

The gospel of God is a double-edged sword

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me please to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13. The Gospel of God is a double-edged sword. One of the things that Christians find hardest to understand and come to terms with is the fact that so many people seem to reject the truth of the Gospel and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And it's a source of great perplexity to us and sometimes great pain when it's people that we love and we care for. And it can be a source also of great discouragement to us as individuals and as a community in our life and witness together.

Why? Why, when it seems so clear and obvious to anyone who will bother to look at the evidence that Jesus Christ must be who he claims to be, and when he offers forgiveness and acceptance that we know we need, however much we may try and hide that need from ourselves at times, why do people still reject him and refuse to believe him, refuse to submit to his Lordship?

Why? Somebody asked me that question just last Sunday morning, after the morning service. How can people, when they've seen and understood, reject Jesus Christ?

And why is it that some who seem at first to have accepted Jesus and begun following him, even being baptized and joined in the church with joy, why do some of these also ultimately reject him and fall away?

[1 : 49] Wasn't it sad to hear this week at the funeral of Robin Cook how when he was an older teenager, his first desire in life was to become a preacher of the Gospel. But during his time at university, he rejected it and became a hardened atheist.

You see, these are not new questions either. The disciples who were following Jesus around and hearing him proclaim with authority the Gospel of the Kingdom, seeing him demonstrate with absolute clarity the Kingdom of God come on earth, they had seen and they had believed Jesus, they'd followed him, they'd become disciples, even though they didn't understand everything fully, they had followed Jesus.

But they had seen that others had not. There'd been a very varied response to Jesus. In fact, the response had been very vitriolic at times. We've seen that in the last couple of weeks in chapters 11 and 12.

First of all, his own times people reject him. Oh, he's got a demon, they say. Then all the Bible teachers reject him. They say, oh, he's in league with the devil. Last we saw in chapter 12, verse 14, they're conspiring to kill him.

There just doesn't seem to be any signs of this world-dominating kingdom that you've been talking about. There just doesn't seem to be any sign of this day of judgment on the wicked and the separation of the wicked from the righteous, the end of suffering and all of these things.

[3 : 16] Where is it? It just seems all invisible. Well, you see, that's why in Matthew chapter 13, at the midpoint of his gospel here, we have this third great teaching section of Matthew's gospel to explain some of these vital truths about God's kingdom on earth, about what it is and what it isn't.

And Jesus is explaining to disciples, disciples then and disciples today, things which we must know, things which we must understand, if we're to make any sense at all of his kingdom and our part in it. And so that we're not discouraged when we don't seem to see the things that we think we ought to see. And Jesus' answer to his disciples is that, yes, well, in a sense, there are still things that are invisible to this world, but they are visible to eyes opened by God to the truth of the kingdom through the gospel.

And we must see them, we must understand the truth. Otherwise, we'll never really ever be able to serve Jesus as the ambassadors, the emissaries of his kingdom that he's called us to be.

Many things he teaches us in this chapter are at least partly hidden. They're not yet fully revealed. But you do need to see and understand that this is part of God's plan.

[4 : 42] It's totally under his control. And a day will come when all these things will be utterly clear to all. That's what this chapter is all about. In it, Jesus tells seven parables.

There's the parable of the sower first, as we read today. Then he goes on to speak about things which are also presently hidden, but nonetheless real.

One day will become clear to all creation. And there's three pairs of parables. One pair, the wheat and the tares and the fishing net, speaks about the presently hidden, but very real division of God's kingdom from the world.

We'll look at that next time. Another pair, that's the mustard seed and the yeast. Well, they talk about the hidden growth of the kingdom, which you can't see just now, but it's altogether real. And then the other two speak of the treasure and the pearl of great price. And they speak about the value of the kingdom to the world, presently hidden, but absolutely real, and one day to be made clear.

[5 : 45] Now, the last couple of weeks, we've taken chapters 11 and 12, very large chunks, and raced through them. But now we're going to slow right down and spend several weeks in this chapter because the teaching is so vital for discipleship today.

And it's so misunderstood in today's church. One of the biggest causes of disillusion and disaster among contemporary Christians is a confusion over what Jesus tells us we are to expect now and what we're not to expect until he comes again.

If we get mixed up with that, if we expect now the things that Jesus says will only come when he finally comes to bring in his kingdom, we're going to end up utterly disillusioned, totally disappointed.

