

The Parables of Our Lord

The Parable of “The Sower” - Luke 8:5-23

(Part 1 of 2)

Sunday, October 30th 2022

Today, we’re looking at “The Parable of The Sower”. We see this parable in Matthew, in Mark’s Gospel, and of course here in Luke. It is repeated thrice and is absolutely VITAL to our mission in the world as the church so important for us *as the church* to grab ahold of it.

Let’s read this parable together. Luke 8:5-15. And I’m reading from the English Standard Version:

“[5] “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. [6] And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. [7] And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. [8] And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”.

Let’s stop there momentarily because we’ll come back and pick up the explanation that Jesus gives towards the end of our time together but let’s do this in pieces and break down this first part before we move on.

This is a simple story & uses picture language that would have been familiar to anyone who happened to be listening.

- Agrarian society: Most involved in some form of agriculture. The idea that only the seed that made its way onto GOOD soil would yield a crop worth harvesting is something they easily understood. This wasn’t a mystifying concept in any way.

The fields of 1st century Palestine:

- Narrow strips bordered by footpaths. You would likely have found small stone walls here and there on the hillsides, to help with water retention and to help control soil erosion from the rains and so forth.

Sowing in 1st century Palestine:

- Seed was sown by hand and was thrown in such a way as to cover large areas of land with evenly scattered seed.
- It was inevitable that some of the seed would have fallen outside the boundaries of a freshly plowed field onto the footpaths and other inhospitable soil types.

Jesus identifies four different types of soil:

- The **first** is the “pathway” soil (or wayside soil/roadside soil). This is the soil that we find in the footpaths at the field’s borders.
 - Well-beaten
 - Hard like concrete
 - Seed that lands there gets eaten by the birds pretty quickly.
- The **second** type of soil that Jesus identifies is “rock”. This describes a rock-bed under the field’s surface, which is covered by a shallow layer of good soil on top.
 - The seed would germinate. But the roots can’t get past that rock-bed layer and once the sun comes out and the water is gone, it dies just as fast. It doesn’t develop those deep root systems which are necessary to sustain it in those kinds of stresses.

- The **third** soil that Jesus speaks of is “thorny” aka weed-infested soil. Sticker bushes, thistles, etc. - useless for agricultural purposes.
 - Weed-infested soil is harmful to crops because the weeds there colonize the field and choke out everything else. A sower who broadcasts his seed into a field of weeds has no hope that the seed would ever grow and mature into a healthy harvest.
- The **fourth** type of soil Jesus mentions is “fertile” soil.
 - Seed that lands in fertile, plowed fields will flourish. It will germinate and its roots will have room to grow deeply. **It’s the only soil that has to be prepared.**

The other three soil types are what happens when NOTHING is done to the soil. They’re the default, natural state. It’s only the GOOD SOIL that had to be “worked”, “prepared”, and “plowed”. Seed that lands there will produce an abundant crop.

Three CRITICAL points to remember:

- **Nothing whatsoever is said about the sower OR his seed-sowing-skills.** The only difference between the seed that yields a hundredfold harvest and the seed that gets eaten by the birds has absolutely NOTHING to do with the sower’s METHOD in throwing and broadcasting the seed. And secondly, and equally critical, is that
- **Nothing whatsoever is said about the quality of the seed.** It comes from the same source and the seed that bears an abundant, fruitful harvest is the exact same seed that gets choked out by the thorns.
- **THE SOIL** is the focus of the parable.

And the true significance and meaning of what Jesus is teaching here isn’t immediately obvious. The parable has to be explained. And so Jesus urges His listeners to discover the true meaning

of this parable. And that's made clear when in the last part of verse 8 Jesus says, "*As He said these things, He cried out, 'he who has ears to hear, let him hear'*". He's stressing the need to pay attention, to listen with a believing heart, and to look beyond the surface for the true meaning of the parable. And actually, Jesus reinforces that point a little later in verse 18 shortly after He had explained this parable, saying "*Take care then how you hear...*".

But before Jesus explains this parable, He says something that usually freaks people out. He says, "...*To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand'*". This is from Isaiah (6:9), "*Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive*".

Most of us assume that the point of Jesus's parables was to better explain His teaching. But Jesus's parables had a double purpose. "For those with ears to hear", parables were given to clarify deeper truths of what He taught. But for those who didn't have ears to hear, His parables were spoken to them in order to VEIL the truth of the Gospel. Why? Because to the hard-hearted hearers (those who DIDN'T have ears to hear and who were stiff-necked and who didn't WANT to hear the Word of God), parables were a form of divine judgment!

It's like God is saying, "You don't WANT to listen to Me? I won't LET you listen to Me". God *will* give people over to their sins. So He would say "Let your hardened heart be even harder. Let your stiff-neck be stiffer. If that's what you want, that's what you're gonna get".

In past studies of parables, we established that one of the main "themes" of the Parables of our Lord was to reveal the "mysteries" of the Kingdom of God. "Mysteries" refers to spiritual truths

that were unknown before or were hidden by the Old Testament that are now being revealed in the New Testament. **Examples:**

- Ephesians 3:5 - "...which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit".
- Ephesians 6:19 - "...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel".
- Colossians 4:3 - "At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison".

