

Mark 4:1-20

“Heart Conditions”

After a brief (definitely not exhaustive) search on the internet I discovered that regarding the heart there are in the upwards of 60 different diagnosed diseases or conditions none of which point to anything positive. They all point to *problems*; and anytime there's a problem with a person's heart it's a serious matter that can have an adverse if not fatal effect on their life. and To have a good heart check every once in a while would certainly be wise.

Today in our text Jesus issues a heart check, only with regard to His diagnosis He's not nearly as complex. Jesus points *out* and narrows it down *to* 4 potential positions, 3 of which will be detrimental to you ultimately if not dealt with properly. Of course the web sites that I viewed are dealing with the heart physically, Jesus diagnoses our heart spiritually, He's looking to, searching *after* and desiring to get a grip *on* your heart. God is always searching our heart, and He wants your heart to be healthy, He wants your heart to be pure, to be *willing* to receive instruction, to be yielded to His work, taking you and making you more like Christ. He wants us to have a heart of wisdom and understanding, of obedience, trust, that retains His words. Understand that in your bible there are no less than 832 references to the heart. Now that should tell you something, God's interested in your heart, places a premium on your heart. So let me encourage you; *open* your heart today to the Lord, it's time for an exam, let Him search you, challenge you, and change you for His glory.

As we slide into the scene here in Mark Ch 4 understand that though the Ch has changed the day has not. It's been a busy day for Jesus already and it's only getting busier; remember Mark is the gospel on the go. After selecting the 12 to be His personal protégés, to spend time with Him, learn of Him and be equipped by Him you recall they went into a house. But hey don't be deceived, He wasn't about to get any “down” time, it's not like He needed to eat or anything right? and So the mercy of the multitude was about to allow for that; they went into a house probably hoping for a little rest, instead they were pressed in on by the crowd such to the extent that they didn't have time to eat. Jesus was just so giving Himself over to the needs of the people that He didn't even take the time to meet His *own* need of physical nourishment.

His family hearing this news decided it was too much, Jesus had finally flipped His lid and He must be out of His mind. Meanwhile having ministered the word of God He delivered a demon possessed man who was both blind and mute only to have a certified delegation of religious leaders from Jerusalem make an official declaration that He was operating under the power of Satan himself. and So after engaging them, and seeking to enlighten them He issued a warning to them regarding the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit in pointing out Jesus as the only acceptable sacrifice for the sin of the world and apart from Him there's no forgiveness. and In rejecting Him in that moment they were teetering dangerously close to the point of no return, cutting themselves off completely from Christ and any and all hope for forgiveness.

Having finished up with them it was back to family matters, there they were calling for Him, wanting Him to come with them. and The people said to Him, “Jesus, Your mom, and

Your brothers are outside seeking You.” and Jesus said, “Who is My mother and My brothers? It’s whoever does the will of God, these are My brothers, My sisters, and My mother.” Was He disrespecting His family? Not at all, search the scriptures you’ll find Him placing *major* importance upon the family.

But rather He was pointing out that as important as family is, of even higher priority is to be apart of the family of God. and That isn’t something you inherit, something that’s genetically passed on, you’re not born into it through the flesh, you have to be *born again* by the Spirit of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and the flesh profits nothing, it’s the Spirit who gives life. We’re born again by faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sin and our reconciliation to God.

Now before we press on I just want to take a moment and draw your attention to the fact that here at the end of Ch 3 is the only place in the gospel of Mark that we see Mary the mother of Jesus in the equation and she failed. She didn’t understand Jesus, was confused about Jesus, didn’t fully get what was going on *with* Jesus. Oh she loved Him, don’t misunderstand, but didn’t really comprehend Him, failed in her understanding *of* Him. Why do I point that out? Because you need to know that despite the fact that our Roman Catholic friends purport her as sinless, a co-redemptory alongside of Jesus, the scriptures declare no such thing. Outside of Christ *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, there are *none* that are righteous, no not one. Was she blessed? Absolutely, was she sinless, absolutely not, was she a perpetual virgin? No, right here and in other places we see the brothers and even sisters of Jesus. and If Jesus didn’t come to her here when she called for Him, why would one think that there’s a special inside approach to Him through her? Why not go to Him directly? When they said, “Your mom wants a word with You.” He said, “Who’s my mother?” Being in the family of God is of higher priority to Jesus than family according to the flesh.