And once self-delusion can no longer hold us, we have to face up to the truth that these things just are not in our possession yet, well, we'll probably give up.

And many do. So we must listen to Jesus' teaching here. That passage today, the first 23 verses, as we read, gives us Jesus' answer to our first question.

[6 : 57] Why is the response to the gospel such a varied one? And it also gives us the answer to our second question. Where is the promised judgment of God?

Remember that was John's question, John the Baptist. How can God's kingdom have come when we haven't seen yet the judgment, the separation of the righteous from the wicked? When God hasn't come to judge the earth in righteousness, how can that be?

Well, Jesus' answer, Jesus' answer is, well, in fact, although it's not yet visible to everybody, judgment has begun.

And it's because that judgment has begun that we see the variable response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what explains this. story, but at verse 10, in Jesus' words of explanation to the disciples in verses 10 to 17, because when we get this part clear, we'll grasp the significance of the message Jesus has in this parable to his disciples and to the crowds, those who seem to be perhaps disciples, but haven't yet taken on the challenge of real commitment.

So the first thing we need to grasp is this, the gospel itself is God's instrument of judgment. The gospel is God's instrument of judgment.

[8 : 19] That's the message of verses 10 to 17. In the proclamation of the gospel and in the responses it engenders, God's verdict on men and women is being forged.

They're being divided in their response to Jesus and his claim to them. That's what the parable of the sword is all about. As verse 19 makes clear, it's about the word of the kingdom, Jesus says, doing its work.

And Jesus' explanation of the nature of that work here to the disciples in verses 10 to 17 is very clear, very stark. God's word divides. It always divides because God's word is not just a matter of information but of power.

It's a living and active thing. It's a double-edged sword by which God confronts not just our minds but our hearts, forcing us to choose, forcing us to either obey him or reject him.

It's a personal word. It's a word that calls people into relationship with him. It creates that relationship so that we trust him and obey him and we follow him. And either, therefore, you respond and that relationship begins and grows or you reject.

[9 : 37] Then there can be no relationship and any vestige of a relationship that there is becomes cold, becomes distant. It demands response.

You see, neutrality is impossible. Remember last time in chapter 12, verse 30, Jesus says, if you're not for me, you're against me. No third way. Even though we like third ways these days.

God's word divides. It exposes the truth. It precipitates the vision that only two ways are possible. You might say, how can God's word do that?

How can a mere word do that? Well, think about this word. Four words. Will you marry me? Now, there's a word that divides.

Either it creates a relationship or it destroys a relationship, doesn't it? Either, if the answer is yes, a whole new world of opportunity, a whole new relationship begins and every subsequent word following that develops it, takes it on, makes it more.

[10 : 46] But of course, if the answer is no, well, that closes the door, doesn't it? Every subsequent word spoken is only going to distance, drive away, make that relationship colder.

And it's just like that with the word of the gospel of God and the response that people make. It creates division. And depending on the response to the gospel, God's subsequent words either will draw us nearer and nearer or his subsequent words will push us further and further away from him. And ultimately, that separation will be infinite. infinite. And that is the verdict that will be made clear on the last day. But the critical message that Jesus is giving us here is that the judgment of that day is being forged now, today, in the response to Jesus' words.

That division, that judgment has already begun in the gospel. And that's abundantly evident even in the very structure of this chapter. Just look at it. The first parable of the sower, as we read, Jesus speaks to the crowds.

And the next three parables, he also speaks directly to the crowds. Look at verse 34 referring back. All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables. Indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

[12 : 11] But in verse 16, as we read, he takes the disciples aside and he explains directly to them the clear words. In verse 36, again, we read, he left the crowds.

And he turns away from them to his disciples, the ones who are following his word. There's a division which is developing here which is absolutely unmistakable. And it's no accident to see how the parables end.

Look at verse 47. An absolutely unambiguous separation. God's acceptance or rejection of men and women. just as the parables begin in the parable of the sower with man's acceptance or rejection of the word of God, the word of the kingdom.

And you see, Jesus' point is clear. The verdict of that day is being forged now in your response, in your acceptance or your rejection of the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Because God's revelation always judges. It's a personal word which divides those who hear into those who respond with their heart to Jesus, who Jesus will draw on and enlighten and give more to, and those who refuse, whom Jesus will withdraw himself from and withhold further light from.

[13 : 36] That's what's going on and that's what Jesus' explanation to his disciples is of why he speaks in parables. In verse 13, that's why I speak to them, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

See, it's not as some people like to think that Jesus uses parables because they're lovely illustrations which make Jesus' teaching more interesting, more easy to grasp.

