

“The Parable of the Sower and the Soils”

November 24, 2019

Luke 8:1-15

I. Introduction

As we begin, I’ve got a couple of questions for you. First, how many years did Jesus go about Israel preaching and ministering to people’s needs—spiritual and physical? The answer is 3 years. The second question is a little harder: as we come to **Luke 8**, how much time is left before Jesus’ crucifixion? The answer is about 1 year is left.

As God Incarnate, Jesus knew the plan for His life—early in His ministry Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:14-15**, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” If Christianity was going to grow after Jesus “is lifted up” and then returned to the Father, Jesus needed to train men to continue where He left off. Rather than choosing religiously trained and influential leaders, Jesus chose twelve common, ordinary men from the backwoods country to carry out this important job. For that matter, rather than spending His time in Jerusalem among the influential and powerful people, Jesus spent much of His time with common people, especially the poor and outcasts of society. This led to the religious elite looking down on Him and saying in **Luke 7:34**, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’”

Throughout all three years of His ministry, Jesus preached the Gospel—in a variety of ways, He said, as He did in **John 14:6**: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” During the last 15 months or so of His life on earth, He also began training the 12 chosen Apostles to pick up where He would leave off. This is what we see Jesus do beginning in Luke 6 in Luke’s summary of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus described the attitudes His followers should seek to have. In **Luke chapters 7 & 8** Jesus continued the Apostles training through more teachings, examples, and even some surprise quizzes—like His calming the storm in **Luke 8:22-25**.

II. Jesus’ Healing Ministry

In the pre-Christian world, women had (and still have in the non-Christian world today) a very low status in society. Rabbis refused to teach them, and they had very little influence in society in general. But as Jesus traveled throughout Galilee “from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God,” Jesus healed women as well as men. As Acts 10:34 says, He was “no respecter of persons.” This was also a lesson to the Apostles, as Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Like the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, these women and “many others,” both men and women “were contributing to their support out of their private means.” The disciples had left everything to follow Him (Matthew 19:27), including their professions (Luke 5:28) and their homes (Luke 18:28). Jesus Himself had “no place to lay His Head” (Luke 9:58). Jesus’ ministry and the well-being of the Apostles depended on the small contributions of others whose lives had been changed.

III. The Parable

During the last year or so of His 3-year ministry, parables would be Jesus’ primary means of teaching the crowd. A parable is a comparison; in this case, a comparison between a simple earthly picture and a singular, spiritual truth. As analogies or extended short stories, parables used familiar practices or objects to explain unknown or complex spiritual truths.

Matthew’s account of “The Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13:1-23 gives the setting for this parable. On the day He told it, Jesus left a house and went to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew wrote that “Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore” (Matt. 13:2). In this parable Jesus chose a picture which was familiar to everyone—sowing seed. Everyone gathered there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee was well acquainted with the analogy Jesus used. Grain fields covered the landscape of Galilee. A man lifting a seed bag up to his shoulder and then scattering seed as he slowly walked across his plowed field would have been a familiar sight to everyone there.

They all would have understood the different types of soil Jesus spoke about, too. Some seed “fell along the path.” There were paths that crisscrossed the countryside and fields. Jesus and His disciples had been walking on such a path when the Pharisees confronted them for picking grain on the Sabbath back in Luke 6:1-5. Because of continued foot traffic, the soil would be hard packed, almost like pavement, making it nearly impossible for any seed that fell there to take root and grow. Instead, the seed would be eaten up by the birds. The first kind of soil is “hard-packed.”

There would be other places where there would be a thin layer of topsoil covering a limestone rock base—rocky soil. Initially, the seed would grow there, but because the root system would be limited, the plant would die under the harsh sun. A third type of soil may have looked good, but in the plowed soil there would also be thorn seeds—weed seeds—weedy soil. As the good seed would grow, a crop of weeds would also spring up. The weeds would grow faster and squeeze out the good seed which would eventually die. Finally, the fourth type of soil was “good soil.” Here there were no rocks, no seeds from weeds—it was soft soil, rich in moisture and nutrients. When the seed landed on this soil, “It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown .” Matthew 13:8 and Mark 4:8 refer to a crop yield of 30, 60, or a 100-fold; Luke mentions only the greatest yield. All were far above the average yield a farmer could expect—one might say, “*It was miraculous.*”

IV. The Purpose

Jesus finished the parable by saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” The religious leaders and some of the crowd had already rejected Jesus. Their hearts and their ears were closed to anything He had to say. But to those willing to listen and ponder Jesus’ words, He was ready to give the explanation. Jesus’ disciples were interested, so they “asked Him what this parable meant.”

Jesus said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.” Despite their simplicity, Jesus’ parables were a teaching tool that actually divided believers and unbelievers. The meaning of the parable would only be revealed to those whose hearts were ready to receive it; for the

rest it was an unsolvable riddle. For those who believed, a parable was a revelation—a revealing of “**the secrets of the kingdom of God.**” For those who were outside the kingdom, like the religious leaders who had declared Jesus to be demonic, the parables were left unexplained and therefore they sounded like nothing more than riddles. Parables divided believers and unbelievers.

