

Who are Jesus' Brothers?

Luke 8:1 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,

² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

⁴ And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable,

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.

¹⁶ "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.

¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

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."

¹⁹ Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd.

²⁰ And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you."

²¹ But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

(Luke 7:1-50)

Puzzling Stories

I love a good [story](#). Story is a foundation of our lives. It is everywhere, and not just in the movies or a novel. Everything we see around us—our social lives, our culture, our country, our politics, we turn it all into story so that we can make some kind of meaning out of it. Manifest Destiny is a story. The land of the free and home of the brave is a story. You'll eat bugs, own nothing, and be happy is a story—a

horror story, but still a story. Story is inevitable. Even if it is a bad story, it is still a story. Even if it is incomprehensible or mysterious or [puzzling](#), it is still a story.

Many years ago, I watched a Hollywood horror movie that left me wondering, “[What?](#)” This week, one of my daughters had the same experience with the same movie. She wanted to watch the movie because decades ago a certain horror king with the same last name visited one of our most recognizable landmarks that she had just visited: The Stanley Hotel up in Estes Park. A one night stay was all it took to inspire [Stephen King](#) to write his 1977 best-seller: *The Shining*.

Three years later, the film maker [Stanley Kubrick](#), who had directed *Spartacus*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, took his turn at horror. His version of *The Shining* became one of the most discussed films of all time. King was not happy with the movie, because Kubrick took such liberty with his plot that he felt it barely recognizable. Worst of all, he didn't even film it at the Stanley Hotel! In fact, rewatching it, I believed I had entered into the Mandela Effect, because I could have sworn that he did use the Hotel in the movie, but this was not the hotel I was seeing! Had I

moved into an alternate dimension? No. My mind just played tricks on me.

At any rate, **the second the movie was over**, my daughter said, “**What? What’s that supposed to mean? Who was Jack? Was he demon possessed? Was he reincarnated? What in the world? Tell me, dad. I need to know!**” I said, “**You’ll have to figure it out yourself, if you really want to know,**” and promptly sent her to a website discussing the **six most compelling theories** on the meaning of the movie.¹

In fact, no one can figure out quite what Kubrick was doing. Was he secretly telling the world that he was the man who shot the fake footage of **the moon landing** that fooled the world in 1969? That’s one theory of the movie’s meaning. Was he cryptically telling us that he despised the **genocide of the American Indian**? That’s another theory. Was he giving us his own take on **what hell looks like**? Was he sharing insider information on **secret CIA Experimentation**? Was this a modern retelling on the **old Greek myth** Theseus and the Minotaur? Was he letting us know even in those very early days about the horrible culture of **child abuse** going on in Hollywood? Why, I even showed her a now classic

¹ **Sam Kench**, “The Shining Explained -- 6 Compelling Theories on The Shining,” *Studio Binder* (Dec 19, 2021), <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/the-shining-explained/>.

spoof commercial for the movie that someone had made years later, turning all of the footage into a Romantic Comedy called *Shining*, complete with theme music taken from Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill." You can take *anything out of context*. The movie is so uniquely shot and Kubrick was such an eccentric person that no one knows. Sometimes, stories are like that and it can be disconcerting to anyone who wants to know.

Let me tell you *another story*. Nearly 30 years ago, when I was a youth pastor in Denver, I had the opportunity to teach on the passage that is before us today. I've never done anything like it before or since. After the usual opening with prayer and music, I began by reading **Matthew 13:1-9**. **Luke's parallel** is found in the first part of **Luke 8**. It took about 40 seconds. Then, I told the kids that we were done. It was time to go home. The leaders thought I was joking. I wasn't. "**Send them home**," I said. "**That's the lesson for the night**." A majority of the kids were thrilled, because my lessons were always so long, they had played their games, and had their snacks. And I'm pretty sure not a single one of those kids could today even recall what I did. They probably couldn't have told you even later that night.

But a *select few*, let's call them the chosen, were *seriously puzzled*. Had I not prepared? Did I have a really bad day? Was I mad at everyone? Was I getting ready to quit and leave the church? What was the deal? Tell us Doug! Fortunately, this was *not my version* of Kubrick's movie. I wasn't trying to be cryptic *to everyone*. At that point, those kids who *wanted* the answer remained behind and we had one of the best informal discussions I have ever been a part of. Some stayed for 2-3 hours afterwards. My whole point in having such a brief lesson was actually that I wanted to *show those who cared* the purpose of Jesus' stories. Fortunately, my plan worked like a charm.