These are all examples of truths that weren't fully uncovered in the Old Testament but were now revealed in the New Testament.

Jesus was speaking these parables to them in such a way as to hide the deeper truth from the ears of unbelievers but no one was kept from understanding against his or her will. He encouraged everyone to seek out understanding.

- Luke 8:18 - "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." The **response** of the listener is what separated those who believed from those who didn't believe so that to those who didn't believe, the parable would just conceal the truth even more.

What did Jesus say to the disciples who desired to understand?

- Matthew 13:16-17 - "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 longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it".

Later, Peter connects those dots:

- 1 Peter 1:10-12 - *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look”.*

Let's briefly examine the Lord's explanation of this parable. Luke 8:11-15:

*“**[11]** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **[12]** The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **[13]** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. **[14]** And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **[15]** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience”.*

There are folks who think he's supposed to represent Christ Himself because in The Parable Of The Tares, He said, *“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man”* (Matt 13:37). But these are totally different parables and the imagery isn't even the same. We aren't to combine the details or the elements of one parable with another. For example, in THIS parable, The Parable Of The Sower, we're **explicitly** told that the seed represents the Word of God (and as we'll see, the cultivated field represents the heart that's been prepared to receive the Word). But in The Parable Of The Tares (Matthew 13:24-30), the good seed represents “the sons of the

kingdom” which are the genuine residents of the Kingdom of God (true believers) and “the field” - in that parable - “is the world”. So we have to be very careful not to mingle the different elements of the parables with one another. The sower in this parable is **not** explicitly identified because his identity isn’t important. He represents anyone who sows the seed of the Word of God through preaching/teaching/evangelism/various encouragements/etc. The sower is whoever sows the Word.

The entire focus of the parable is the SOIL. You cannot get the meat of this parable **without** understanding that the soil here is a representation of the heart. Verse 12 here in Luke 8 proves that: “*The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word **from their hearts**, so that they may not believe and be saved*”. The heart IS where the seed of God’s Word takes root. We see that in verse 15, “*As for that in the **good soil**, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and **good heart**, and bear fruit with patience*”. And the only difference between one soil and another is whether they’re in the right condition for producing fruit (or not).

The SKILL of the sower and the QUALITY of the seed is not even in view. The seed is perfect (it’s the Word of God). And anything that a sower would do to “improve the yield of the crop” by using different types of seed has totally failed in his basic duty. If the entire point of sowing was to produce lots of plants that produce no fruit, then the sower could sow weeds which would sprout and grow fast but never bear fruit. But accursed is the sower who tries to produce a harvest that way. The only real-deal, pure seed is the Word. And the sower is anybody who sows the Gospel.

So the lesson of this parable is that a person's response to God's Word is dependent on the condition of that person's heart. And beyond that, FRUIT in a life is the only evidence that a person has actually heard the Word of God rightly.

This is a foundational-level parable. This speaks to the most important role of the church in the world which is evangelism. The New Testament exhorts us to live in such a way as to strengthen the testimony of our lips with the way we lead our lives. Sanctification causes us to look more like Christ and less like us and that bolsters our evangelism. Dying to self-centeredness, being transformed more and more into the image of Christ, strengthens our evangelism. Living a life marked by an affection and love for Christ and by patient endurance under various trials, and by manifesting joy in the midst of our lives when things go south, causes us to look more like Him. And that fortifies our evangelism. He shows the world His transformative power in us when He displays us to them. This parable is about evangelism. It's NOT about monetary harvests. It's NOT about sowing a seed in order to reap a financial return. Verse 12 gives us the proof that this parable is about evangelism, as symbolized by the work of the sower. "*The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not **believe and be saved***". The sower's whole goal is that people would come to "believe and be saved". There's only one way to accomplish that goal: proclaim the Gospel. The sower is an evangelist. He desires for a harvest of souls into the Kingdom of God.

Some abandon the sower's job. They've decided that casting seed around is too old-fashioned and uncultured. And so they create what they believe is a much better use for the field in which they are supposed to sow. They'll turn it into a big music festival, or carnival, or whatever.

A quote from a preacher that I think is apropos in describing the modern church and the awful state it has seemed to find itself in:

“Let’s say that a King had a bride. He loved her, he dressed her in white, she was pure and precious to him. And the people admired her for her virtue, for her merit. And the King has to go on a long journey and so he calls his steward in and he says “Here are the directions and you are to care for my bride. You do not deviate from this, not one jot or tittle, and when I come back you will be rewarded. Or I’ll come back and you will be severely punished. Keep this book, these instructions with regard to her.” Well after a few years, this steward realizes that the people are losing their loyalty in the King and they’re no longer concerned about the bride because, well she’s just “prudish”. She’s “old fashioned”. So, he takes off her beautiful white garment and replaces it with something really sensual, paints her face like a prostitute, and then marches her up and down the kingdom and uses this new look to attract carnal men back into the kingdom. When that King comes back, there are no words to describe what he will do to that steward. And when Jesus Christ comes back, there are no words to describe what He will do to many of these men who call themselves “Pastors” who have done to His Bride exactly what the steward did in that parable I just told.”

(Paul Washer, G3 Conference, Atlanta, GA - 2017)