So it’s been a busy day so far, in Ch 4 it continues to get even more demanding. Ministry can be demanding, that’s why it’s so important that you be *called* to it, because if you just try and make a *career* of it you’ll never last, not if you’re *truly* seeking to minister. There’s only more and more that needs done, that demands your attention, and often times people don’t understand it, but you’ve got to be busy about your Father’s business. Is alone time, family time important, absolutely, you’ve got to learn the balance, and even that is tough. But true ministry is a whole lot like hard work...

Vs1-2

If I could have your attention for just a moment before we launch into what Jesus has to share with us and say to us in the following Vs we notice again in Vs 1 that Jesus (leaving the house) began again to teach by the sea (that is the sea of Galilee). and So see the scene here’s the Living Word teaching the word there on the beach before the people, and the longer He teaches the more and more people begin to press in around Him. We read that a “great multitude” was gathered to Him. Now here in couple Ch’s we’ll see where Jesus and His disciples got in a boat and the crowd trickled around the sea shore until they came to the place where they off loaded and there we discover that there were 5,000 men not including women or children. So if you average a wife and one child per man you’re looking at about 15,000 people give or take a few thousand (conservatively) that are gathering around Him and pressing in on Him. (That gives you a bit of an idea at the kind of crowds that were coming to Him.) and

Someone along the way had discovered that if you could even touch Jesus you'd be healed of whatever affliction may be plaguing you. and So you'd listen to what He had to say but primarily people were wanting to get close to Him, they were pressing in on Him, wanting to be healed by Him. You remember from a couple weeks ago that He had to have a get away boat ready because people were pressing in so hard He was in danger of literally being crushed.

and That's what we see here, so many were gathered to Him that He got into a boat, pushed back away from the people, and dropped anchor so that using the natural acoustics of the water He could teach them with out being overwhelmed by them.

So once again we note the importance of the *teaching* of God's word. There were no doubt hundreds if not thousands of people there that day who'd have benefited from Jesus' healing hand. However He didn't prioritize that, His priority was upon that which would help them eternally, not so much that which would only benefit them temporarily. So He taught them, gave life lessons through the word of God *to* them.

Now I've told you before that the gospel of Mark focuses mainly on the *works* of Jesus as opposed to the *words* of Jesus. But this one of but a few times that Mark pauses to place attention on one of Jesus' teachings. and He doesn't give us *everything* that Jesus taught that day, but He does give some of what He taught and he tells us that Jesus was teaching (at this point) by *parables*.

Up to this point Jesus hadn't been employing parables as a method by which to teach people however now He begins to do just that. Now what is a parable? It's actually a compound word made up of 2 separate words "Para" and "ballo" meaning to cast alongside. "Para" meaning "to come alongside" like a "para-medical" one who comes alongside you to give you medical help. "Ballo" meaning "to throw" or "to cast." The idea being to cast a practical picture alongside a spiritual truth so as to draw us in, engage us and ultimately enlighten us in a deeper way regarding whatever particular point is being taught. But in many ways parables can be to us like a riddle and you really have to search it out, think it through and study it to unlock it. and So they have this way of separating the sincere from the superficial or even the "seeking to find fault" type follower of Christ; if you want the truth it's there for you. If you're not interesting you won't probe any deeper than the surface of the story. and You have to recall that Jesus was just judged to be in league with Satan, so now He begins to change His approach, challenging people to really seek Him, not simply be amused by Him, or fascinated with Him, but really begin to think about what He's saying, the things He's sharing. and As always with Jesus He brings us to a point of decision, having heard Him we have to decide where we're at and what we're going to do about it...with that we read beginning in Vs 3

Vs 3-9

Now I'm fighting an uphill battle here because this is one of the most famous parables that Jesus ever taught and if you've been a believer for any amount of time at all you've more than likely both heard this parable and have had it explained for you. But if you will, just voluntarily delete from your memory the fact that you've heard this before and imagine that this is the very 1st time you've ever heard it and you can begin to glean a little bit of what these people are seeking to assimilate, take in and learn from.

Jesus is speaking to an agrarian culture, readily familiar with what it means to sow seed and reap a harvest. and There they are lining the shores and listening to Him, and seeking to get

their attention He shouts, “Listen!” Which makes me feel better, even the most gifted teacher who’s ever graced the earth with His presence had to get people’s attention at times so they’d dial in and pay attention. and He says, “You see a sower went out to sow, and as he cast his seed some fell by the wayside and was immediately snatched up by the birds.”

