

The Parables of Our Lord

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

(Part 2 of 2)

Sunday, November 6th 2022

We return to “The Parable of The Sower” for Part 2 of our study. 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. [9] And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, [10] he said, “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.’ [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”.

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.

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.

This parable is NOT a how-to lesson in agriculture nor is it about gardening. And the deeper meaning of this story/parable Jesus gives them is not clear at first to the folks listening to Him tell it - it had to be explained. And He’s highlighting the need to pay close attention, and to listen with an open heart. He’s asking “Are you *hearing* this story? Are you paying close *attention*?”

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".

So the only ones who were able to grab ahold of the meaning of the parables were true, authentic believers who had been given "ears to hear", those who DESIRED to know the truth. And Jesus encouraged everyone within earshot to try and understand; He didn't exclude anyone against their desire to learn. Later in verse 18, He says, "*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 so to those who didn't believe, the parable would just conceal the truth even more.

The Lord explains the parable. From verse 11 we're told that the seed represents the Word of God.

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.

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.

There are countless examples of modern evangelical churches coming up with all sorts of really weird, completely unbiblical, aberrant ways and methods in their evangelism because they actually believe that they can get a better response from hard, shallow, or worldly hearts by changing “the seed” entirely and even attempt to “update/reimagine the Gospel” to be more culturally “appropriate” or more inclusive of non-believers. They’ll tone down the offensive nature of the Cross. They leave out all the hard & unpopular stuff and often they replace the Gospel with a completely different portrayal of the Word altogether. Before long, you’ve got carnivals and Las Vegas-style shows designed to entertain people.

Now the Four Soils and Representative Heart Conditions:

1. **The “footpath” soil.** The “roadside” or “wayside” soil might be the most unsettling and depressing of all the heart conditions Jesus speaks of.
 - This hardened, dry, stomped-on soil is a picture of a human heart that’s totally resistant and impervious to the Gospel. Its unbelief and love for sin totally blind this person. They’re spiritually dead and they’re wide open to the schemes of satan in their lives.
 - The Old Testament refers to hearers like this as “stiff-necked”. The words of the Lord in Jeremiah 19:15 (ESV) say, *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words”*. So it’s implied very clearly that these hearers have **DELIBERATELY** stiffened their necks and hardened their own hearts. Another account: 2 Chronicles (36:13) talking about a king named Zedekiah it says, *“He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel”*. He closed his own heart and his own will against repenting and coming

to the Lord in submission, deliberately. The same type of hard-hearted people murdered Stephen by stoning in Acts 7: *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you”*. This heart is pictured as a footpath: well-worn, parched, and totally barren. It’s an expressway. It’s been criss-crossed and traversed by so much evil and sin that now it’s calcified. It’s never been plowed by any conviction or difficult self-examination and it’s totally indifferent to God’s judgment and the final accounting.

- Exhortation: Sin **will** harden a heart. It **is** possible to sear our consciences. And God **will** give people over to their sin. A terrifying reminder that when we LOVE our sin, we CAN get to a point that we no longer feel any conviction. Let us die to self, let us stay close to Christ, let us examine our own hearts, and pray that we NEVER come to that place.
- Jesus is talking to religious people - not atheists. The hardest hearts of all belonged to those of the religious upper echelon, the scribes and the Pharisees. **We** shouldn’t be ignorant of the potential for hardened hearts within ourselves so let us all keep vigilant against this potential.

The hardened heart is one at the mercy of satan’s schemes and we shouldn’t be ignorant about how the devil snatches the Word from people’s hearts. *“...then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”* (Luke 8:12). He mixes truth with lies and he’s deceitful. If we were to assign an IQ score to him, it would be in the millions. He’s a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). In 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, Paul even says, *“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds”*. Servants of righteousness! He loves to confuse people through his false teachers

who appear to come in the Lord's name but who actually attack the Gospel in very sneaky ways. He manipulates through sinful passions, egos, fear, insecurities, hatred, guilt, the esteem of others, etc. He knows "*people love darkness rather than light because their works are evil*", according to John 3:19. Eventually, through those methods, he keeps these hearts from the truth of the Word.

2. **The shallow soil**: This pictures a shallow-hearted person who hears the Word and responds straight away but only on the surface-level. Verse 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*". These plants are ones that die before ever reaching the stage where they'd be mature enough to produce any fruit.
 - Many people respond to the Gospel this way. These are people who actually seem genuinely interested and who seem truly receptive. They "receive the Word with joy". They're energized by it; they're excited by it. But there are no roots. Verse 13 says, "*they believe for a while*". At least intellectually, they're open. But there's a hostile environment that's just waiting to test the authenticity of its roots. Anyone who responds at all to the Word of God **WILL** go through a time of testing/trial etc. In my case, I was IMMEDIATELY tested for a season. And I'm continually tested. When trials and tests come; they aren't for God's benefit to see if you pass or fail. He already KNOWS the results of that. Trials and times of testing are for US. To act as a diagnostic for US. So that WE know in those times WHO it is we trust. The faith of all new disciples of Christ in our own day will always be put to the test and you won't be able to fake a true, authentic abiding belief in Christ. No matter how happy or ecstatic a person's initial response to the Gospel may be in the beginning, if it's superficial and it lacks roots, then that person WILL fall away.

- John 8:31 - *“if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples”*
- Hebrews 3:14 - *“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end”*
- Colossians 1:23 - *“...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard”*

There's usually a lot of outward signs of apparent conversion **AT FIRST**. I think we assume that are more outwardly ecstatic or emotional are in many ways more genuine than the restraint of a genuine believer who is moved by conviction over his own sin that all he feels is a profound sense of brokenness and appreciation & gratitude for what he's just received.