No, Jesus says it's the opposite reason. He speaks to them in these parables because they will not see. And they will not hear, and they will not understand.

And so now he says, I will conceal it from them so that they cannot see. You see, the gospel itself is the instrument of God's judgment for those who do respond to Jesus, who do follow him, and who seek more, and who want to hear every word.

Well, verse 12 is true, do you see? The one who has, more will be given to him. But for those who are scorning, who are rejecting, who are devaluing the word of the gospel, the second half of the verse is true.

[14 : 46] Even what he has will be taken away. It's very stark, isn't it? The word of God divides. Now, notice that there is an element of mystery here.

Look at verse 11. It's very clear. Those who see can only see because God has opened their eyes, not otherwise. To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom.

And yet, his judgment, Jesus says, is nevertheless absolutely just. Humans are responsible entirely for their rejection of him. They have no excuse.

Remember in chapter 11, Jesus said to the towns of Galilee, if the things done in Sodom and Gomorrah had been done in your place, you would have repented. But you won't.

Despite all the gracious revelation that you've had, there is no excuse. God's revelation calls us to Jesus by a command. It's not just an offer.

[15:46] Jesus says, come to me, all you who are laboring and heavy laden. And therefore, refusal of that command is inexcusable. Rejection of forgiveness must be unforgivable.

And yet, despite all this revelation, men and women, as Paul says in Romans 1, continue to suppress the truth. Refuse to believe what is blindingly obvious, because God has made it obvious. And that's always been the case. That's why Jesus quotes here in verse 14 and 15 from the prophet Isaiah. People will never see, never understand, because here's the point, they don't want to understand.

They don't want to receive, because as verse 15 says, their hearts are dull. Their hearts are hardened. That's the problem. It's not a matter of the intellect. It's not a matter of saying, well, I just can't grasp it, I can't understand it.

No, it's a matter of the heart. In the Bible, a heart is the control center of our whole being. Notice that the organ of understanding is the heart.

[16:58] Verse 15, they understand with their hearts, or rather they refuse to. What it means is, I refuse to submit and obey to the gospel of God and Jesus Christ.

And Jesus says, that's the way it's always been with my people, resistant, hard-hearted. Look over to verse 35. He quotes again here from Psalm 78, verse 2.

If you read Psalm 78, you'll discover it's just a litany of the same story. God speaks again and again, patiently, graciously, revealing himself to his people.

But again and again, he is rejected by people who are hard in heart. The Psalm says again and again, you're a generation whose heart was not steadfast.

You refused to walk according to God's ways. You did not believe God, you did not trust his power. And yet again and again, God rains his mercy down on his people.

[17:57] Until finally, verse 32, in spite of this, they still sinned. Despite his wonders, they did not believe. And so at last, God had no option but to reject them, to send them in captivity.

And it's very chilling, isn't it, when we read these words on the lips of Jesus. He says, so be it. You will not hear, you refuse to obey and understand.

Now, your hearts will only be hardened further. By everything that you hear, you'll be taken further away from me. The gospel creates division.

Rather than hearing his words of love to draw you nearer, these same words of love will simply push you further away. And he says to these people, you stand in the long line of people with rebellious hearts all down the history of Israel, and you now, in this generation, are coming to a climax of unbelief, which is going to result in your ultimate judgment.

Whereas verse 16 makes it clear, the division. The disciples who do hear, who do respond, well, they stand in the long line of believers, like the prophets, who longed for more insights, longed to see the things that you've seen and heard, but didn't see it.

[19:21] To see how clear the parting of the way has become. Verse 51, do you believe, says Jesus, do you understand? They say yes. The disciples do believe, they do understand, and therefore, says Jesus, you're going to have the joy of teaching to others the treasures of the kingdom, not just the old, old story of my grace, but the new climax in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every scribe, every teacher who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Verse 58, and he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Jesus takes away even that light which they have possessed. Friends, this is a very stark warning for all of us today.

The parables of Jesus are not an illustration of his message, they are the message. They're the message of his gospel, and it's a message which is a double-edged sword. It divides, and ultimately it divides forever.

It hardens hearts that are hardening against him, even as it softens hearts of those who are drawing closer to him.

[20 : 35] And our response is never neutral. Our response to hearing that message always has consequences. And also, moreover, the situation with the gospel is never static.

