all this week, boys and girls? Good.

Good, good. You know what happened this week? Our girls, well, Mary and Grace and Lois, not Anna so much because she's away, but they had a great week this week.

[14 : 30] Do you know why? Because I lost my voice. I lost my voice. I lost my voice. So last weekend, I had quite a lot of preaching to do, and I had a wee bit of a cold.

And at the beginning of the weekend, I was thinking my thoughts a wee bit funny. By the end of Sunday night, I didn't have a breath. I couldn't say a word.

And so I came back home on Sunday night, and I was speaking like that, and I couldn't say anything. And on Monday morning, I got up and I tried to speak. I said, nothing. All through Monday, I tried to rest my voice.

Tuesday, I was trying to speak, and I was getting wee bit of words that were coming out. I sounded like a teenage boy. Sometimes the voice was coming out.

Sometimes it was way up quite high. Sometimes it was very low. And by Wednesday, it was starting to come back. But for three or four days, I had no voice.

[15 : 32] And sometimes that happens. Put your hand. Have you ever lost your voice? Any of you ever lost your voice? Yeah? Sometimes we lose our voice. Sometimes we lose our voices when we've got a cold.

We can feel it in our throats, and we can feel it in our chests. And then the voice starts to go away, and it starts to get croaky, and we lose our voices. Have you ever found that sometimes when you're a bit scared, a bit nervous, you want to speak, and you want to get the words out, but because you're so nervous, and you're a bit scared, you're trying to get the words out, and they just don't come out.

Or when they come out, they're all jumbled up, and they're in the wrong order, and you make a bit of a mess of what you're trying to say. Have you ever found that?

I find that most Sundays. Boys and girls, I think, I can't see anybody's heart, but I think already probably some of you are Christians.

What's a Christian? Christian someone. Michael, can you tell us? Pardon? You're losing your voice. A follower of God.

[17 : 03] A Christian is someone who knows our sin, don't we? We know that we're sinners. We've asked Jesus to take our sin away, and we're wanting to follow Jesus.

We're wanting to do things to please Jesus. And you know, if we're Christians, whether you're very young, or whether you're a bit older, one of the jobs that God gives us to do is to tell people about Jesus.

That's why when we're talking about communion, I keep saying, if you're a Christian, you need to come to the Lord's table, because when we take the bread and the wine, that's what we're doing when we take the bread and the wine, is we're remembering Jesus, we're trusting Jesus, and we're wanting, even as we sit at the Lord's table, and as we take the bread and we take the wine, we want to tell people who are watching, we are trusting Jesus.

So, the last thing I think I say before the bread and the wine goes out in the congregation is, as you take the bread and you take the wine, you proclaim, which is a fancy word for you speak out, you speak about the Lord Jesus and his death, until he comes.

So, boys and girls, one of the jobs that God gives you to do, if you're a Christian, is to tell people about Jesus. Is that always easy?

[18 : 33] Is that always easy? See, the older you get, see, when you're very young, probably it's easier. But the older you get, it sometimes feels harder and harder to tell people about Jesus.

Because, sometimes we might be in the playground, and some of them will say, you're one of these people that goes to church. You can tell by the way they're saying it, that they're wanting maybe to laugh at you about it.

And you want to say, well I am, and I'm going to church because I trust in Jesus, but it can be a bit scary when you're in that kind of situation. And so, sometimes we go to speak, and the words just don't come out.

And so, you know, we're struggling, and we're thinking, I think it's best if I just stay quiet. So we just sort of, we walk away, and we say nothing. Because, it can be scary.

I'm tempted to get some of the big ones out, but I won't. Because they would tell you, that, it can be really scary, to speak to our friends, about Jesus.

[19 : 50] And we, in this room, have lots of friends, who know nothing about Jesus, even in Harris. they don't know about the cross, they don't know about salvation, they don't know about heaven and hell.

