

6th March 2022

“Good Soil”

Luke 8:1-15

8:1 gives us a quick summary of Jesus' circuit ministry, '*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.*'

The places are the usual places, the cities and villages of Galilee, both important and unimportant; the message was the usual message of the good news of the kingdom of God, and how all those who are poor can be included, how all sin can be forgiven; the method was the usual method, Jesus proclaimed/preached the message; and the company was the usual company, the 12 disciples were with Him.

V2-3 are the unusual verses that Luke puts forward for special mention, '*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.*' Among the disciples were some women and they ministered to Jesus and the other disciples out of their means.

Jesus bucked social convention by teaching women and allowing them to be His disciples. Traditionally rabbis would be very fussy in who they would take on as a student, and it was always a man. There was a huge amount of prejudice towards women in the ancient world. Jesus taught women, when so many teachers and philosophers believed it was a waste of time,

Jesus was a revolutionary and controversial figure in His day. He touched the untouchables, He befriended sinners, He was an equal opportunist when it came to accepting invitations to dine, and in this section v1-3 we see that against the beliefs of the day, Jesus had women as disciples.

The reason Jesus was a radical is not because He made an enemy of whatever the present status quo was, but rather because He ignored the status quo. Jesus treated everyone as equally sinful and in equal need of salvation. Whether the person was young or old, male or female, Jew or Gentile, God's loves all kinds of people and seeks to save them.

The radical nature of Jesus ministry is not in Him deliberately setting out with a political agenda but because of His persistent love towards sinners. He was not issue driven, but gospel driven.

He bucked convention when he stilled at the funeral in Nain and gave a widow back her son; He allowed a sinful woman to touch and anoint His feet shocking the Pharisee whose house He was in, commending her faith and sending her away with His blessing of Peace.

When He met the woman at the well, He spoke the truth in love to her putting aside racial norms to minister to her, salvation came not only to her but the Samaritans. These and many more instances of genuine love and care and an interest in them as individuals in relationship to God and not the centrality of a political agenda stands out.

Now I must be careful here. I'm not suggesting Jesus was issue driven, He was not an activist for women's rights, or the rights of the poor and oppressed, or for the rights of the marginalized. No, He ignored these cultural clashes as He focused on bringing the universally needed gospel to all sinners.

Now, as you know we are in the thick of the gender wars, the last 50 years has seen the rise of feminism which has dismantled biblical and traditional views of male and female roles in the home and church. Added to this we have the transgender war. We moved from the removal of the differences between men and women, to pushing acceptance for homosexual activities and marriage, and this has now taken a third step as all traditional categories of maleness and femaleness have become fluid and many new genders have arisen as "equally" valid, noted in the LGBTQIA+ label.

What I want us to note is the wonderful way in which these women like the 12 disciples have forsaken everything and followed Christ. In fact, we know that when the disciples were hiding for fear

of arrest when Jesus was arrested in order to be crucified, it was the women who braved the Roman soldiers and religious authorities to stand in faithful vigil at the cross.

These women are examples in their bravery from physical pain, in their indifference to disapproval from the majority around them, as they loyally ministered to the Saviour they loved.

1) **The Seed that is Sown**

In v11 Jesus reveals that **the seed that is sown is the Word of God**. To break that down to its simplest explanation, and to tie it in directly with the parable, the seed represents the teaching and preaching of the truth of the Bible (the entire counsel of the Word of God -- both Old Testament and New) which clearly proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that He is the only way of salvation. It is essentially the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Good News of salvation. And in this parable the seed that is sown has **the power of life** in it. It has the power of life that, given the right circumstances, under the right growing conditions, when planted in the right soil, will sprout and grow and bring forth an abundant harvest.

Another important detail about this seed, the fact that some of the seed falls on bad soil and does not produce any crop at all is not the fault or the failing of the seed. Once we understand that the seed is the Word of God, we also understand and accept that fact that God's Word cannot fail.

It is exactly as Isaiah put it in chapter 55: 10-11: *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the Sower and bread for the eater, 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.*

You see, either the Word, the seed, convicts and opens the hearts and minds of the hearer so that they receive it and respond in faith and are saved (and come to Christ again), or it closes and hardens the heart and condemns those who reject it and will not put their faith in Christ.

That is what we might call the spiritual mechanics behind the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And as sobering as this is, I believe this is also a particular comfort and encouragement to us as Christian parents, and preachers and teachers -- and basically anyone who has had any part in the spiritual instruction of others, or has shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. It's comforting to know that the results do not depend on us. I want all of you to hear that loudly and clearly today. The results do not depend upon us. Our calling is to simply be obedient to the task God has given to us. We are called to sow the seed and trust God for the results.

This is what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth when they were boasting and bragging about who was the superior preacher and who was converted under whose ministry. He wrote: (I Cor. 3:5-7): *"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow"*.

2) **The Sower who Sows the Seed**

Secondly, let's look at the Sower who sows the seed. Although it is not specified in the parable, the Sower is Jesus. And throughout His ministry Jesus has been sowing the seed generously and liberally. As we have already noted, Jesus was sowing the seed in Judea, in the Judean wilderness. He was sowing the seed in Galilee, and Capernaum, in Tyre and Sidon. Jesus was sowing the seed to Jew and Gentile alike. To men and women alike. To religious zealots, as well as to tax collectors, and prostitutes and sinners.