It's always active, an active process all the time. every time you hear the message of God's call upon your life, either more light is shining in the darkness and drawing you closer, or the darkness is coming in and closing in upon your soul.

And if that happens, we make it harder and harder to see, harder and harder to hear. So the messages start, never presume upon the grace of God.

there will come a day when you have become so deaf and so blind, that you will no longer be able to hear, no longer be able to see, even if God is shouting his message of repentance at you.

The only way to find more light is to follow the light that God has given you, to grasp it and to seek for more. And if you do, he promises, more will be given.

[21 : 48] The gospel is God's instrument of judgment. That's Jesus' first answer to the disciples' questions. Why do you speak in parables? But you see, he doesn't stop there, does he?

He goes on. Notice, they hadn't actually asked him to explain the parable. In verse 10, the question was why, wasn't it? But explaining the parable actually is part of Jesus' answer to them, because they need to know that if the gospel of God is God's instrument of judgment, drawing people further on in the kingdom and at the same time hardening those and pushing others away from Jesus, they need to know, and we need to know, something that follows from that logically.

And that's this, that we shall see God's word working his judgment wherever the gospel is at work. We shall see these things.

And when we do see that happening, as we will see it happening, we're not to despair, we're not to lose heart, we're not to think that God isn't in control, but rather we're to be assured.

The word that Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 55, 11, God's word shall never return to him empty, but shall always accomplish that which he has purposed. You see, we must understand that Jesus explains this parable primarily to his disciples.

[23 : 10] Although, as verse 9 makes clear, he is challenging the crowd to have ears to hear, to ask what soils they are. But remember, he's taken up with the disciples' question, why do you teach in parables?

He's taken up with explaining to them why they see these hostile reactions and all of these things. They need to have their faith in Jesus, bolstered, assured.

They need to know that he's not a failure. And they need to know, as we need to know, that in their witness to the gospel and our witness to the gospel, we will see exactly the same thing.

Exactly the same as what Jesus found. But Jesus says, what you are seeing, my followers, is the gospel of God doing its work as God's instrument of judgment, sifting the hearts of men and women, trying their hearts, penetrating to the depths, exposing the truth as they are faced with the challenge of Jesus Christ.

That's what's happening. And so, first of all, he warns his disciples, you must be realistic. You're going to see the gospel being rejected.

[24 : 22] You're to expect that in gospel work. And when you see that, you're not to lose trust in God. You're not to lose faith in his word of the gospel. You're not to think his word has no power.

The fault is not in the word. Nothing wrong with a seed. The fault is in the hearts that are exposed by their rejection. And notice, one very important thing to note, and that Jesus tells us here, and that's this, that there are many and varied ways of rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ, not just one. And friends, we are to expect to see all of these. Look at the parable of the sower. We know the story so well, don't we? It's a brilliant story. It speaks just as easily to 21st century townies like us, as it did to 1st century Palestinian rustic people.

The sower goes out, he scatters the seed everywhere on his land. Maybe that is to make sure he misses no good soil. And yet inevitably it falls in different places.

Sometimes it's paths where it won't seed. Sometimes it's rocky ground. Sometimes that thin soil which covers the limestone. Sometimes it's among thorn and thistles, but sometimes it is in the good soil.

[25 : 38] It's common these days for people to call this parable the parable of the soils. And that may be fair because the interpretation does seem to focus on the soil, but it's interesting in verse 18 that Jesus doesn't call it that.

He calls it the parable of the sower. And in the context, you see, all his emphasis is on the sowing and on the seed, on the risks of sowing, on the apparent heartbreaks of sowing, and yet on the assurance of a great harvest when the word is sown.

And therefore his whole point is to focus on the undaunted, ongoing sowing of the seed, despite all the apparent unresponsiveness that there may seem to be. And Jesus' chief point to his disciples and to us is this.

God knows what he's doing. And he is doing it. His salvation and his judgment are both at work in the world. That's what you're involved in.

So don't get despondent. Sow the word. Keep on sowing the word. Leave the rest to God. He has promised that the outcome will be right. And so Jesus says, first of all, you're going to see all of this. [26 : 47] You're going to see rejection. And it's interesting that all of these instances of rejection do seem to come before we see anything of the true harvest in the parable and in life.

It's often that way, isn't it? Rejection in all its forms. Look at the first one. I call this the response of the heart of Flint. That's the path. It's the response of some whose hearts just seem to be so hard. They're like stone pavements. The gospel seems to bounce off. There is absolutely no penetration of the heart. Maybe that they're hardened because they've been trampled hard over the course of their life.