Who's going to tell them? It's your job and mine. Not just mine, but it's your job and mine. But it's scary. So for all, those, who like me, at times, feel scared, and for, us, who think, that sometimes, when it comes to telling people about Jesus, we're going to lose our voice.

Listen to this promise. You ready? Listen to this promise, from Jesus. He says in Luke chapter 12, and verse 12, the Holy Spirit, will teach you, at that time, what you should say.

So your job and mine, to tell your friends about Jesus. Don't be nervous about that. Don't be scared about that. Because Jesus promises, when the time comes, when you open your mouth, you won't be like me on Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, going, I'm not, I'm not.

because the Holy Spirit, will teach, teach us, what we should say. So, I want to encourage you, boys and girls, if you're trusting in Jesus, to tell people, about Jesus.

[21 : 24] And we'll pray now, and we'll ask for help, with that, will we? Heavenly Father, we thank you, that you love us. We thank you, that you sent Jesus, your son, into this world, to be our saviour.

We thank you, that he saves us, from sin. We thank you, that he's promised, that we can have, everlasting life, if we believe in him. And we thank you, Lord God, that you do give us jobs, you prepare things, for us to do.

You put, you put friends, into our lives. Some of our friends, don't know Jesus, and we know that, we, through our words, and through our, our actions, are to tell them, about Jesus.

Sometimes, Lord, we find it hard. Sometimes, we feel like, we've lost our voice. We can't find, the right words to say. But we thank you, that even though, we find it scary, you've promised, that you will help us, and when we open our mouths, at the right time, you will put, the words, in our mouths.

You will give us, the words to say. So we pray, for the boys and girls, thank you, for how good they are, at telling their friends, about Jesus. We ask, that you would help them, as they grow older, to keep on doing that.

[22 : 36] And for some of us, who are older, who maybe, have got out of the way, of telling people, about Jesus, we pray that you would, help us to start, to once again, look for opportunities, to tell, our family, our friends, the people we work with, the truth, of the Bible, and the good news, about Jesus.

And we pray all this, in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing now, and we're going to sing, from Psalm 34, Psalm 34, and from verses, one to verse nine.

And it's a psalm, about telling people, about how good God is. God will I bless all times, his praise, my mouth shall still express, my soul shall boast in God, the meek shall hear, with joyfulness.

Big words, but what they're meaning, is, that we will, with our mouths, tell people, how good God is. So we'll sing, from verse one, to verse nine, to God's praise.

We'll stand to sing. God will I bless, all times, his praise, my mouth shall still express, my soul shall boast in God, the meek shall hear, with joyfulness.

[24 : 11] Ex-dome, the Lord with me, let us exalted, the Lord with me, I sought the Lord, he heard and did, lead from all fears, deliver.

They looked to him, and lightened, not shaven, where their faces, this poor man, cried, thought her, not safe, and from all his distresses.

The angel of the Lord, then comes, and round, and compasses, all those of earth, that to him fear, and then delivereth.

Oh, taste and see, that God is good, who trust in him is blessed.

Fear God is safe, none that in fear, shall we with want oppressed.

[26 : 09] Okay, boys and girls, if you head through to Sunday school, pray for them as they go, and if we could turn our Bibles to Matthew chapter 13, please.

Matthew chapter 13, and we will read from verse 1, down to verse 23 of the chapter.

This is God's word. That same day, Jesus went out of the house, and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat, and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables, saying, A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, the birds came and devoured them, other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil.

But when the sun rose, they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil, and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear. Then the disciples came to him, and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables?

[28 : 09] And he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, that says, You will indeed hear, but never understand.

You will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away, what has been sown in his heart.

and teachers have to plan lessons. So I often see this in the evening, a laptop or a worksheet and the lessons for the next couple of days are being planned out.

Teachers have to work out methods for teaching. Now as we come back into Matthew chapter 13, we see Jesus and Jesus is in teaching mode.

He is teaching. Now in our day when we observe a teacher, we see that the teacher stands and those in the classroom tend to sit.