Luke 8:1-21 Context and Structure

As we move out of Luke 7 and the great question confronting the Pharisees, “*Who is this Jesus?*” we are given a parable, I think, to help answer the question. **Luke 8:4-15** is usually called *The Parable of the Sower*, though it might just as well be called *The Parable of the Soil*—two sides of the same coin. The same parable is found in Matthew and Mark. Mat-

threw has it much later in his Gospel and Luke seems to follow Mark's version much more closely. It is tempting to preach it all by itself. But this would be a mistake.

The **first three verses** of the chapter serve as an important **introduction** to both the story and the rest of the chapter. “Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (**Luke 8:1**). We've seen **the kingdom** several times, and it is one of the most important doctrines of the Gospels. It was promised at Jesus' birth (**Luke 1:33**). Jesus told the people he was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom everywhere he went (**4:43**). This parable and the surrounding verses will tell us something about it. The “**proclaiming**” will be found in our passage today, while the “**bringing**” is going to find its parallel beginning in **vs. 27** in the story of the **demon possessed man and Legion** (**27-39**), followed by **Jairus' daughter** (**40-42; 49-56**), and the **woman with the hemorrhage** (**42b-48**).

It next says that “**the twelve were with him,**” (**1**), and this is followed by the statement, “**and some women,**” one who was healed of **seven demons** and **two others** who provided for the disciples out of their own means. This is also foreshadowing of what follows, first in the story of Jesus

calming the *Sea with his disciples* (22-26), and then the story of *Legion and the demons* and the story of *two other women* (the daughter and bleeding woman).

Beginning and Ending of Luke 8 Parallels

1b: The twelve were with him	22-26: The disciples and calming the sea
2: Mary Magdalene from whom seven demons had gone out	27-39: Legion and the demon-possessed man
3: Joanna and Susanna	40-56: Jairus' daughter and the bleeding woman

This leaves us with **vv. 4-21**. But we said that the parable of the Sower only goes through **vs. 15**. Here is where it is important to see **the one major departure** that Luke has from the other Gospels. First, following Mark, Luke has something right after the ending of this parable that Matthew does not have. He talks about **a light being hidden**. Second, Luke takes a short statement about **who Jesus' "real" mother and brothers are** that are found *before* this parable in the other two Gospels, and he deliberately **inserts it after the parable**. This has a very interesting effect upon our interpretation.

It creates a fascinating parallelism that **helps us interpret the meaning of the parable**. This might not seem like a big deal, until you realize that Jesus is giving this parable *in order*

to be cryptic! Luke's move of this tiny story now creates a compliment to the parable so that *we* can see the meaning of the parable through real life examples of who it is that makes up this kingdom (**hint: not biological**). It looks like this:

- A. The Twelve and the women are with Christ (1-3)
- B. A great crowd is "came to him" (4)
- C. The parable told (5-8)
- D. "He who has ears to hear, **let him hear**"
- E. **"To you it has been given to know the secrets, but for others they are in parables (10)**
- C'. The parable interpreted (11-15)
- D'. "Take care then **how you hear**" (16-18)
- B'. His mother and brothers "came to him" (19) INSERTED HERE BY LUKE, EARLIER IN MARK/MATT
- A'. Jesus' real mothers and brothers: *Those who **hear** and do the word (20-21)²*

Together with the last chapter where we asked, "Who is this Jesus?" we are going to therefore now ask a complementary question, "**Who then are Jesus' mother and brothers?**" And this will really help us answer the mysterious parable that is before us.

² **Christine Smith**, "Luke 8," *A Little Perspective* (March 14, 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/luke-8/>.

Luke 8:1-3 Those who Followed and Provided for Jesus' Ministry

Soon after **Nain**, Jesus went through other cities and villages (**Luke 8:1**). We are not told where, but it doesn't matter. He went everywhere in the north country! He went "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (**1b**). Proclaiming is **preaching**. Bringing is his ministry of healing and freeing and exorcizing and all the other things he told John to believe.