“Some fell on soil that had bedrock underneath it and so it grew fast but when the sun beat down on it, it was scorched and withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and was choked out, and still more fell on good ground and produced a crop some 30, some 60, and some 100 fold...Does everybody understand what I’m talking about?” and Everybody is going (ah, nodding head) “No.” I mean, what does this mean?

There where Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” He’s not talking so much about listening with your physical ears as He is really seeking it out and soaking it up; study up on it, dive into it, discern and obey it. Having an ear to hear is synonymous with understanding it and making application of it.

Now in that day they didn’t farm like we do today, there fields weren’t always neat squares with barbed wire fence around it. There maybe a walking path that runs through it, or around the edges of it, the field might have an odd shape to it with other things that surround it. and They didn’t make these nice little furrows, then come back and plant the seed. They just went out and scattered seed liberally after they burned off their fields getting rid of whatever thorn bushes they might see on the surface and all, but then after the seed was scattered they’d plow it with their relatively crude instruments and that was the process that would work the seed into the soil. and It’s not uncommon in that part of the world to have portions of land with a bedrock layer that you can’t see because it’s a few inches deep. and So as you’re sowing you’re throwing seed all over the place, some of it lands in/on the walking paths, some of it over the bedrock areas you couldn’t see. Others in the areas you burned off but the roots of various thorn bushes and all were still under the surface. But you’d had good areas as well and they’d take the seed in, send the shoot up and bring forth fruit. (Agrarian culture, industrial culture, impact on kids)

But I want you to notice that Jesus is challenging people on how it is that they *hear*. Often times we sit and critique the speaker, and like the Olympics when he’s done we’re prepared to hold up our score cards and give them an overall rating of what we thought. (How was the delivery, how much practical application, any points deducted for the over usage of “you knows” or “ums”) and We graft an opinion of a given speaker, and that’s fine we all do it to a greater or lesser degree, but here the challenge goes out to consider not how something is being said, but rather how it is that you and I are hearing it, taking it in, being ready to respond to it, it’s putting not the speaker under the pressure but rather the hearer. Check it out

Vs10-12

I like this because His disciples are right there in the front row and they’re all nodding their heads knowingly, issuing forth power point “Amen’s” to underscore His words. But then when they get Him alone they’re all, “Um, You know that parable about the seed, and the soil and all?” “Yeah” “What exactly did You mean by that?”

and Jesus says, “To you it’s been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God.” Now when the bible talks about a mystery understand that it’s not saying its something that if

you put together the clues you'd figure it out. A biblical mystery is something that's impossible to know outside of Divine revelation. If God didn't tell you, you wouldn't get it, but when God unveils this particular truth, you come into an awareness previously unknown. and There are different "mysteries" that have been revealed to us in the NT. We read of the mystery of lawlessness, the mystery of godliness, the mystery of Christ, and here we're reading of the mystery of the kingdom of God. Previously veiled but now revealed. and He says, "You guys have the privilege of this insight, but those outside do not."

Paul said that like this, "*...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" 1 Cor 2:14 If you're in Christ there's a measure of spiritual discernment that's been given to you that those outside of Christ simply don't have. and So seeing they don't see, hearing they don't hear and understand.

and Where we read, "Lest they should turn and their sins be forgiven them." Understand that Jesus isn't saying, "God doesn't want to save them." We know that God's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. The bottom line here is that God will honor the position and the persuasion of men's hearts. He's putting the truth out there, but if they don't want to see it, they won't see it, if they don't want to obey it, they're just not going to get it. Remember at this time there's a lot of tension that's surrounding Jesus now, the official position of the nation has been to reject Him, they've placed Him in league with Satan. and God is honoring their position, their persuasion, if they don't want to see it, then they won't see it.

That's why it's so important that we seek to line ourselves up with what God desires and requires of us. Because He'll honor the position and the persuasion of our hearts as well. If you want to know Him more, understand Him more deeply, then He'll honor that to, and open and unveil His word to you. Notice, to those who sought the Lord, desired understanding *from* the Lord, Jesus readily gives it to them.

No telling what everyone else is thinking. Perhaps the farmer is thinking, "Oh, Jesus is saying I need to be more careful with the way I sow my seed, thanks Jesus." The Politician is thinking, "I need to add a 'purposeful planting' awareness month to my campaign it'll really help my re-election." The reporter is thinking, "There's a story here, we've got a real problem with these birds and we've gotta get this under control" But apart from really seeking Jesus about it, none of them are grasping the spiritual reality of what He's saying.

