



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Parable of the Soils

Sermon Notes

Luke 8:1-15

May 6, 2012

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.

- Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus often speaks to his followers and to crowds in *parables*. Parables are short stories that illustrate universal, biblical truths regarding the nature of man, God, sin, salvation, and the Kingdom of God.

- The word “parable” is actually a transliteration of the original Greek, which means, “comparison, illustration, analogy.”
- In many cases, the parables of Jesus are allegorical, whereby our Lord tells a story, employing symbolism and imagery in order to convey a particular truth.
- Here in Luke 8, we have one such allegory.
- Although we have seen other parables in Luke’s Gospel, this is the first major parable recorded in this book, and it is certainly one of our Lord’s most famous.
- This is the Parable of the Sower.

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| I. | Along the Path |
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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,

- This was a preaching tour of sorts. Luke does not say that Jesus went into any of the synagogues, possibly because of the rising opposition to His ministry. It may be that He was simply acting as an itinerant, open-air preacher.
- Rabbis in the first century refused to teach women, believing that they were far too inferior to do the work of theology.
- However, Jesus engaged them, spoke to them, healed them, and thus liberated them by dignifying their status as image-bearers of God.
- Luke even provides for us the names of those women who were with Jesus: **“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.”**
 - Mary, called Magdalene
 - Her name is a place-name, meaning “of Magdala,” or “The Tower.”
 - Christian “tradition,” lore, and imagination have depicted her as a beautiful woman that Jesus delivered from a life of promiscuity and immorality. However, the Scriptures state nothing of this. Rather, Luke describes her as a woman “from whom seven demons had gone out...”

- Joanna, the wife of Chuza
 - Joanna is mentioned here as well as in Luke 24:10.
 - Her husband was Chuza, who is only mentioned here in Scripture. Her husband may have been the manager of Herod's estates, but it seems that he was a man of means.
 - One scholar posits that he may have been the officer whose son Jesus healed in John 4:46. If this was the case, it would explain why Joanna was one of those who followed Christ in his preaching tour.
- Susanna
 - This is an unknown woman.
- What is also interesting and noteworthy is that it was these women who, it appears, were providing for the physical needs of Jesus and His disciples. Providentially, God used the rejected of society – women – to provide for the needs of our Lord and His disciples out of their means.

John William Burgon writes that “no woman is mentioned as speaking against our Lord in His life, or having a share in His death. On the contrary, He was anointed by a woman for His burial; - women were the last at His grave and the first at his resurrection; - to a woman He first appeared when He rose again; - women ministered to His wants; - women bewailed and lamented Him; a heathen woman interceded for His life with her husband, Pilate; - and, above all, of a woman He was born.”

Norman Geldenhuys writes, “What a challenge and inspiration it must be for every woman to consider that, while nowhere in the four Gospels is mention made of any women who were hostile to Jesus, there are numerous references to ministrations and marks of honor which they accorded Him.”

- Yet, not only are these women an inspiration to women today, but they are an example for all followers of Christ.
- The presence of these women in this narrative demonstrates that Christ came to save sinners, regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, or even gender. In this way, He is indeed the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, without distinction.
- Further, this brief mention of women in the company of Jesus shows that the parable that Christ is about to tell applies not only to his band of male disciples, but all people – rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, men and women.
- And, it is in this context that Jesus tells His famous parable.

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.”

¹¹ *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.*

- Jesus makes it clear that **the seed is the Word of God.**
- Phillip Ryken writes, “Like a seed, the good news about Jesus Christ has the power of life in it, and under the right conditions of the heart, it will spring up to salvation.”
- What is important here, as we examine this parable, is that in each of the four conditions, **the Word of God is the same.** In other words, the difference in the outcomes of each of the four examples is not because the Word of God, or the message, changes.
- Rather, the difference is in the soil – the condition of the listeners’ hearts.

I. Along the Path

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.*

- Sowing typically took place from October to December (the rainy season), and the crop sprouted during the spring (April or May). Harvesting took place in the early summer.
- In the Near East, farmers typically put walkways or paths through their fields in order to be able to sow or cast seeds in all the fields. These paths were often well travelled and beaten.
- Jesus, here, compares the condition of the paths to the condition of the heart of “those who have heard” but do not believe.
 - **What is clear is that the reason they do not believe is because their hearts are so hardened.**
 - In other words, **THE PROBLEM HERE IS NOT THE WORD OF GOD, OR THE WAY OR MANNER IN WHICH IT IS PRESENTED. RATHER, THE PROBLEM IS WITH THE SOIL – OR THE HEART OF THE HEARER.**

Ezekiel 36:23, 25-29 “²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ... ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you

shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ And I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.”

- Throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel are referred to as a stiff-necked people. This idea of being stiff-necked went hand-in-hand with a hardened heart.

2 Chronicles 36:11-13: “¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. ¹³ 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.”

- To be “stiff-necked” went beyond mere stubbornness. In fact, one who had a “stiff-neck” was one who refused to bow his or her head and worship the LORD.
 - Yet, notice back in Ezekiel 36 that it takes a work of God Himself to remove the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh.
 - ...and the means God uses to do this is solely the Word of God – the imperishable seed.
- Those with hardened hearts are those in whom the seed of the Word of God will not penetrate.
 - Consequently, Satan is able to snatch it up so that they will not believe and be saved.
 - The pathways in the fields were, indeed, busy places, where travelers would go back and forth. There was busyness there, along the pathways, yet, it was never intended to yield fruit. This was not its purpose. Furthermore, because of the busyness, a seed could never grow for long.
 - Charles Spurgeon, preaching in his London church over one hundred years ago declared:

“Many of you do not go to the place of worship desiring a blessing. You do not intend to worship God, or to be affected by anything that you hear. You are like the highway, which was never intended to be a cornfield. If a single grain of truth should fall into your heart and grow it would be as great a wonder as for corn to grow up in the street. If the seed shall be dexterously scattered, some of it will fall upon you, and rest for a while upon your thoughts... you will not understand it; but, nevertheless, if it be placed before you in an interesting style, you will talk about it till some more congenial entertainment shall attract you... we could hope that our words would tarry with you, but we cannot hope it, for the soil of your heart is so hard beaten by continual traffic, that there is no hope of the seed finding a living root-hold. Satan is constantly passing over your heart with his company of blasphemies, lusts, lies, and vanities. The chariots of pride roll along it, and the feet of greedy mammon tread it till it is hard as adamant... your soul is an exchange, across which continually hurry the busy feet of those who make merchandise

of the souls of men. You are buying and selling, but you little think that you are selling the truth, and that you are buying your soul's destruction. You have no time, you say, to think of religion. No, the road of your heart is such a crowded thoroughfare, that there is no room for the wheat to spring up. If it did begin to germinate, some rough foot would crush the green blade ere it could come to perfection.”

II. On the Rock

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.*

- The next type of soil described was the kind “on the rock.”
- This type of condition was common in the hill country of Palestine, where there would be a thin layer of topsoil, under which there was limestone.
- Under these conditions, a seed will spring up quickly; however, the roots cannot receive moisture, so the crops do not grow to fruition.
- Jesus says that those who are like this “believe for a while, and in a time of testing fall away.”
 - In our Western culture, this is perhaps the most common type of individual.
 - It is clear here that these are not true believers. Rather, they “believe for a while” because of what they think they can gain from Christ.
 - These are, like the soil, shallow individuals when it comes to their faith. They are superficial, only seeking the fulfillment of their selfish desires.
- The reason this type of individual appears so common today is that we have bought into the “seeker-sensitive lie.”
 - That is, we believe that if we are more “sensitive” to the desires of the non-believing “seeker” that they will be more likely to attend worship and become more open to the message.
 - We then “simplify” or water down the message, keeping a kernel of truth within it, but promoting the blessings of faith in Christ, rather than Christ Himself.
 - Consequently, many respond, and we rejoice.
 - In fact, they often receive the message with great joy. They are often passionate very quickly, even zealous for the faith, only to turn away just as quickly as they expressed faith in Christ.

- We have all witnessed this type of individual – one who is “on fire” for the LORD one minute, and the next is nowhere to be found.
- Tragically, the reason for this is often that this type of individual believes that “faith” in Christ will fix particular problems in their lives. They are often wounded, hurting people who are looking for a “quick-fix” solution to their problems. Yet, when their problems do not quickly go away and difficulties arise, they turn away from the faith. The reason for this is because Christ did not provide them with what they wanted and expected.
- In short, **they want the blessings of the Gospel, but not the Christ of the Gospel.**
- **They want peace, joy, satisfaction, hope, and happiness. It is Christ they do not desire.**
- Certainly, perseverance under trial is one of the most significant marks of a true believer.