So, already here we see that the ministry of Jesus was bearing fruit. The seed had been sown and it was already producing a wonderful harvest. It is in this context then, that Jesus tells this parable. He begins v5 with the farmer who goes out to the field to sow the seed. In those days the farmers didn't have tractors to work the fields. All the planting and cultivating and harvesting was done by hand. To sow the seed, to plant the seed, the farmer would have a bag of seed over one shoulder, and he would simply walk through his fields, and cast the seed this way and that by hand. Keep in mind, this

may be a parable about farming, but it is a lesson on the kingdom of God and the way the Word of God is to go out. And in Christ's kingdom, the Word, the Gospel is to be sown generously, indiscriminately, everywhere and to all – without regard for ethnicity or gender, or race or religion, or income, or occupation or even present spiritual state.

It is this very parable and other passages as well, that gives us the confidence and boldness as well as the drive and desire to take the Gospel of salvation to our unbelieving friends and neighbours, to the community around us, and to all the nations, so that all people everywhere might hear the good news of salvation and believe in Jesus Christ and be saved.

While in Luke 8, the Sower is Jesus as he sows the seed among the people of His day. But it is God who is pleased to use us and others to sow the seed of life. Every one of us here today, in some way, are farmers who sow the seed of the Gospel. It is especially true as we parents sow the seed of life in the hearts and souls of their own children. We raise them in the fear and knowledge of the Lord. Husbands and wives sow the seed of God's Word in our marriages as each spouse exercises spiritual influence on the other. As iron sharpens iron, so husbands and wives ought to learn from each other and grow in godliness together.

Beyond that, every one of us sows the seed of life each day we live in this world. We sow both by word and deed. Think of your field as your entire area of influence in your life. It includes everyone you come into contact with every day. And especially in circumstances where God gives us the opportunity, in relationships that we cultivate with neighbours and friends or relatives, that if the opportunity presents itself, we speak to them openly and lovingly about the hope that we have in Christ. And we do so not with a goal of converting them to Christ and getting them to come to church. That's wonderful if that happens.

But we do so for the simple reason that we love our neighbours and friends and family members, and we want them to know and possess the same comfort and hope and eternal life that we have. Again, remember the first point: we sow, but God grants the harvest. Sow the seed faithfully everyday. And yes, pray for the harvest. But remember to leave the rest to God. By faith, ENTRUST the rest to God.

3) **The Soil that Receives the Seed**

Finally, we consider the soil that receives the seed. Let's take a moment to review the four soils and what they represent in the parable. As we review these, prayerfully reflect on your own heart and mind as you receive the Word of God today.

The seed sown on the path/hard soil: The seed that was sown here was either trampled underfoot or birds came by and snatched it up the moment it was sown. Jesus said v12 that is like those who hear the Word of God, but the devil comes along and takes away the Word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

The seed sown on the rocky soil: The seed sown here came up, but then it withered because it had no moisture. Jesus said v13 that is like those 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.

The seed sown on the thorny soil: Here the seed came up but thorns grew up as well and eventually the thorns choked out the plants. Jesus said v14 that the seed that fell among the 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.

Finally, ***the seed sown on the good soil:*** Here the seed fell and it came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times what was sown. Jesus v15 the seed on good soil represents those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

So, what are we to do with this? Some suggest that this part of the parable is simply meant to be *descriptive* and not *prescriptive*. In other words, Jesus is not calling us to any particular action. Instead, he is merely describing how and why it is that people respond to the Gospel the way they do. After all, how can the soil change itself? Soil that is hard and infertile cannot suddenly decide to become soft and fertile, right?

But I think Jesus is prescribing something here. I think Jesus is calling us to action remember, this is a parable and Jesus can assign meaning wherever he sees fit. I believe that v8 makes that clear. Jesus ends his parable with these words: “*Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.*” This parable is not only about **preaching** the Word, but it’s about how we listen and respond.

And there is evidence from the surrounding passages that backs this up. In Luke 6 we find the parable of the wise and foolish builders. What’s the point of that parable? Jesus says the fool is the one who hears the Word of God but does not put it into practice. As a result, his faith crumbles in the face of trials. But the wise man is the one who hears the Word of God and does what it says. He is the one who will persevere in the midst of trials.

I think what Pastor Philip Ryken wrote is helpful. “*The parable of the soils searches our hearts. As Jesus talks about the different kinds of soils, and the different spiritual conditions they represent, we recognize that we are all in this parable somewhere. And this should cause us to ask some serious questions. How am I responding to God’s Word? Is my heart like shallow ground, or am I deeply rooted in the grace of God? Are there things in my life that are distracting me from what God wants me to do or to be in my life?*”

How can you tell what kind of a listener you are, or what kind of soil lies in your heart? Examine your life. Examine your actions. What do your words, your thoughts, your actions indicate about the spiritual condition of your heart?

But according to this parable, it’s actually God’s Word that evaluates *us*. The way we respond to the Word of God shows and reveals what’s in our hearts; what kind of soil we are. And it reminds us that good listening is just as important as good preaching.

And so, let us strive to be good listeners, better listeners, and to analyse our own lives to see if what we are hearing on Sunday is bearing any fruit on Monday.

And if you fear that the seed is bouncing off your heart, and not penetrating the soil; if you fear that maybe God’s Holy Spirit is not enabling you to hear, then pray today for God give you a heart of faith to be open and receptive to the Gospel; to believe in Jesus Christ, to hear and obey the call of the Gospel!

Or if you fear that all your worries and anxieties or cares and concerns are choking out the seed or starving it of moisture, then come to talk to someone who can pray with you and address your anxieties and worries, and help you focus your heart and mind again on the rich promises of the Word of God.

v15 “*the seed in the good earth—these are the good-hearts who seize the Word and hold on no matter what, sticking with it until there’s a harvest*”.

And so let us take to heart what Jesus says here – he who has ears to hear let Him hear.
Prayer.