

Sermon: An Agricultural Lesson

Text: Luke 8:1-15

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: Nearly 1/3 of the way through Luke's gospel he introduces a teaching form known as the parable. Mark's gospel records *these* remarks almost immediately after his telling of the same parable we are looking at this morning:

Mark 4:33-34 (NIV) ³³With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Jesus took many of his illustrations and teachings from common and familiar sights so as to test hearers. In his ministry Jesus is now drawing large crowds, and with these crowds come envy from the religious community and misunderstanding from those who wish to follow. The question remains for each group: what kind of Messiah is Jesus? It is within this kind of environment:

I. A Parable Is Introduced (vv. 1-4).

Luke 8:1-4 (NIV) ¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ²and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. ⁴While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

A. The people with Jesus

1. The Twelve. They had left everything and decided to follow Jesus. Some had been under the teaching of John the Baptist. Others had seen the miraculous signs and believed that God's Messiah was among them. Even though there was not complete understanding or commitment within the group, the concept of the Kingdom was becoming more and more clear.

2. women supporters. Two of the three women mentioned by name are still with Jesus around the time of his death and burial. These are not followers just for what they can get from Jesus, but they are supporting him with their own wealth. Giving is not necessarily the mark of a true believer, but its lack is an accurate sign of an unbeliever.

3. a large crowd

(put up diagram) Even early now, Jesus is trying to draw a line of distinction from within the crowd between genuine disciples and those who were only superficially interested. He was calling them out. There is a polarization already in place with those listening to Jesus (Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 211). Some are for him; others want him gone from view and earshot. The religious leaders, who for the most part had already hardened their hearts, will later devise a plan to do away with Jesus. They think for good!

Teaching can help determine who is a sheep, alive, rich, sighted and able to hear as opposed to those who are goats, dead, poor, blind, and deaf. While the final identification comes later, choices we make to what and whom we listen will help decide our final relationship with Christ.

In our story three kind of hearts reject Jesus. There is only one kind of soil or heart that is able to see the seed mature and bear fruit. Those are the disciples of whom Jesus speaks when he says:

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV) ¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Luke 13:24 (NIV) ²⁴“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

The reason for this is that people will try to be a part of the kingdom on their terms rather than the King's. And in a kingdom, the King is always right and to be obeyed.

Jesus taught with parables often. And I must admit I love parables, so let's look at a:

B. Definition of a parable.

The word parable (*παραβολη*) in Greek means to throw or cast alongside. It implies a comparison or an analogy. It acts as an illustration.

C. H. Dodd gives us this definition: “At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.” - quoted in Craddock, *Luke*, p. 108

This parable of Jesus is very much like an allegory where every aspect means something else. This is partially why Jesus explains it to those who are interested.

II. A Parable Is Pronounced (vv. 5-8a).

Luke 8:5-8a (NIV) ⁵“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 of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ^{8a}Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

A. One farmer, one seed, four soils

One farmer would certainly be representative of anyone who went out to sow seed.

The seed is not varied; it is one kind. When conditions are good, the seed reproduces 100 times. And whenever a farmer goes out to plant he certainly has reason to expect a harvest.

Like any sensible farmer he realizes that in every field there are differing kinds of soil. Yet, “farmers sow seed only in order for it to bear fruit; without this result the plants are good for nothing.” - Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 226

Some soils are not conducive to good results. The soils in our parable are four:

1. **Hard, nonporous soil.** Whether the plowing was done before or after, or both in Palestine, makes little difference. Everyone knows that soil must be prepared to receive seed, and then covered to an appropriate depth.
2. **Shallow soil.** What is meant here is that in Palestine, many times there was a shelf of limestone rock close to the surface of the ground. This would really heat up the earth and deplete precious moisture during dry periods. It also would limit the depth of the important root system.
3. **Infested soil.** Whenever you plant in soil already occupied by other plants like thorns there will be a competition for moisture, nutrients and sun. And weeds almost always win. A field that is full of these weeds is a sign of neglect and laziness.
4. **Good soil.** The Greek word (αγαθος) translated “good” also means “fertile.” When referring to people, “good” can have a moral quality to it. A yield for crops in Palestine might be considered good at 7.5 %, but here the harvest is extraordinary.

To have the kind of harvest told of here is not impossible, but God has to be involved.

Genesis 26:12 (NIV) ¹²Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him.

B. There are different receptions for the seed.

1. **on the hard path** - it could not penetrate the soil and was even trampled underfoot. Finally it was carried away for food by the birds.

2. **in the shallow soil** - literally it fell on a rock. Because the growing medium could not retain moisture, the plant withered and died.

3. **in the thorny soil** - the seed grew up with weeds that competed for everything necessary to produce a healthy plant, and the plants that showed some initial promise were first stunted then choked out. Thorn bushes can be painful to remove and even have beautiful flowers that betray their danger to other plants.

4. **in the good soil** - without any negative conditions, the seed grew, developed and produced as it was designed to do.

Just an ordinary story, right? No, of course not! It is meant to provoke interest in a deeper spiritual meaning.

