

# The Parable of the Sower, the Seed and the Soil

(Series: "Stories of Jesus;" Message Twelve)  
(Luke 8:1, 4-15)

**Luke 8: 1, 4-15**

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. . . .<sup>4</sup> *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: <sup>5</sup>"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."* When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

<sup>9</sup>*His disciples asked him what this parable meant. <sup>10</sup>He 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."*

<sup>11</sup> *"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. <sup>14</sup>The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. <sup>15</sup>But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

These are the words of God.

People of God: Throughout the summer months, Pastor Doug has opened God's Word for us under the series title, The Stories of Jesus. We have been challenged as we heard the stories of Jesus explained. I trust that we have listened with open hearts to Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God and our expected response of submission and obedience as citizens of the kingdom.

The story Jesus confronts us with today is unique in two ways. **First**, it includes an **explanation** in verses 11 -15. Neither the disciples nor we are left to guess what the story means. Jesus does provide explanations in part or in whole, in a few other parables, but by and large, the stories are left for the hearers to discern the meaning. **Secondly**, between the parable as given and its meaning is a thought-provoking statement regarding the **inclusion** of the disciples in knowing the secrets of the kingdom, but the **exclusion** of others. In verse 10 we hear, "The knowledge 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.'" That does not sound very generous or loving of Jesus.

We need to spend time trying clarifying verse 10. Those words are not unique to the gospels; in fact, the thought is present throughout the entire storyline of the Bible. It presents the sad truth that left to ourselves we will **rebel** against God, turn our **backs** on God and nurture a stubborn **heart** of stone, hardened against the gospel of God's grace. And though God faithfully calls his people to himself in love, we refuse to accept his love. And refusing to accept his love and redemption leaves us in the camp of the enemies of God. Parables, though containing the good news of the Kingdom of God, are to us, then, a foreign language.

Yet to those sinners who turn to God in **humility**, crying to him for his mercy, God provides his **gospel**. Alongside the other means God uses to address us, he also responds in parables and stories that allow us to understand him. We hear the gospel, we listen to it with their heart, and we are productive citizens in God's kingdom.

Verse 10 is a quote from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah has a vision of the glory of God on a throne with seraphim encircling the throne calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah cries out, "Woe to me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." After being purified with a coal from the altar, brought by one of the seraphim, the Lord says, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah offers to go and the Lord responds by saying to him, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'" Isaiah was to proclaim the same sad news that Jesus would tell the disciples. There are people who will hear, and hear, and hear again, but their hearts will not be open to the message;

parables both reveal and hide the message based on the openness of the heart to God and his love.

The prophet Ezekiel received a similar message. In Ezekiel 2:4 he is told, “The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’<sup>5</sup> And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

The parables told by Jesus open the door to **understanding** for some, and **close** the door to others. Therefore, it can be said, that in immersing ourselves into all the story parables of Jesus, we need to listen with our ears and hearts, asking ourselves how willing we are to listen to and learn from, King Jesus?

This story has a farmer; he is not mentioned often, but he holds an important role. There is seed which is sowed across the farmer’s field. We trust it is good seed, and will only produce good plants, and there are four different soil types upon which the seed lands. And encompassing it all is the knowledge that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ to the world.

“Whoever has **ears** to hear, let them hear.”

## **I. The Setting of the Parable**

Chapter 8 begins with a headline. In verse 1 we read, “After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.”

In verse 8, we are told that a large crowd was gathering made up of people from many different towns to hear Jesus proclaim the good news of God’s Kingdom on earth. They wanted to know if their centuries-long hopes about God’s anointed Messiah were being fulfilled in Jesus? Jesus told **stories** to them, so that his message could be easily **remembered**, retold, and **reflected** on, revealing that he was God’s Messiah, and that God’s Kingdom had certainly come on earth.

A farmer sowing seed in his field provided just such a story setting. Not only would hearing about a farmer sowing seed be common, very likely many were such farmers.