Luke tells us **next** that "the twelve were with him" (**1c**). These are the Apostles that he had listed back in **6:13-16**. They are now that merry band of followers who will learn and listen for the next few years. But we are met with something unexpected after this. "... and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means" (**2-3**). Luke loves to tell us about the unexpected people following Jesus, and three women, one of whom was at one time demon possessed surely counts in a patriarchal world where women were often viewed as less

than equals. Calvin, always helping us **see our own sin** rather than looking to the sins of others puts it this way,

To be associated with such persons might be thought dishonourable; for what could be more unworthy of the Son of God than to lead about with him women who were marked with infamy? But **this enables us** more clearly to perceive that the crimes with which we were loaded before we believed, are so far from diminishing the glory of Christ, that they tend rather to raise it to a higher pitch.

(**Calvin**, *Commentary* on Luke 8:2-3).

Mary means “**Bitterness; rebellious; obstinate.**” **Magdalene** means a “**tower or fortress.**” Magdala was a small Jewish fishing village three miles north of Tiberias on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. It was recently confirmed as a city only in the last 15 or so years through excavations that found the now oldest known synagogue in the Galilee. Mary was from here.

According to the text, she had been **possessed by seven demons**. Obviously, they had been exorcised, and since she is following Jesus, it must have been performed by him. There are **two main reasons Mary is famous**. The **first** is that she was a central figure at the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact,

she makes it into all four Gospels. The **second** is that at some point in time, she came to be identified as the same woman we see at the end of the last chapter—*the sinful woman* who anointed Jesus' feet. This is where the legend that she was a prostitute came from. **But there is no reason**, biblically speaking, to see them as the same women. It was also through a series of increasing perversions of this mix-up along with certain Gnostic writings that said she was very close to Jesus, that the blasphemous Dan Brown wrote his novel the *Da Vinci Code*, where he claimed that Leonardo secretly put her where John was in the *Last Supper* painting and this is because everyone knew that she was actually **Jesus' wife** who was carrying his child at the crucifixion and that this child became the founder of a bloodline that survives to this day. There is no reason whatsoever, even in Gnostic sources, to see this. It is pure fiction made up to **slander the Lord** and besmirch Mary.

Luke tells us **the names of two other women**: Joanna and Suzanna. **Joanna** is called the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager. How amazing that someone from Herod's own household would follow Jesus! Her name means "**Jehovah has been gracious.**" With Mary, she was also **a witness later to the empty tomb**, which may be why Luke mentions her here (see **Luke 24:10**). **Susanna** means "**Lily; or a white**

lily.” We know nothing else about her except that she, along with Mary and Joanna “and many others,” “provided for them out of their means” (3). This is about as subversive as it comes, because women did not travel with a rabbi in those days, let alone support their ministry. The Gospel is influencing all kinds of people, from women to the rich and powerful. The kingdom of God is doing something remarkable and these women all attest to its power. As I said, this opening will also have parallels much later in the chapter, but we will have to wait for another time to see those.

Luke 8:4-8 The Parable of the Sower (Soil)

After this brief introduction, we learn that “a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him” and so he began to speak in a parable (4). We’ve seen “parable” three times in Luke (5:36; 6:39; 4:23 where it is translated as a proverb). The Greek word is *parabolē*, and the Hebrew counterpart helps us understand the meaning better. That word is *mashal* and it refers to proverbs, maxims, similes, allegories, fables, comparisons, riddles, taunts, or stories embodying some truth.³

³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 303.

Most of the parables in the NT are extended metaphors or similes. Remember, a simile is a figure of speech where two things are compared in a non-literal manner. They use the words “like” or “as.” In **Matthew 13:24** Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is *like* a man who sowed good seed in his field.” A metaphor is similar to a simile, except that it doesn’t use the words “like” or “as.” “A mighty fortress is our God” is a metaphor. God is not literally a castle, but he resembles a castle because he is strong and unmoving, a place of refuge and safety.

Our parable is a metaphor, “A sower went out to sow his seed...” (**Luke 8:5**). This parable is meant to teach a truth about *the kingdom of heaven* through this image. It begins with a farmer (lit. sower, σπείρω; *speirō*) who goes out to sow his seed (σπόρος; *sporos*). To state the obvious, the reason you would sow seed is because you want it to grow. However, a problem arises. That problem is *where the seed lands*.