Many knocks, many batterings, things that have gradually closed them up to even hear the word. Sometimes in people, it happens very suddenly, doesn't it? A sudden thing happens. Perhaps a sudden bereavement, some injustice. Something happens in somebody's life and instantly, it seems like a shutter has come up over their heart as far as spiritual things are concerned.

[27 : 51] Whatever it is here, Jesus says, these people hear the message but they do not understand. In other words, there is no penetration of the organ of understanding which as we've seen is not the intellect but the heart.

The heart is closed to the truth of Jesus Christ. It bounces off. And no doubt today this person may well think that they're being very rational, very secularist in their thinking.

They may have thought it all through and be an atheist in total control of their thinking. I suppose that's what Robin Cook thought as he rejected the gospel. But look at verse 19.

What is the chilling reality? This person is not in control of himself. It's the devil who is actually in control.

He snatches the seed away. And ultimately it is the devil and his kingdom that the gospel assaults. That explains the battle that we so often face in Christian work.

[28 : 52] And Jesus says when the gospel, the true word of God is at work, you're going to see that reaction. You're going to see it. Because the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing.

And we do see it, don't we, sometimes? Often. Sometimes the devil seems to be so clearly at work, scuppering a hearing of the message right at the very beginning. The second response of rejection is what I call the heart full of froth.

It's a seed that falls on the rocky ground, the thin soil. And isn't that something that we often see as well, something that's so painful? Here's the shallow soil.

It's warmed up quickly by the sun. It springs up. But ultimately, when the real heat of the sun comes on it, well, of course, it just withers away.

And the point, of course, is that the sun always comes up in its heat. Summer always comes, even in Glasgow this year. But it just can't stand up under hardship, which always comes to a follower of Jesus, under persecution, which very often comes.

[30 : 03] And it's so discouraging, isn't it, after a mission, after a course of running Christianity Explored, we seem to have a great response as that bubbly, joyful person who's apparently so zealous in their belief, so full of the joy.

But Jesus says there's no root because nothing's gone deep into the heart. Maybe the person's taken up with all the outward paraphernalia of the Christian faith. Maybe they love the songs and the worship and doing Christian things.

But you see, the real thing, the penetration of God's word into the heart, to really challenge, to really take over, to begin to grow, and it just hasn't happened.

And transformation of the heart is what it's all about. So along comes an illness, a bereavement, unanswered prayer, and Jesus says they fall away.

The word there means collapse, sudden collapse under pressure. And Jesus says you're going to see that in Christian work, froth that suddenly just goes flat, disappears.

[31 : 13] But it's not just hearts of flint and froth that we're up against. Thirdly, he says we're up against hearts that are betrayed by enthrallment to the fashions of the world.

That's the thorns that grow up, not this time causing collapse under pressure, but a slow choking by the things of this world, the cares and worries, he says, perhaps of the things we don't have.

The delights and pleasures, the things that we do have but which deceive us. And how often we see that too in the Christian church, how painful it is, how disappointing it is to us.

The church member who's gradually drawn away from Christ by their worrying obsessions, perhaps for their family, their welfare, begins to edge out the spiritual concerns of their life.

A worrying obsession with perhaps their business, their profession, gradually takes them away from the fellowship of God's people more and more, so they're more absent than present. Or the worry of academic success that means you're studying so much for your exams, that Sunday becomes so precious, you just can't afford the time to meet with God's people, to hear his word.

[32 : 26] Or maybe it's the indulgence in our society with so much money. Weekends become so important for that, don't they? Indulging our wealth. Might be our new golf clubs, our new car, a new yacht, maybe a new holiday cottage, that's a great thing, but it just begins to take us away more and more from the place where we're fed with God's word and the fellowship of his people.

And it's just a slow and gradual tightening, a choking. We may have no idea that it's choking us at all until it's too late. We've no idea that something else is creepingly possessing our heart.

I remember once in my medical days seeing a patient doing a cardiac ultrasound on them, discovering that almost their entire interior of their heart was taken up with a gigantic tumour.

And for years and years and years and years it had been slowly growing and they'd been slowly adapting until at last when it had almost occupied the whole of the heart chamber. suddenly they started getting breathless and choking.

Jesus says there's things like that that grow up and possess your heart. And all of these, says Jesus, all of these are ways of rejecting the gospel.