The farmer carried a seed-filled bag over his shoulder. As he walked up and down his field he would hand broadcast the seed, trying not to throw any on the path, in the weeds or on the rocky ground, but undoubtedly some seed would find its way to those places. When I reseed a part of my lawn, or add fertilizer to my lawn, undoubtedly some of it will end up on my sidewalk or driveway.

We say that good **fences** make good neighbors; farmers in Israel did not have fences; neighboring farmers shared a packed down path that served as a border. Jesus says that some of the seed fell along that path where walkers **trampled** it down.

Some seed fell on rocky ground. Since all of Israel is rocky ground of course some seed would fall on rocky ground. But this is different, this rocky ground refers to a layer of soil covering a layer of **limestone** that was several inches beneath the soil, undetected by the human eye. Seeds that are spread on that soil will sprout quickly due to the warmth held in the soil, but there is no way for those roots to get deep where there is consistent moisture. The sun withers those plants quickly.

Jesus then says that some seed fell among **thorns**. Again, the farmer did not sow seed there intentionally, but some seed ended up there. The plants that germinated became victims of the surrounding circumstances. Weeds happen, right? The weeds suck much of the energy out of the ground and crowd out the sunlight hindering the growth of the plants.

After identifying those three less than desirable soil types, Jesus says that some seed fell on **good soil**. Those seed grew and “yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” A phenomenal harvest. The seed has the God-given power to produce and multiply.

## **II. The Invitation of Jesus**

The parable concludes with an invitation to respond. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” It is a familiar invitation both in the gospels and in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Each of those seven letters end with this invitation. It is a call to all to hear the Word of God: The Kingdom has come.

It is as if Jesus is saying, “To those of you who are blessed and willing to get it, get it and do something with it.”

The Old Testament background to Jesus’ call to hear, comes from Deuteronomy 6: 4,5 in what is known as the Shema (Shema is the Hebrew word translated, ‘Hear’, which includes more than only ‘ear-hearing’, it also means obeying. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” When Jesus calls us to hear, he calls us to hear and obey with conviction. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

### III. The Disciples realize their need for further Insight.

If I had stopped reading at the end of the parable (vs. 8) and said “This is the Word of the Lord – go in peace” you would have been left with nothing but an interesting farming story. So, I hope you would have said, “Give us an explanation to these verses.” Just so, the disciples humble themselves and ask Jesus to explain the parable. They did not understand what the farming story meant with regard to the kingdom. Asking for **understanding** when you do not comprehend something is not a sign of **weakness**, it is a sign of **strength** – it is an honest request that Jesus is **quick** to answer.

In Mark’s account of this parable, Jesus responds to the disciples and says that understanding this parable will open up understanding for all his parables. To understand this parable is to know that God’s Kingdom has come in Jesus. It is a good **thing** that the disciples asked for more **information**.

### IV. The Meaning of the Parable

Jesus begins his explanation of the parable by saying that the seed is the **Word** of **God**. And the Word is Jesus, the Word become flesh. He is God’s long-awaited and anointed Messiah to the world.

Even though the sower is not mentioned in the explanation of the parable, we know he is there because seed is being sown. At this point in history Jesus was the only one bringing the kingdom good news, so it obviously refers to him, but it does not refer only to him. In God’s Kingdom **all** who follow Jesus are called to sow and tell the Kingdom good news, calling people to repentance, to faith in Jesus as God’s anointed King and Savior, and to the ongoing task of making disciples of people in all nations. Therefore, the sower refers to Jesus first, but also to each and every believer. We all are to tell and explain the good news of Jesus!

As the seed, the Word of God, is shared, some falls along the path. Jesus says that those along the **path** are the ones who hear, and note that they do hear, but due to the **hardness** and stubbornness of their heart the good seed is not **accepted**. It is trampled, and the devil comes and (vs. 12) “takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Their opportunity is gone, due to their own calloused heart. The devil will jump at those opportunities. How terrible and terminal to have a heart of stone.