III. A Parable Is Seen and Heard (vv. 8b-10).

Luke 8:8b-10 (NIV) ^{8b} When he said this, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” ⁹His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He 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.”

A. One group develops understanding.

Jesus’ disciples had a heart to understand, so they asked Jesus. They were hungry for every word that Jesus would share. John’s gospel does not use parables, but certainly is full of metaphors.

Jesus said “I am the bread of life.” Jesus went on to explain the responsibilities of following him in **John 6**, and many rejected him - while a small group stayed.

John 6:68-69 (NIV) ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

“What a parable says and does is to a very large degree determined by the listener, just as a work of art means different things to different viewers.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 110

(Show watercolor picture) What does this mean? It is a painting of a picture I took outside Deming, NM on the occasion of the church's 100th anniversary. It reminds me of many old friends. It reminds me of the scripture in John: [John 10:7 \(NIV\)](#) ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

The picture represents the good friend who painted it and my beloved wife who commissioned it without considering the cost. But how could you know that unless you were concerned enough to ask? This picture is a parable of a Shepherd's love for his sheep and also a wife's love for her husband. And so much more.

B. Others reject new revelation.

It is not because they are mentally incapable. It *is* because they are spiritually disinterested and unwilling to recognize God's higher authority.

Matthew shares this: [Matthew 21:45 \(NIV\)](#) ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

"Matthew 21:45 makes clear that the understanding of the parables is not so much cognitive as volitional. Those outside the kingdom 'understand the provocative claim of the parables very well, but they are not prepared to accept it...Jesus' speaking in parables is not a riddle as such. What is perplexing is the behavior that it calls forth--that man can see salvation personified and nevertheless not come to conversion and belief.'" - Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 212

In the beginning hard hearts are intentionally developed by the hearer; it is a willful thing. Later, God so much as says: OK, if that is what you want to do! Have it your way. God will not violate our free-will.

It is difficult to appreciate why family, friends, and others fail to see what is obvious to us!

IV. A Parable Is Explained (vv. 11-15).

[Luke 8:11-15 \(NIV\)](#) ¹¹"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those 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. ¹³Those on the rock 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. ¹⁴The 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. ¹⁵But 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.

A. The seed is perfect.

Proverbs 30:5 (NIV) ⁵“Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

If a person attends church every week and claims to get nothing out of the service of the Word maybe the problem is not with the speaker, but the hearer (auditor).

Today when the word of God is preached I hope we will hear what was said of the early church: **Acts 12:24 (NIV)** ²⁴... the word of God continued to increase and spread.

B. There are two kinds of soil.

They are either fruitful or unfruitful. There is no middle ground in defining hearts.

If you are so hard that you will not listen to God’s word, the devil will have his way with you and remove what could save you.

It is easy to take snapshots of joy at a wedding, but what that joyful beginning becomes is up to you and how you deal with testing and times of trouble. The important pictures come later after there has been sickness, poverty and adversity.

I think the third example of unproductive soil is the most common. A Church Father by the name of Chrysostom adds this: When the Word is choked, it is not merely due to the thorns as such, but to the negligence of those allowing them to spring up. There is a way, if there is a will, to hinder evil growth and use wealth appropriately. For this reason he warned not of “the world” but of the “care of the world”; not “riches” as such but “the deceitfulness of riches.” Let us not place the blame on what we possess, but on our corrupt mind. (Taken from Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament II, *Mark*, p. 57)

C. Maturity requires perseverance.

We can grow through adversity and trouble if we have God as our guide and gardener. It may be easier to give up and no longer live for Jesus, but if you think of what he has done and will do - it is the worst possible choice. We must be patient and work *with* God to produce a harvest that honors our Lord. Any relationship takes perseverance; it also takes ongoing communication. Time will tell what kind of soil you are, and your fruit will be the proof that is presented to God (**John 15**).

“The non-communication between God and us is not because God is either dead or silent, but because we are not listening. If we are cut off during a telephone conversation, we do not jump to the conclusion that the person at the other end has died. No, it is the line which has gone dead.” - Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, p. 105

“He who has ears, let him hear.”

Conclusion: I do not believe Jesus shares this parable to teach that some people, because of their hearts, are just destined to be condemned. Even the hardest of hearts can change with God’s help.

In the context of idolatry and a call for Israel to be faithful, we hear the O.T. prophets Jeremiah and Hosea speak:

Jeremiah 4:3 (NIV) ³This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: “Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns.

Hosea 10:12 (NIV) ¹²Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.

Do not discount the Word of God. Prepare your heart to receive the words of life. I do not believe man is as good as he can be, nor do I believe he is as bad as others say he is. I believe that given a fair hearing, and with God’s help, no one is beyond His reach. Yet, we make conscious decisions everyday that bring us closer to God or less receptive to his call on our lives.

God wants everyone to be saved and to distinguish himself from the crowd of disinterested hearers who believe the lies Satan produces. There is a time of harvest or judgment coming and there will be no second chances, no matter what anyone says or thinks!