Both the curious crowds and the religious leaders had been given more than enough time and evidence to conclude that Jesus was the Messiah. As time went along, their unbelief not only continued but it was hardening—for some, it had already passed the point of no return. Their willful rejection of the Son of God had led to God’s rejection of them. Because their rejection was final, the time had come when they could no longer be given the message—quoting from **Isaiah 6:9-10**, Jesus said, “**They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!**” Basically, God was honoring their requests that they wanted nothing to do with Jesus. A person’s rejection of Jesus Christ leads to God’s rejection of them.

V. The Explanation

This parable helped the disciples understand why Jesus was not impressed by the huge crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of them would never produce fruit from changed lives, because the Word He was teaching them was like seed falling on poor soil. Jesus explained that “**the seed is God’s word.**” **Mark 4:14** says that the sower is the servant of God who shares the Word with others. The human heart is like soil and, like the soil in and around a field, it comes in a variety of conditions. Jesus was preparing His disciples and all future disciples to expect four kinds of hearts and their corresponding responses to the preaching of the gospel—hard hearts, shallow hearts, crowded hearts, and fruitful hearts.

A. Hard hearts Just like the hard soil along the paths in a field resists seed, the hard heart resists the Word of God and makes it easy for Satan to snatch it away. Despite all they had seen Jesus do and say, many Pharisees and some of the crowd had determined that Jesus was used by the devil or that He was just plain crazy—He was a lunatic or a liar. Having resisted the truth about Jesus Christ, their hearts had become hard like pavement. The reason some people today fail to receive the Gospel is not any deficiency in either

the will of the sower or the power of the seed but rather to their own willful unbelief. Their animosity to the Word of God is so great that when they hear it, “the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Hard hearts willfully reject God’s Word. Then there are . . .

B. Shallow hearts Shallow hearts are like the shallow ground on top of rock. The initial response of some to the gospel is a joyful acceptance. Every external sign seems to indicate a genuine faith. There may be great enthusiasm for several days or even weeks, but their faith is shallow and temporary. Their feelings are affected, but their hearts were not transformed. When persecution or difficulties come, the enthusiasm fades and their faith collapses. When the going gets tough, they abandon their superficial commitment to the Lord. Writing of such people, 1 John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” When tests and trials come, they reveal whether faith is real or merely superficial feelings. The same trials that perfect righteousness in believers harden unbelievers in their sin. Turn to James 1:2-4. Shallow hearts are hearts that aren’t transformed. Hard hearts, shallow hearts, and then there are . . .

C. Crowded hearts Like the “weedy” ground, crowded hearts have too many kinds of “seeds” growing in the soil—worldly cares, a desire for riches, a lust for things. A crowded heart pictures the person who receives the Word but doesn’t truly repent and remove the “weeds” of sin out of his or her heart—the good seed of the Word has no room in which to grow. Crowded hearts are hearts that haven’t repented. Instead of having a singular love for Christ, such hearts remain captivated by a love for the world and the things of the world. Jesus addressed this, turn to Matthew 6:19-21, 24. A love for the world and a love for the Word of God are incompatible and mutually exclusive. Judas faced this dilemma—after spending 3 years with Jesus he decided on riches—30 pieces of silver rather than Jesus Christ. Those who truly love Christ will forsake the world and all its allurements and cling to the Lord and be fruitful; those who love the world will forsake Christ and will be spiritually unfruitful. Finally, there are . . .

D. Fruitful hearts “Good soil” describes the fruitful heart of the true believer. The change isn’t a mental change, a true believer has been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2) and bearing fruit

is the inevitable result—turn to Galatians 5:19-23. Believers aren't saved by doing good works but doing good works is a result of being saved—Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” All genuine believers will bear some genuine fruit.

VI. Conclusion

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, calls all believers to be witnesses—sowers—of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But did you notice this parable mentions nothing about plowing, fertilizing, weeding the field, or even putting up a scarecrow to scare off the birds? The sower in this parable is not responsible for the soil on which he sows His task is to faithfully spread the gospel message—turn to 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, it is God who makes things grow. We aren't judged by our successes, but we must share the Good News that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Not everyone will receive God's word with open arms, some will outright reject it, due to hard-heartedness. Others will demonstrate a superficial interest, but when hardship comes, their shallowness will lead to eventual falling away. Still others will profess a love for Christ while at the same time keeping a deadly affection for the world. Over time, they will leave Christ for the things of the world. Finally, there will be some who genuinely receive the Gospel. They will humbly turn from their sins and wholeheartedly acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The genuineness of their profession of faith will be demonstrated by the abundant fruit in their transformed lives, as they walk in obedience and faith.

So, what does this parable mean for us today? First, the task of the sower—our task—is to simply spread the seed through the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. God supplies both the seed of His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. God's work is to prepare the soil. He readies the soil, working in the hearts of those whom He is drawing to Himself. We can spread or sow the Good News that Jesus saves, but only God

can make things grow—**Isaiah 55:11** says, “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Second, thinking about the four kinds of soil, what kind of soil are you? Hard heart, shallow heart, crowded heart, or fruitful heart--what does **your** fruit say?