The twentieth century German theologian, Helmut Thielicke wrote, “there is nothing more disintegrating than people who have been merely ‘brushed’ by Christianity, people who have been sown with a thousand seeds but in whose lives there is no depth and no rootage. Therefore, they fall when the first whirlwind comes along. It is half-Christians who always flop in the face of the first catastrophe that happens, because their dry intellectuality and their superficial emotionalism do not stand the test.”

J.C. Ryles wrote of nineteenth century England: “It is quite possible to feel great pleasure, or deep alarm, under the preaching of the Gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. The tears of some hearers of sermons, and the extravagant delight of others, are no certain marks of conversion. We may be warm admirers of favorite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than stony-ground hearers. Nothing should content us but a deep, humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Ghost, and a heart-union with Christ... The things of this life form one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian’s path. The money, the pleasures, the daily business of the world, are so many traps to catch souls. Thousands of things, which in themselves are innocent, become, when followed to excess, little better than soul-poisons, and helps to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins soul. In the midst of our families, and in the pursuit of our lawful callings, we have need to be on our guard. Except we watch and pray, these temporal things may rob us of heaven, and smother every sermon we hear. We may live and die thorny-ground hearers.”

- Recent statistics prove the abundance of these types of “believers”:
 - A pastor in Boulder, Colorado, sent a team to Russia in 1991 and obtained 2,500 decisions. The next year, the team found only thirty continuing in their faith. Retention rate: 1.2 percent.

- November 1970, a number of churches combined for a convention in Fort Worth, Texas, and secured 30,000 decisions. Six months later, the follow-up committee could only find thirty continuing in their faith.
- In Sacramento, California, a combined crusade yielded more than 2,000 commitments. One church followed up on fifty-two of those decisions and couldn't find one true convert.
- A leading U.S. denomination reported that during 1995 they secured 384,057 decisions but retained only 22,983 in fellowship. They couldn't account for 361,074 supposed conversions. That's a 94 percent fall-away rate.
- NOTE: This is not necessarily a criticism of the pastors or preachers in these venues; it is simply a confirmation of this parable. We must be very careful, however, not to brag about our “conversions” until such converts have shown themselves to persevere under trial.

III. Among the Thorns

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.*

- Here is another common “convert.”
- These are individuals who express faith in Christ, yet, love the things of this world more
- In Palestine, weeds can grow up to six feet tall. These types of weeds consume much of the nutrients from the soil, often depriving the crops of what they need to grow to fruition.
- There are many things in this world that are not inherently “bad”: money, a nice home, vacations, etc.
 - However, these things can become all-consuming, and we must be careful not to allow them to draw us away from Christ.
 - Yet, the individuals here, like those in the previous two conditions, are not true believers.
 - They are those who, for particular reasons, embrace “Christ.” That is, like the soil on the rock, they believe that Christ will grant them the worldly things they desire.
 - Then, they are “choked” by the things of this world so that “their fruit does not mature.”

IV. In the Good Soil

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.*

- Finally, we read of the seed that falls on the “good soil.”
- Jesus states that they are those who:
 - Hear the word
 - Hold it fast in an honest and good heart and
 - Bear fruit with patience.

Darrell Bock write, “On average such a seed would bear thirty-five progeny, with some occasionally producing sixty or a hundred pieces of grain.”

- What is interesting here is that it is only in the good soil that we read of the seed penetrating.
- This year, for the first time, Kimberly and I planted a garden in our yard. It has been a lot of work; however, the garden is already beginning to bear fruit.
 - But one thing is true: it takes time. Tomatoes and cucumbers that are healthy do not grow over night. First the soil must be prepared, the seeds must be sown, and continual care must go into it. Only then, after weeks of work, do the plants begin to bear fruit.
 - And so it is in the life of the Christian. Fruit bearing is a long process.
 - And the one with genuine faith will persevere.

Isaiah 55:11: “¹¹ 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.”

- Therefore, it is our call to preach to the pure Gospel. We must realize that **we** save no one. Rather, it is the word of God that is the seed of salvation. Furthermore, it is the condition of the soil (the individual), not the method of “delivery” that determines the outcome. Even more, only God can prepare the soil.

1 Peter 1:23: “²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;”

The famous hymn-writer William Cowper wrote a poem, entitled, “the Sower”:

The seed that finds a stony soil,

Shoots forth a hasty blade;
But ill repays the sower's toil,
Soon withered, scorched, 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 high-way 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 blessed the happy field;
How plenteous is the golden store
The deep-wrought furrows yield!