[38 : 04] That's what we are used to. But in biblical times it was the opposite. When the teacher sat, that was the signal for the pupils and maybe those who are interested in becoming pupils, that was the signal that was given to them to gather round, lesson.

And so verse 1 of the passage says, that same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

And great crowds gathered about them. You okay, Amon? I'll just pause a wee second.

If the screen goes off, don't worry. Just look at your Bibles. It's always better than looking at my face.

You'll get more from your Bibles than my face. So Jesus is teaching. He is sitting. And there are those who are standing around.

[39 : 16] And verse 1. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.

So we see Jesus here. And he's teaching. The crowds have gathered, but he doesn't use a lectern. He doesn't sit within a classroom context.

Jesus sits in a boat on the water's edge. And the whole crowd listened as they gathered on the beach. And Jesus uses a technique, a teaching technique, which we'll see repeatedly over the next few chapters.

And Matthew calls the technique of teaching that Jesus employs at this point a parable. So the first point that we have today is the parable.

And that's verses 1 to verse 9 or verse 3 to verse 9. We see Jesus as he tells the parable. And verse 3 says, He told them many things in parables.

[40 : 26] Now, I expect for most of us, we know what a parable is. The literal translation for parable in the Greek is to throw alongside.

That's what it means. It means to throw alongside. And so what Jesus would do is he would take a spiritual truth that he was teaching and he would throw alongside that a story that would illustrate, that would connect with the truth.

Probably the most simple, the most commonly known definition of a parable would be it's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

So a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It's a story that's grounded in this world, but the moral of the story, the moral of the parable takes us from this world and beyond this world into the eternal realm.

So Jesus, he tells this story, he shares the parable in verse 3 to verse 9. So let's just look at the verses again. Jesus told them many things in parables and then he starts the parable.

[41 : 44] A sower went out to sow and as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil and immediately they sprang up since they had no depth of soil.

But when the sun rose, they were scorched and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

So that was the parable, that was the story. And Jesus takes the story and he just throws it out. He tells a story and he throws it out and he says at the end of the story, he doesn't say, I've got sixteen points and I'm going to step through all this so you've got a full grasp of everything.

He just says to the crowds, he who has ears, let him hear. And in terms of the, the this world level, this is not a complicated story.

[43 : 08] We don't have to have a degree in agriculture or horticulture to be able to grasp this story. We see in our minds that a sower, everybody knew, everybody still knows what a sower is.

And the sower has seed and the sower sows the seed. The seed goes different places.

Some seed grows. If I summarize this really quickly, some seed grows because it finds a place where there's growth and some seed doesn't.

Some seed goes deep and it produces fruit that produces grain. Some doesn't. So that's the parable.

Point number one. Point number two is the puzzle. And that takes us into verse 10. Because Jesus' disciples, they have heard the story.

[44 : 18] We can see them in our mind's eye in the front row on the beach. And they've heard the story, the parable, and they seem to be somewhat puzzled by it.

And we get a sense that they also see that the crowds are puzzled by the parable. And so the disciples, verse 10, came and said to Jesus, why do you speak to them in parables?

So there is an impression for us here in the way that the disciples approached Jesus that they weren't overly impressed by Jesus' teaching plan.

They aren't convinced that there'll be good learning outcomes for the vast majority of the crowd achieved through the telling of parables. And so they ask Jesus, why are you telling these parables?

That was their question. And we'll get to Jesus' response in a minute. But before we get there, I think it's good to note that sometimes when we are following Jesus, we will be puzzled.

[45 : 38] sometimes when we open the Bible and we're reading what Jesus says, it can be puzzling.

Sometimes God will allow things to come into our lives and we cannot make head nor tail of them. They're just a puzzle to us.

And it's part of being a disciple of Jesus. We can expect puzzles. puzzles. If we think that when we become Christians and when we start to follow Jesus, everything that made no sense to us before will make perfect sense.