It lands on *for different kinds of places*. “And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil

and grew and yielded a hundredfold” (5-9). The *path*, the *rock*, the *thorns*, and *the good soil*.

Some falls upon *a path* where the seed is taken by birds. Think of a path where the soil is either pressed down hard or that has pavement on it so that nothing grows there. Think of a dirt road. There is dirt, but no life. When the seed hits the path, it is like landing on that road. It stays on top of the dirt. Because it stays on top, the birds swoop down and quickly eat it up. Why not? It is food. Drive down a country road and you will see plenty of *birds pecking* at food off the ground.

Some falls on *rocky places*. Think of a cobblestone road or a hiking trail on a mountain near Phoenix. Dirt flying with the wind gets into some of those cracks and pieces of grass starts to grow. The same thing happens between the rocks on the side of a hot mountain. The point is, the dirt is only a couple inches deep. It has no roots and when it gets hot, it quickly dies. It grows, for a short while, but it doesn't last.

Some falls on *thorny ground*. Think of a really bad lawn, one that has been overtaken by weeds. You can't just go and plant new grass on a plot of weeds, because the grass won't grow. *Weeds grow far faster and bigger* than grass, suck up all the moisture themselves, and choke out the good seed.

This is why you don't want your lawn to be overtaken by weeds. It will kill anything good that you try to grow.

What's so interesting is that **Jesus stops there** and suddenly pronounces, "**He who has ears to hear, let him hear**" (8b). That's it. He tells the story and then makes the declaration, and then he's done. That's all the crowds get. No interpretation. No explanation. Nothing. "**Go home everyone. I'm finished.**"

Luke 8:9-10 – "What?"

Our problem is that **most of us know this story and its explanation** and so the **power of leaving the people hanging like this is lost on us**. But think about it. That's all he says. That's why you need to think of some riddle that drives you crazy that you don't know the answer to. The meaning of *The Shining*. The reason why I would read this very story to a youth group and then tell them all to go home.

Many people won't care about finding out the purpose of Kubrick's masterpiece. Many of those youth couldn't have cared less about why I ended the lesson and made them go home. They just don't care. *Que sera sera*. What's for dinner?

But a few people, *a precious few*, they will want to know. It's one thing if it is a movie. It's quite another if it is the very words of God in flesh. Jesus is telling you about the kingdom of God here. The kingdom of God is like this. Is this something you want to know the answer to? Do you care? Or are you just thinking about snack time?

The disciples were among these. Vs. 9, “And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant...” They wanted to know. “You can't leave us hanging like this, Jesus. What does it mean? Who is this sower? What is this seed? What is being planted? What do the soils mean? You have to tell us!”

Notice that Jesus does not tell them immediately. Instead, he says something else and it is pointed directly at them. It is not the center of Jesus' story, but it is of Luke's. “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'*” (10). To you? To who? Just the twelve? Are they the only ones who are allowed to know? Are all the rest of us just out of luck? Well, I'll show you later that this “you” in fact means more than the twelve. But for now, that's who Jesus has directly in mind.

But we need to investigate what Jesus is saying first. This is important, as Brown says, because “This is the most important gospel explanation of a[ny] parable.”⁴ First, what are these “secrets” of the kingdom? The word is “mysteries” (*mustērion*). This is not some secret occult mystery, some mystery school religion esoteric gnostic secret. Rather, it refers to the plans of God in redemptive history as predicted by Daniel which are to be revealed to the elect. Plans that come through Jesus which had yet to be revealed. In other words, people didn’t understand them. Recall that the dream Nebuchadnezzar had of the statue, that ended with the rock crushing it to pieces was called a “mystery” (Dan 2:18, 19, 27-30, 47).⁵

Second, though Luke paraphrases (the reason being, he moves the whole quote to the end of Acts 28:26-27), he’s getting this *from the OT* (Matthew is much clearer on this). It comes from Isaiah 6:9-10. The prophet is in the very throne room of God standing before the divine council of heavenly beings (1-3). He sees Christ himself (John 12:36-41). And he is being commissioned. And he said, “Go, and say to this

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, “Parable and Allegory Reconsidered,” *Novum Testamentum* 5.1 (1962): 40.

⁵ See David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 305.

people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; *lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed*’ (Isa 6:9-10).