Vs13

Now this is huge here guys because Jesus is giving us a key so that we can unlock the meaning of all of His parables. Notice He says, "If you don't understand *this* parable, how then will you understand *all* parables." That speaks of what we might call expositional constancy with regard to these parables. What He tells us about the seed here will hold true in all of them, what He tells us about the birds, will hold true in all of them. He's unlocking and unveiling the mystery for us.

Vs14

The sower sows the word. What's the seed? The word of God, who's the sower? Whoever is sharing it. You guys this is critical because if you see the seed as anything else it doesn't accurately unlock the parable. If you see it as money Jesus is saying, "Hey you make a lot of investments some pan out, most won't." It doesn't work, if you see it as love Jesus is

saying, “Send out the love, most the time you’ll be rejected, but occasionally people will respond.” Neat where’s the spiritual benefit in that.

But if we understand that the seed is the word of God, now it begins to make sense. Jesus is saying we’re to scatter abroad the word of God, and the word of God is always fruitful as to it’s *power* but not always fruitful as to it’s *produce*. What makes the difference? How it’s rendered? No, how it’s received, it’s not on the one who’s sending it out, but the one who’s soaking it up. What makes the difference is the type of ground it’s hitting, the condition of the human heart that it’s landing on.

We know this as the parable of the sower, more accurately it’s the parable of the soils, it speaks of the condition of the human heart.

But what we need to understand out of Vs 14 is that we have a responsibility incumbent upon us to share the word of God with people. and We should sow *plentifully* as the farmer did here. The bible says, *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” 2 Cor 9:6* Not only should we sow plentifully we should sow *passionately*. Again we read, *“Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.”* May God instill a burden on our hearts for the lost, sowing plentifully, passionately and *patiently*. We read in *Gal 6:9*, *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”* We should sow plentifully, passionately, and patiently, God will give the increase in His time. There’s a lot of hard work between seedtime and harvest.

Vs15

The wayside heart, the hard heart, simply cold, callused, indifferent to the word and ways of God. Not necessarily hostile, just not interested, “This stuff is for the birds.” and Satan snatches the seed away in an instant, this person doesn’t really give a 2nd thought to the word. But this tells us something, something that’s been coming up around here quite a bit lately. There’s spiritual warfare involved when it comes to sowing and reaping in people’s lives. Satan doesn’t want you to receive the word of God. So he’ll do what he can to snatch that seed out of your heart. and That’s another reason we try to keep distractions to a minimum in the sanctuary. God’s dealing with someone’s heart, they’re on the edge of an eternal decision, or accepting some challenge, some change the Spirit is directing them toward, someone gets up and excuses themselves and “boom” they’re distracted, the thought evaporates, the seed has been snatched. The word that was sown in their heart has been taken away. The hard heart, not really interested.

Vs16-17

These are the “flash in the pan” “fireworks” display kinda Christian. The shallow heart. They hear the word, they’re blown away by the word, it starts doing something in their lives and people are blown away over how fast everything is changing for them. Then a month, or 3 goes by, and suddenly they disappear, its like, “Where’s so and so.” and Often times these people will become hostile toward the Lord, it’s like “I tried Jesus it didn’t work for me!” and I would challenge you on that point because you may’ve tried something but it wasn’t Jesus because He’ll never let you down. People think Christianity will make life easy, it doesn’t, but this kind of person lives in the moment, makes decisions on impulse, doesn’t really stop to

consider consequences or count the cost of what it takes to genuinely live for Jesus. and So when the pressure comes, the persecution comes, the “heat” is on they feel like they got burned and they toss in the towel and walk away. and As quick they decided to live for Jesus, they decide to walk away, notice Jesus uses the word “Immediately” twice with regard to these people. They’re in and out, unstable, no root, nothing has the time to become established in them.

Vs18-19

This is the crowded heart. Jesus has appointed us that we should bear fruit, that we should bear much fruit that the Father might be glorified. and It’s not that this person doesn’t receive the seed, it’s that they receive everything else as well. They don’t refuse *anything*, they want the best of both worlds, the pleasures of this world with the benefits of being in Christ. and To me in our culture this particular category is the most dangerous. Because many will receive the word, but they won’t repent of their sin and remove the weeds. There’s no spiritual round up being sprayed in the soil of their hearts. and A gardener can’t only love the fruit, he/she has to hate the weeds or it just won’t work.