We'll have all the answers and life will all be clear and understandable to us. If we think that, then our thinking is flawed.

Because throughout the Bible, those who followed God, yes, there were things that became clear, but there were many things that they grappled with and wrestled with that were puzzling.

[47 : 03] But what I want to note here is that it's what the disciples did with their puzzle. Where do they take their puzzles? Where do they take their questions? They obviously have questions about what Jesus has just taught.

Maybe they're not all that impressed with the technique he's just used, but they don't go off in a corner and have a discussion privately. They don't say to each other, I don't know what he was on about there. I wish he took a different approach.

They come directly to Jesus. And they say, why do you speak in parables? They take their questions to Jesus and they teach us to do the same.

Read through the Psalms. Go through the book of Job. And we see time after time after time God's people wrestling with problems and puzzles and questions and taking them to God in prayer.

And that's an instruction for us. When we are struggling, when we are wrestling, when we are dealing with what one hymn said, the perplexing paths of life, speak to God about it in prayer.

[48 : 26] And if I can pause just for one more moment before I move on to the next point, and if I can think for a moment particularly about the call to the Lord's table, prayer, there may be some in this room who are hearing that call to profess faith in Christ but are holding back because you still have questions and there are still some things that puzzle you.

And maybe you want to have all your questions answered and all the puzzles that you're wrestling with cracked before you respond to the call of Jesus. So you hesitate, communion season after communion season passes by.

And there's still you sitting outside the table scratching your head saying, I wish I had the answers. Well, that's not how it works. Disciples of Jesus will always have questions.

that's not a reason to hold back. It's a reason to come to Jesus. The disciples walked with Jesus and they continually took their questions to him.

And sometimes he answered them and sorted them out and sometimes he didn't. There are some questions questions that you and I have that we will have to wait until heaven to get answers to.

[50 : 09] But until then, our calling is to walk by faith and not by sight. The parable, the puzzle, thirdly, the purpose.

It takes us from verse 11 to verse 16. The parables were a bit like a spoken out optical illusion.

You know what an optical illusion is? Sometimes we will see these optical illusions on social media. An optical illusion is an image that's on a screen or on a page.

And you look at the image and for some people, they pick up the picture and they look at the image and immediately they can see another picture embedded within the image.

So there might be the picture of an old lady's face or a young person or a silhouette and they look at the image and they can immediately see it. And then there's other people who look at the same image and they can see nothing.

[51 : 15] The person who can see is saying, how can you not see that? I mean, can you not see that picture? Can you not see the face? Can you see the nose there? Can you see the silhouette? And they look and they look and they look and they can see nothing. It's an optical illusion.

And the parables were about like that. Jesus answered the disciples. They come to him with a question. Verse 11. Jesus answered them, to you, disciples, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them, it has not been given. So Jesus creates two categories here. To you, it's been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them, it hasn't been given. Verse 12. for to the one who has, more will be given. And he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

So Jesus makes that distinction between the disciples and a group that Jesus calls them. to the people.

[52 : 29] Think about the disciples first of all. The disciples were a group of people who wanted to know more and more about Jesus. Apart from one disciple, Judas, the eleven disciples wanted to know more and more of Jesus.

And as they listened to Jesus' teaching in the parables, they came to know more and more of Jesus. They were, in Jesus' words, verse 11, they were given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

So that's what the parables were doing for the disciples. As they listened, they took in the teaching, and they understood more about Jesus, and they understood more about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But then there was the group that Jesus calls them. And they were critics, they were skeptics, they were doubters, they were usually highly religious, authoritative figures who were resistant to Jesus.

And as Jesus spoke in parables to them, they made no sense to them. And the more that group who were against Jesus listened to Jesus, the less they understood.

[53 : 52] they were like me, you know, every year I go to the opticians, my eyesight's a bit worse. Every year I go and get the test, they say, you need more glasses.

There's been deterioration over the last 12 months. What do you expect? You're getting old. And for this group that Jesus calls them, as time went on, and as they continued to resist Jesus, as they listened to parable after a parable, they saw less and less and less.