What could Jesus possibly mean by citing this? It is a hard word for some to hear. Jesus is obscuring his message deliberately. Calvin summarizes nicely. “The doctrine of salvation is proclaimed by God to men for various purposes; for Christ declares that he intentionally spoke obscurely, in order that his discourse might be a riddle to many, and might only strike their ears with a confused and doubtful sound.”⁶ Someone might object to this, but if that is you, the first question you need to ask is this. Are you someone who wants to know what Jesus meant by what he said or do you not really care, instead, only caring about getting angry at what was just said? That question reveals your heart.

But why would Jesus do this? Some might want to blame God for this, as if it is his *fault*, as if he is to blame for some kind of unfair sinful treatment of men. But Calvin goes on to explain that the problem lies not with God, but

⁶ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 102.

with man. And it is at this point that we need to see the interpretation of the parable.

Luke 8:11-16 – The Parable Explained to the Disciples

Notice that **Jesus explains the parable**, not to everyone, but *to the disciples*. And he says, “**Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God**” (Luke 8:11). Here, you should remember something else from Isaiah. Much later in the book, a very famous passage appears and it says, “**So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it**” (Isa 55:11). What is not as often quoted is the verse that comes before it, “**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but *water the earth*, making it bring forth and sprout, giving *seed to the sower* and bread to the eater...**” **Isaiah likens the word to the seed of a sower**. It makes perfect sense, because Jesus has Isaiah in mind in what he just said. God’s word is so **powerful** that it actually **creates life**, life that grows, life that can be eaten. When it goes out, it accomplishes the very purposes of salvation in those God wants it to grow in. **Belief in this power of the word** is in

sharp decline in our day as men refuse to believe that the word of God can do much of anything. But what does that say about us?

The interpretation continues. “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” (Luke 8:12). Jesus likens people, people who won’t receive his word, to the ground upon which the seed falls. In this case, they are the path, that hard ground which no seed can penetrate. It’s not that the sower isn’t throwing his seed at them at all. It is that they are themselves hard ground.

The word goes out from the farmer, but it just sits there lying on the ground. It does not penetrate. The soil is too hard. The people just don’t care about what was said. But the hardness of the ground in turn creates another problem. The birds represents *the devil*. Someone else is involved in this one. So many people these days, non-Christian and Christian like, think that the devil is a made up cartoon character complete with red pajamas and Halloween horns. Too much Bugs Bunny. Jesus took this creature very, very seriously. We’ve already seen that he tempted Jesus in the wil-

derness. Now we see that **he goes after those who are hardened paths**, especially when the seed is thrown at them. The devil comes along and pecks it up.

Curiously, this was not **a foreign image** to the Jews of the first century. Jesus takes this very illustration from the **book of Jubilees**. “**Prince Mastema sent ravens and birds to devour the seed which was sown in the land ... Before they could plow in the seed, the ravens picked [it] from the surface of the ground**” (**Jub 11:10**). **Mastema** means “Hostility” or “Hatred,” and it is **a common name for the devil** in Second Temple Literature. In this case, Jubilees says this happened during the days of **Abram’s father Terah** in Babylon; the seed is literal, the devil sent crows to eat anything farmers planted so that there would be a great famine. Terah was said to be named after this event. Jesus is taking this well-known story and applying it to the word of God. It is a lot like Amos, “**Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘when I will send a famine on the land-- not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD’**” (**Amos 8:11**). Why **a famine**? Because the devil is stealing the word away from people whose hearts are hardened paths.

Jesus continues, “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” (Luke 8:13). Those with shallow roots, barely even in the ground like topsoil that accidentally blows into a crack in the cement are the people in view here. They, Jesus says, receive it with joy. Receive what? The word of God. They hear it and it makes them glad. It doesn't say they only pretended to receive it but didn't. It says they did. This is the quick convert. But they are shallow people.

Like that sprout that grows up quickly with a little water, they accept what they hear and spring up quickly. Everyone around them thinks, “What a great Christian this must be.” This is Simon the Sorcerer, whom Peter says, “Believed the Gospel” (Acts 8:13). In fact, that story is the direct parallel in Acts to this part of Luke. But they only last until a little heat comes. This is the fires of persecution and temptation which test our flesh. Life is great, until it isn't. The Gospel they actually received is *Your Best Life Now*. They heard the word wrongly! Then, Jesus doesn't fix your problems. Then, someone starts to mock you or test you or persecute you for calling yourself a Christian. They are no longer popular. Their means of making a ton of money is in

danger. One can think of a million excuses. The Scripture contains hard, hot words here. Beware of your reaction to them. Will you be burned by them? What are you doing to prepare yourself for such a time as this? Do not turn your back to the storms on the horizon. They are gathering strength. And they are coming at you.