I attempted to plant a garden once. Me and my wife sowed a # of things that we thought would be great to harvest. But then I discovered that if you’re not tending to it *everyday*, at times multiple times in a day weeds will overtake it. and It didn’t take me too long to discover that I didn’t want the fruit bad enough to keep the weeds away. That took discipline, time, effort, and energy, and I began to realize that I couldn’t have both, it was either going to be weeds, or a garden but there was nothing fruitful about a weed infested garden. I chose weeds.

But with regard to spiritual matters it’s imperative that we choose garden, that we uproot the weeds of our heart and cultivate the seed, the word, that it might bring forth fruit.

What are the thorns in this life that choke out the word? #1 The cares of this world. Making ends meet, making sure my kids get through school, am I going to have a job tomorrow, how am I going to fare on that test...? and It’s not wrong to be concerned with these things but if we’re not careful they can consume us, paralyze us and render us unfruitful. #2 The deceitfulness of riches. “More money is going to make it all better.” As if money is the answer, Christ is the answer. (Let me read to you from Luke Ch 12 Vs 16-21, 29-30)

The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and #3 The desire for other things. “What’s that?” Anything that #’s 1 and 2 didn’t cover that takes priority over your pursuit of God and gets rooted in your heart and begins to choke out His word. Someone once said, “Money has a way of binding us to that which is physical and temporal, and blinding us to that which is spiritual and eternal. The Hard heart, the Shallow heart, and the Crowded heart, the enemies of the believer, Satan, the flesh, and the world.

Vs20

The fruitful heart. There’s evidence of the Spirit’s work in this person’s life. The bible says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, (inner attitudes sourced in God) longsuffering, kindness, goodness, (relational qualities expressed to others) faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (personal qualities that guides individual conduct).*” Gal 5:22-23 These are people who are active members of the body of Christ, in someway, somehow they’re available to and being used *by* the Lord. and We readily note varying degrees of fruit, God’s got a different plan for each persons life. We’re not to compare ourselves amongst ourselves, and

quite frankly not everyone will be as fruitful, but the bottom line is there's evidence of the Spirit's work in these people's lives. If there's nothing happening in your life, if God's word is bearing no fruit through you, making no change in you then you're not receiving it as you should.

You see not only does this parable make application to various kinds of people and the condition of their heart. It seems to me that anyone of us could be in any of these categories on any given day. Indifferent to the word of God, unstable and double minded depending on our mood, giving way to the things of this world, or being fruitful for the kingdom of God. Where do you find yourself today? Be open to the Spirit searching your heart, has Satan been snatching the seed, perhaps you're open to it but by the time you get to the parking lot, it'll be gone, shallow, no depth, maybe you're too worried about other things or unwilling to repent of a certain sin in your life so you'll take in the word but it's not going to change the basic pattern of your life. Or are you open, saying "Lord Jesus take my heart, may it be soft and fertile soil, pure and free from the pollution and strangulation of the sin and cares of this world. God may Your word be implanted deeply in me, bringing forth fruit through me, for Your glory, 30, 60, 100 fold, Lord have Your way." Do you have ears to hear this morning?

Prayer Points:

God give us ears to hear, as we look into the mirror of Your word and see the condition of our heart reflected back, God do what you need to do to get us into that fruitful category. May we have pure and pliable hearts, ready to receive Your word and rendering fruit for Your glory. Free us from distracting cares, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust for other things, teach us to be content in Christ, following after You Jesus with all that we are.

Perhaps today you're eyes are opening and you're seeing for the 1st time that your heart isn't where you thought it was and you know you're not right with Christ. Your heart perhaps has been indifferent toward the things of God, maybe you've received the word, but didn't go the distance because you thought it was just too tough, and you're realizing there was no root, you were never really established in Christ. Or maybe you've been trying to have the best of both worlds and you're eyes are opening to the fact that it doesn't work that way, there's no fruit, your heart doesn't belong to Christ, not really. and Today you want to receive Him for the 1st time in a way that says, "Lord, I cast my cares upon You, I open myself up to You, have Your way in me." Open your heart to the Lord, invite Him to come in, to cleanse you, to make Himself real to you and He'll forgive you of your sin and make you brand new.