They understood less and less and less. So the parables, the purpose of them was to do two things.

John MacArthur says, while the parables do illustrate and clarify truth for those with ears to hear, they have precisely the opposite effect on those who oppose and reject Christ.

Jesus says to the disciples, to answer their question, why are you speaking in parables? Jesus says, verse 13, this is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

[55 : 09] Indeed, in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, you will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. So what was the root of the problem with those who didn't understand?

What was the root of the problem with those that Jesus calls them? Why couldn't they understand? Was it an IQ problem?

Was it the fact that their intelligence levels were not as high as the disciples? Was that the nature of the problem? Well, no. Jesus makes clear that the problem that they had that led to no sight, no vision, no understanding, no hearing, it was a heart problem.

So Jesus says in verse 15, for this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and with their eyes they have closed, and their eyes have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

So there was a heart problem with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, those who were resistant, those who were skeptical, those who were against Jesus.

[56 : 44] It was a heart problem. It wasn't a head problem, it was a heart problem. And you know, very often the glory of God and the wonder of the good news of the gospel, it goes over the heads of the people that this world would call wise.

And it's grasped much more quickly by those that this world would call simple. And we have an illustration of that very often week by week, with how ready the young, simple minds and hearts are to take hold of the truth of the gospel.

We don't have arguments with the young ones, do we? We don't see them folding their arms and saying, you know, well, there's this and there's that and there's the next thing. No, they listen and they accept and they seem to believe.

It seems much easier for those that the world might call simple to actually grasp the truth of the gospel. I've been told a story many times about a man who, his name in English means Angus of the Hills and this is not very close but you know who I'm talking about.

And this man, Angus of the Hills, was a man who, I'm told, would have struggled academically. he didn't have a degree in theology, he didn't have a degree in anything else but he would hear and see the glory of God everywhere.

[58 : 34] There's a story told of one day when he was sitting by a fast flowing burn over Bunai direction, I think it was, and he said to the person nearby, he says, can you hear it?

He says, can you hear what? Can you hear what the burn is saying? It's saying glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, glory, glory. And we can kind of hear something of that as the gurgling water, we can hear how that word can almost come out of it but for the majority of us, if we stood by a burn, we'd just hear water.

how could this man, this so-called simple man, hear, even in the simple things, the glory of God and have a mind that was directed to think about the glory of God?

Well, the answer is because his heart was open to God. And in this group that Jesus addresses, there were those whose heart was open to God and there were those whose hearts were closed.

And the parables, they had a double purpose. They helped those whose hearts were open and soft to believe and to understand.

[60 : 07] and they brought confusion to the hardened hearts of those who do not want to believe and who do not want to understand.

So the question for us in application is what is going on in our hearts as we listen to these parables?

In fact, to broaden it further, what is going on in our hearts every time we open the word of God, every time we come together in this church or any church?

what is going on in our hearts when we come under the teaching of the word of God? Are we listening with hearts that are open to Jesus?

Are we listening out with hearts that desire to know Jesus better and to trust him more and to obey him and to become like him?

[61 : 31] Because if we're listening in that way, then God will use the parables to help us understand more and more and more of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

if we're listening with that openness to Jesus, God will use the parables to be a means of receiving grace and abundance.

Verse 12. So is that how we're listening? Do we come this morning or any morning into any church with that desire, that expectation?

Lord, I want to know you more. I want to see more of your glory. I want to see more of the wonder of the gospel. I come with that sense of wanting to obey you and to become like you, Lord Jesus.

Is that how we listen? Is that how we approach the word of God? The alternative is that we come with hearts that are hard. You know, we can harden our hearts.

[62 : 42] It's all we can do. We can't soften our hearts. It's a work of God the Holy Spirit that we pray for. But we do have the power to harden our own hearts.