Someone might hear this word and think that Jesus is saying that the person **loses their salvation**. That's not what he's saying at all. Show me the word salvation here. Show me the word faith here. This is ear-candy to them. They hear one thing, but it isn't what the good news was really all about. Jesus will lose none of those given to him by the Father. The whole point of this group is that **they do not produce fruit**, but wither up and die. They are a mirage. They are fleeting. They do not last. Their soil was never right to do anything lasting with the seed. They *imagine* that they had true faith, so they believe for a time. But as Calvin rightly says, "**They are not truly regenerated by the incorruptible seed, which never fadeth**" (1Pe 1:4).

There's a third group, "**And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it**" (Luke 8:14). This is not temptation from within—the flesh. This is **temptation from without**—*thorns: the world*. Notice all three: **the world**,

the flesh, and the devil or differently, as someone has put it, “hard hearts, shallow hearts, infested hearts.”⁷ These are the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth (Matt 13:22). Because of them, patience is choked—you want more and more. So is self-control—you never have enough, you become restless. Peace is choked—you become miserable. So is joy—you will do anything to have more of them. Love of brother, gentleness, kindness, they are all choked by the weeds of the world. You bear no fruit at all.

Jesus warns us elsewhere to be very wary of worrying about life (Matt 6:25-34). The worries of life choke the fruit of the spirit. They demand all the water. Notice again, this is the problem of the ground, not the seed or the sower. This is the power of the world’s system, its values, its beliefs, its passions, and lusts. You must fight with all of your strength to watch out for these, lest the soil fall among the weeds.

Again, someone says, “So aren’t they losing salvation?” Jesus said you will know them by their fruit. What fruit is this seed producing? The farmer is concerned with good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, John had said (Luke 3:9). They are bad trees. Here, they are bad soil. All that is produced is weeds.

⁷ Heading titles in R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 288-291.

In the immediate context, it is surely the individual hearts of people that Jesus has in mind in all three of these soils. We are totally depraved people, but our depravity does not all look identical. **Some are** hardened paths, **some are** shallow soils, **some are** thorn-infested fields. But all are taken over by **sin and depravity**.

Yet, it is important that in **the context of Isaiah**, that bad soil was *the nation of Israel*. They were always hearing, but never perceiving. Isaiah was to tell them the truth over and over, but they would not listen. Listen to what the prophets said about the **thorns**, “**For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns’**” (**Jer 4:3**). He warned them. They wouldn’t listen.

So then the Lord said, “**And I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God’**” (**Hos 2:23**). This is very interesting, because Hosea is predicting **something having to do with Gentiles**. This is the mystery contained in the OT. He is going to do something with people who are not his people, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

The final thing we see is the **fourth**. “**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” (Luke 8:15). This is the only soil that matters. Notice, they have a “good heart.” Their soil is different. Therefore, they hold the word fast. They want to know what Jesus meant. They care. Because the seed is itself alive, it goes down deep into them and creates life. But their heart must be right. Yet, it is the word’s power to create a new heart. “*I will give you a new heart*” (Ezek 36:26). It isn’t that they are born with a good heart. For no one is good, no not one. It is that the word creates a good heart by its inherent power as applied by the Holy Spirit.

This creates a paradox, one that many can’t handle. On one hand, it is the word alone that creates a new heart. The Spirit ploughs the soil, the Word goes deep, and the Father creates new life. On the other, he is not guilty for not creating new life. We are. We are the sinners, not God. Is the sun to be blamed when it shines on soil and the soil becomes cracked and hard? God throws the seed out, but the soil, left to itself, chokes it or causes it to burn or be eaten by enemies. You are responsible to hear this word for yourself. Not for someone else. You are not responsible for what God does with his word in someone else. They are. You are responsible for what you are hearing now. Do you hear? Do you care? Do you want to know the secrets of the kingdom? God

is opening up his kingdom to Gentiles! God is opening his kingdom up to those who are wretched, poor, sinners. Are you more interested in fighting over election or reprobation? Or at making sure your heart is receiving the word as fallow and fertile soil?