But friends, never forget, God’s power softens such hearts, making people receptive to the Word and Kingdom. Never give up praying for the “pathway people” you may know, asking God to open even a crevice allowing a seed to

fall in and begin a process of growth. And if you find yourself being a “pathway person” rejecting the gospel, listen and allow God room to soften your heart. Remember the believing thief on the cross hanging next to Jesus. With some of his last breaths, the seed sprouted in his heart.

Secondly, some seed fell on rocky ground, where there was only shallow soil, lying on top of that rock shelf. Note that these too (vs. 13) “receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no **root**.” The late Rev. William Hendrickson, in his commentary on this passage refers to these as people with an “impulsive heart” responding with great emotion and enthusiasm for a time.

The **Word** sweeps these people away with its first impressions; but then later the **world** sweeps these same people away with its more seemingly attractive impressions. When times of testing come before they are grounded in Jesus, these people lose confidence and turn to those other things. Friends, to correct this situation, it is imperative that we continue to read the Bible and listen to it, that we study it, prayerfully asking God to make it plain and humbly joining with others so that mutual understanding can take place. We should always be ready to go deeper to where there is nourishment.

The third type of soil is the thorn infested soil. These people hear, but become choked by “worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (vs. 14). They become suffocated by the **circumstances** around them and cannot see the **forest** for the trees. The things of this life screen out the true light around them, often good things given by God, but things that easily become too important in our lives so that the Word which is the truth from God gets lost. Beware and watch out. These weeds and thorns creep in when we least expect it.

Three out of the four soil, or heart types, provide a less than complimentary response to hearing the Word of God. One might think there is little hope for the kingdom of God, but do not despair, because good seed lands on good soil, finding a home in those people who have a “noble and good heart” (vs. 15). God, whose power has already changed their hearts, has blessed, and continues to bless these people. Their reborn hearts trust God to overcome the **weeds** and distractions of life, these hearts strive to find deep-rooted **rest** in Jesus and these hearts, by God’s grace produce an unprecedented **harvest**, a 100 % return on investment. This is the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven and is yet to come in its fullness at the return of Jesus.

“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Disciples of Jesus need to remind themselves to hear the Word and respond to it continually. That means, of course, that we, as individuals, and we, as a congregation, need to hear this. There is an abundant harvest guaranteed by the power of the Word of God, our risen Lord Jesus. Understand that the work of dying to self, being rooted deep in Jesus, growing, and producing for the kingdom is not easy or automatic. That is why Jesus describes those with a good heart as those “who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (vs. 15).

Please do a self-diagnosis of your heart and if you discern that you are not yet the good soil, not yet completely “transformed by the renewing of your mind,” take heart. The Word of God instructs you on how to grow into the fourth soil. To move past the hard-packed soil, believe that God’s Word contains all the instructions for life, godliness, and Kingdom citizenship. To move beyond the second shallow soil, do what you must do to develop deep spiritual roots. To conquer the thorns, exchange physical and worldly pursuits for spiritual. Pray, “Lead me not into temptation,” and mean it. Only by inviting and allowing the Word to transform you will you become good soil, able to produce the harvest of the “Kingdom of God”. Seek to honor God, to love God and to serve God. For our God, through Jesus, is the **victor** over the devil, sin, temptation, and trials. He has promised and earned eternal life for his own, and he alone will deliver it. To God be the glory.

**Prayer:** *Loving and faithful Father thank you for giving us your Word in Jesus Christ. Thank you for redeeming and reclaiming your world through him and for offering your gift of salvation to all. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, softening stubborn and hardened hearts, freeing entangled hearts and enriching hearts seeking after you. Help each one here to do a heart check, identifying areas that need to be softened by your Spirit so that your Word, Jesus, might find a place to grow. For Jesus’ sake, who died to give us life we pray, AMEN*