And when we call, when we hear the call of Jesus, and we don't come to him, we harden our hearts.

we see the cross of Jesus, we understand that he died for sinners and we are sinners. But we don't respond to the cross and ask for forgiveness.

We harden our hearts. free offer of the grace of Jesus, and yet we don't receive it.

We harden our hearts. And when we are called to own the Lord Jesus as our Lord and our Savior and profess our faith in him, and we don't profess, for every refusal, we harden our hearts a bit more.

[64 : 13] Think about a brick layer, or somebody who's a hard, heavy labourer. As that person handles rough bricks and equipment day by day, the skin on their hands gets hardened.

And the more they work, the harder the skin gets. It gets calloused, is the word that's used. Callous is forming the skin. So much so that these guys who graft and work hard with rough materials, they can pick up a boiling hot plate that you and I can't go near, and they feel nothing.

You can get a pin and stick into their fingers, they feel nothing. Because they're callouses. And our hearts can get like their hands.

That's the warning here. I think the NIV actually uses the word, their hearts have become calloused. Christ. And when you and I handle the gospel, the good news about Jesus, week by week, and we hear it, we just pass it on.

We might even hear it and handle it and think about it and move it around in our hands, you could say. And we just pass it on. When we do that week by week by week by week, our hearts get hard.

[65 : 47] Calloused. And over time, we no longer see what we used to see. And over time, we no longer hear what we used to hear.

And over the course of time, we no longer understand and take into our acceptance the things that we used to accept.

We question everything. And the things that used to touch us, the Psalms and the hymns that we used to struggle to sing, because they touched us, they have no effect anymore.

And the soul healing, the forgiveness, the salvation that we used to really want, we no longer really desire.

We desire. That's what it looks like to harden your heart. And the question that Jesus is asking, as he shares with these people, that vast crowd, and his disciples, as he shares this parable, the question that he's asking is what's going on in your heart?

[67 : 27] Is it open? Is it soft towards Jesus? Do you listen to the gospel with that desire to respond, to believe, to trust, to obey?

Or do we come in week by week with minds that are closed, no expectation, no real desire, but a polite resistance to Jesus?

Maybe next week, maybe next month. I'm not ruling it out, but I'm coming to church, but I'm going to do nothing today.

Is that how you come? if that's your state, then be careful.

Because in some ways, if that's how we come into church, week by week, it's the most dangerous place we can come. one more point, but I'm going to end here.

[68 : 52] And I want to end simply by going back to the psalm that God used to break through my hard heart and to bring me to the point of decision.

psalm 95 where God says, today, if you hear his voice, if you don't hear his voice, this won't even touch you.

It'll have no effect. So there's certain people in the room this morning who likely will hear none of this. But God says to the psalmist, today, if you hear, his voice, if you hear the voice of God calling you to come to him and receive forgiveness and receive grace and receive salvation, today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart, but come to him and receive the grace, receive the forgiveness, receive the blessing that he has promised to all who will respond.

We'll pick this back up next Sunday, God willing, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, we thank you for these parables, angels, and we ask that we would be those who have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts that are open, that are willing to respond to the call of Jesus.

So help us, we pray, to have hearts that are, as we'll sing in a moment, are ready to praise you as our God and as our Saviour.

[70 : 59] we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll sing to conclude from Mission Praise 495. Oh, for a heart to praise my Lord.

Oh, for a heart to praise my Lord. Oh, for a heart a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free, a heart that always fills thy blood so freely shed for me.

for me. A heart praise my submission be, my great Redeemer's throne, where only Christ is there to speak, where Jesus' praise!

Jesus' praise the Lord. A humble, lonely, contrite heart, believe me to and free.

! He shined He their light nor death can part from Him that dwells within.

[72 : 58] He in hearts in heaven He's God renewed! And Lord, all blood divine, where grace and light and pure and good and hope be Lord all thine.

Thy nature gracious for impart Come with me from above!

the heart die new name upon my heart Thy new best name of love Now may the grace of our Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore.

Amen.