Luke 8:16-18 – Hidden and Lit Lights

Importantly, **Luke is not finished** with his telling of this story. Many people think that what comes next is a complete change of subject. It isn't. Jesus continues talking (also in Mark). “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may *see* the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. 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” (**Luke 8:16-18**). To some, this is just as puzzling as the parable of the Sower! Let's unpack it.

First, notice the words “**see**” and “**hear**.” This is precisely what he told those listening and his disciples earlier. “**He who has ears to hear, let him *hear***” and “**so that *seeing* they**

may not *see*, and *hearing* they may not *understand*” (9-10). To put it another way, this seemingly new story of a light is talking about **the same thing**. It therefore **helps us interpret the Parable of the Sower**.

“No one after lighting a lamp...” To whom does this refer? It refers **to God**. God is lighting the lamp with **his Word**. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... In him was life, and the life was the *light* of men” (Jn 1:1, 4). **God is lighting the lamp of his Son**. He has sent his Son to be the Light of men. Why? So that men may see the Light. God is not covering up the light, hiding in under a blanket. That would be absurd. Light it be used. God has given us his light in Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the World.

But what does the next part mean, “**For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest?**” The **Light will shine on everyone** at the end. If God is not hiding his light, then what will the disciples do with his teaching, which is itself light? Will *they* hide it? Will *they* receive it and heed it? Will *they* share it? The Sower will hold everyone who hears his word accountable on the Last Day. To him who receives it, more will be given. To him who rejects it, even what he has will be taken away. For this light is precious and to reject it is a great and terrible blasphemy. God has gone to great

lengths to give us his Light so that we might see it. So that we might see Christ.

“Take heed then.” This is **not my words, but the Saviors**. To not heed is to have your soul in great jeopardy and peril. Like one interpretation of *The Shining*, you would be staring into hell itself. But *you* would be the one going to it. On the other hand, to say that no one can take heed if they are not given new soil is fatalism, not biblical Christianity. It’s a paradox. Was not Judas one of the Twelve and did not Jesus tell him to take heed? Do you think the Savior meant it?

Taking heed is doing something about this word. It is important to come to the word and ask, “**What does this mean?**” It is more important to **not finish there**, but to take that word and to begin living out the light as Christ’s light on earth. As Hughes says, “**This is the same teaching as in Isaiah 6, which Jesus referenced earlier. Do it or lose it! Hearing the word always involves doing.**”⁸ But **doing what?**

Luke 8:19-21 – My Mother and My Brothers

I told you that Luke does something just here that no other Gospel writer does. He takes a short story about Jesus’ mother and siblings and **moves it to the end of this story**. Why? Let’s look at it.

⁸ Hughes, 292.

“Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd” (Luke 8:19). Notice, “*they came to him.*” This is precisely what the crowds were said to have done in vs. 4. In other words, they are parallel and meant to be read together.

Just here, Jesus says something absolutely remarkable. “And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.’ But he answered them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it’” (20-21). Some will want to go on a tangent here, for understandable reasons, to talk about the Perpetual Virginity of Mary and the fact that Jesus is said here to have “brothers.” This is the usual word for a brother, though it could refer to step-brothers, so this single passage cannot prove that theory either way. As for me, I believe it unthinkable that Mary would have withheld herself from her husband in holy cohabitation for their entire marriage, when this is the very thing God blessed and called good. I believe these are Jesus’ full brothers.⁹

⁹ **Going Deeper.** A thought strikes me about this. One argument used for her perpetual virginity is that she carried God himself in her womb, and so for her to carry any other child would be to turn the womb-temple into a desecration, someone not God. This fundamentally denies the very mystery of our story—that God is taking unclean things and making them clean (namely, sinners and Gentiles), bringing them into union with the very Christ himself. We are made holy through faith. To use this as an argument for her perpetual virginity is to fundamentally deny our new nature and union with Christ.

But **the real point** here is that Jesus distances himself from them as his brothers and even as his mother! Holy Mary full of grace, blessed art thou among women... We've discussed the origins of the Hail Mary at Jesus' birth, and she is truly blessed among women. Yet, just here, **Jesus distances himself from her**. Why?