[33 : 52] They're all real rejection, he says, because none of them are fruitful. That's emphasized in verse 22. Even professions that take a long time to be choked off are not fruitful, so they're not real.

Not just hearing the word that's important, Jesus says, not even just hearing and rejoicing, not even just hearing and doing for a while. That's why our evangelical obsessions with professions of faith and decisions are so meaningless.

Ultimately, Jesus says, the heart of flint, the heart full of froth, the heart captured by fashion, they're all the same, because there's no fruit. And that's the only thing that matters.

And Jesus says to us, friends, you're going to see all of that as you work as my ambassadors of my kingdom. There are many ways of rejecting the gospel, not just one.

And there's only one way of accepting the gospel. He says, not many, it's the way of fruit in verse 23. The fruitful heart. The one who hears and understands. In other words, the word gets right into the heart.

[34 : 56] It's allowed in, it's not rebuffed at the start. It takes root, it's not just burnt off. But more than that, it takes over. It's not just choked off, but it begins to bear fruit, fruit in abundance.

And Jesus says, you will also see that. Yes, you will. Indeed, you'll see that in abundance. There will be an astonishing yield as you sow the word.

And it may not seem dramatic. It may take much more time than it takes for you to see some of these other things. It may never even be seen by you, the sower.

It may be by another reaper. And ultimately, it will only be on the day of harvest when the true fruitfulness is seen. But it will be, says Jesus. It will be. Wherever God's word is at work, there shall be a harvest.

There shall be a harvest of fruit that will last and that will be abundant. And that's a promise. That's a certainty. That's a guarantee. So in closing, let's be clear what Jesus is saying here.

[36 : 03] First, what he's saying to his disciples then and today. He's saying this. You may have many questions. Yes. There may be some things that are hard to grasp now.

Yes. But know this. God knows what he's doing. The gospel is not a failure, even though many people scoff and reject it.

The gospel itself is the beginning of God's judgment. One day he tells his disciples, you will judge the earth. But today, in the ministry of the gospel, you're already involved in that. That's what you see. And that's why you see what you do see. The gospel divides. So, plead with men and women. Call them to come to Christ and go on doing it, but realize that you will see many turn away.

You must be realistic in our gospel witness. And yet there is courage. There is hope. There is good soil.

[37 : 07] God has promised that. There's absolutely nothing wrong with the seed. There's no need to change the seed. Jesus doesn't trade in his seed for a new hybrid variety of the gospel that is much more seeker friendly and won't cause offense.

No! He says, go on sowing the offensive seed, the divisive seed, and keep sowing, knowing that a harvest shall come, that it's absolutely certain, that it's vast beyond your wildest imaginings, and that only the harvest time itself will reveal the true magnitude.

Scatter the seed. Scatter it as far and wide as you can, because God has promised, and God has prepared good soil. That's what he's saying to his disciples today, as in those days.

But secondly, we mustn't forget verse nine. Jesus does appeal to everyone in the crowd, everyone who's listening, everyone who might appear to perhaps be an interested party in Jesus.

And he says, whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. Listen, he says, think about the gospel, ask questions, take my word seriously. God's word is powerful.

[38 : 24] Do not resist it when you hear it. It has the power to judge your hearts, and it is judging your heart every time you hear it, including today.

Open your heart, he says, to Jesus and his word. God's word. What are you doing with his words today? That's what he's asking the crowd this morning.

Don't harden your heart and ignore it. Don't let frothy frivolity keep out the real challenge of a word that must go deep into your heart. Don't let the cares and the fashions of this world creep up and crowd out your heart so that ultimately there is no room for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Don't do that. What are you doing with the gospel of Jesus Christ today? Open your heart to him, Jesus says, and he will fill it abundantly with treasures new and treasures old.

But be warned, if you begin to close your heart to the word of the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, he will begin to veil that light to you until at last no light at all remains.

[39 : 50] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even that which he has will be taken away. Don't play games with the word of the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of God is a double-edged sword. Amen. Let's pray. We thank you, Lord, that you are a God who speaks a word of power.

And we humbly ask this morning that every one of us here would be hearing with a listening ear, seeking light with eyes that long to see and have more, opening hearts to you, not closing them, that we might be found at the last to be fruitful servants, those who have loved your word, have received it, have taken it in, and have let it grow and bear fruit.

Help us, we pray, and soften our hearts today, because we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.