A tragedy in mass evangelism in America:

- Evangelist holds a huge rally
- Give an emotionally-charged sermon
- Give an altar call to come forward to give their lives to Jesus
- They make a profession of faith in Christ.
- **BUT**: Studies show where after a short time, the vast majority of the people who went forward to make a decision for Christ weren't even walking with the Lord anymore and never showed any signs of genuine repentance or conversion.
- **WHY**: Even in our spiritually dead condition, we can still perceive something of the Gospel's benefits. We're made in the image of God, we have the capacity to feel guilt. So, oftentimes when the Gospel of free grace and forgiveness is preached, they jump at the offer. But it's an emotional response; it's superficial. It's NOT a response that originates from the deepest places of the heart.
- **Exhortation**: We aren't justified by a profession of faith; but rather by a possession of genuine faith. REAL conversion will turn a life UPSIDE DOWN. So the real question is

ARE you converted? Not that you answered an altar call, not that you raised your hand at a prayer meeting, not that you repeated the sinner's prayer, not that you signed a membership form at church. ARE YOU CONVERTED? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in your heart? Has your life been changed by the grace of God? Jesus that only fruit will be the measure.

3. **The thorny soil**: This represents a heart who is completely distracted by worldly matters. In Verse 14, Jesus says, *"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"*. The parable suggests that even with this soil, there's likely to be a sign of SOME reception on their part. But as they go on their way, they're choked out by the cares and riches and so forth. At first they certainly seem to be following the faith.
- This soil describes a heart that is too in-love, too worried, too obsessed with the values of this world. The love of worldly values like ambition, sinful pleasures, money, prestige, politics, conspiracy theories, whatever - an overemphasis on things which are totally unimportant, inconsequential diversions will flood into that heart and stifle the truth of God's Word.
 - Luke 16:13 - *"No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money"*.
 - 1 Timothy 6:9-10 - *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs"*.

Why would a “pastor” tell his congregants that God wants them to desire wealth when the Word of God declares that desiring it brings a soul into **RUIN**?

- James 4:4 - “*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*”

- 1 John 2:15 - “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him*”.

Material wealth IN AND OF ITSELF is NOT inherently evil or sinful and neither is pleasure if these things are ordered correctly in our life in such a way that glorifies God. What IS evil and what IS sinful are when those gifts are loved more than the Giver. The account of the Rich Young Ruler is an example of thorny soil. He was a lover of the world, and obviously Jesus knew it. After what Jesus spoke to him, he left sorrowful, because he was extremely rich. He loved the world and the world’s values more than he loved God or his neighbor.

The footpath heart, the shallow-soil heart, and the thorny heart all have something in common: **none of them bring any fruit to maturity**. Now, the singular point of agriculture is to produce a harvest, so if a particular soil produces no harvest, we’d say that it’s pretty useless (at least for agriculture). In this parable, ALL of these three soils failed to produce any fruit.

4. **The fertile soil**: This soil is well cultivated and well prepared to produce a crop worthy of a harvest. In Verse 15, Jesus says “...*those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience*”. This is the prepared heart. This heart has been so well-prepared that when they hear the Gospel, they receive it with

understanding and they receive it with a real, authentic faith. They “hold it fast” meaning they’re hanging on to it with a tight grip and they won’t let it go.

The fruit in this parable includes:

- A. **The fruit of the Spirit** from Galatians 5:22-23 “...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*”.
- B. **The fruit of genuine worship.** Hebrews 13:15, “*Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name*” (Hebrews 13:15).
- C. **The fruit of leading people to Christ.** All of these are examples of the fruit Jesus spoke of when He gave this parable.

This soil is representative of those who bear fruit with patience. Fruitfulness is the perfectly REASONABLE result that you would expect when possessing a saving faith. We’re told that “faith without works is dead” in James. This can only happen in a heart that has been plowed, cleared of stone and weeds, and has been well-prepared.

But now we see a problem: Though we all have a DUTY to prepare our hearts to receive the Word, we can't accomplish the business of soil preparation ourselves. We came to the party as guilty sinners and showed up with shallow, weed-infested hearts filled with hostility and rebellion. Only God Himself can plow and prepare the hearts we showed up with to receive His Word. He does that through regenerative and sanctification. Romans 8:11 says that God awakens our hearts spiritually.

Exhortation: Father, KEEP us tender, KEEP us receptive, and ultimately make us FRUITFUL. We are commanded to remain faithfully DEPENDENT on Him. We must come to

Him with trust and in submission, allowing Him to do whatever is necessary in us and in our hearts to do that which we cannot do for ourselves. Psalm 51 (ESV), “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*”. That’s the spirit in which we should approach God: with brokenness, contrition, and submission. Relying on Him to affect change our hearts, to prepare our hearts to receive His glorious, life-giving Word.

Exhortation: We are **all** to be sowers of the Word of God and when we’re sowing faithfully, the RESULTS will always vary according to the condition of our hearer’s heart, therefore: success or failure DOES NOT DEPEND ON OUR SKILL AS SOWERS. And the result doesn’t belong to us anyway. Some of the seed we scatter WILL fall on hard, shallow, thorny soil. But there is NOTHING wrong with the seed itself. So just KEEP SOWING. If we’re faithful in our duty as sowers of God’s Word, then some of the seed we sow WILL find its way onto well-plowed soil, prepared by God’s own Hand, and the result will be abundant fruit.