It is because in this singular statement, **he is revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of God**. The very thing we've been pointing to in the two parables is now being told to us straight up by Luke. This kingdom is not like the kingdom of men. In all this world's kingdoms, one's family is biological. You are born of the will of the flesh or the will of man, via a woman's uterus. But not this kingdom. **One is not born into this kingdom.**¹⁰ One must be *born again* into it. Even Mary could not be said, in and of herself, because she was the mother of God, to be in this kingdom. For that, something else is necessary.

Return **the introduction of our story**.¹¹ For **Mary and Jesus' brothers** now parallel **the twelve** and the **three women**

¹⁰ This seems to me to be a fundamental mistake of all paedobaptist arguments as well. And I think it is no coincidence that nearly all who teach the perpetual virginity of Mary also teach paedobaptism. But one is simply not born into this kingdom. Yes, one can be born near the kingdom, via Christian parents, but this kingdom is not national. Yes, you can come near to the kingdom through the sacraments, but those do not regenerate you. That is a fundamental misunderstanding of this kingdom.

¹¹ Bullinger's notes see this chiasmic parallel: **Ethelbert W. Bullinger**, *The Companion Bible: Being the Authorized Version of 1611 with the Structures and Notes, Critical, Explanatory and Suggestive and with 198 Appendixes*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2018), 1454.

who were “with him” and “provided for them out of their means.” What are the disciples doing? They are wanting to know what Jesus meant. What does Jesus then tell them about receiving this knowledge? They had better do something with it. Do what? *Believe it.* Blessed are those who “hear” the word of God.

You must not be “ever hearing but never perceiving.” That’s what the multitudes do. No. A true disciple hears these words and receives them, just like the centurion and the sinful woman in the previous chapter ... *by faith.* Again, faith comes into view in Jesus’ teaching. This is what it means to hear. You believe.

But not only do you believe it, you *do* it. Do what? *Take his teaching to heart.* The law that he gives? You go and practice it. The command to believe? You receive it and you do it. You believe. The warnings he gives? You heed them and you do them. That’s what a disciple does. Because that’s what it means to be given a new nature, a new heart. God’s fields produce fruit, because that’s the kind of field he has created with his powerful word. *He doesn’t sit there and question* Jesus all day long. That’s what Pharisees do. *He*

K | 1-. Proclaiming.

L | -1-3. Comparing.

K | 4-18. Teaching.

L | 19-21. Kindred.

doesn't leave the second the teaching is over, especially if he's had a good meal as a freebee. That's what the crowds do. The true disciple hears the word and it changes him so that he, or she, produces fruit.

That's what **Mary Magdalene** did. That's what **Joanna** did. That's what **Suzanna** did. The unexpected do it. The **outcasts** do it. The **poor** do it. Some **rich** do it, but not the expected ones. Some men do it. Some Gentiles do it. Some Jews did it. As it was predicted by the prophet. Those God loves to save do it. Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, slave or free, male or female.

So do not sit there **questioning** the Master. Do not go home **heedless** of what you have heard. Do not trust that because **your parents** are saved that you are "in" the club. Don't **hide the light** under a table. It doesn't work like that. In this kingdom, things run differently.

Will you seek to find out these mysteries for yourself? Will you heed the words of Jesus? The Holy Spirit, through Luke, has told you and not just the twelve, the secrets of the kingdom through this parable. That word is for you. Will **you hear the word** of God and do it? Such are Jesus' mother and brothers in this mysterious Kingdom of God.

Ye sons of earth prepare the plough,
Break up your fallow ground;
The sower is gone forth to sow,
And scatter blessings round.

The seed that finds a stony soil
Shoots forth a hasty blade;
But ill repays the sower's toil,
Soon wither'd, scorch'd, and dead.

The thorny ground is sure to balk
All hopes of harvest there;
We find a tall and sickly stalk,
But not the fruitful ear.

The beaten path and highway side,
Receive the trust in vain;
The watchful birds the spoil divide,
And pick up all the grain.

But where the Lord of grace and power
Has bless'd the happy field,
How plenteous is the golden store
The deep-wrought furrows yield!

Father of mercies, we have need
Of thy preparing grace;
Let the same Hand that give me seed
Provide a fruitful place!

(William Cowper, "The Sower," 1779)

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