

The Devilish Bearer of Bad Religion, Part 1

Luke 8:10-12

When his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 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. Now the parable is this. "The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard, and the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so they may not believe and be saved.

"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. 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. As for that in the good soil. They are those who, hearing the word, hold it

fast with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

In that last section, there in verses 11 to 15, Jesus has there given us the key to unlock the meaning of the parable. He has told his disciples in verse 10, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the *mysterion*, the mysteries of the kingdom of God. And then in verse 11 he says, “The seed is the word of God.” The seed has inherent power. It has life-giving energy. It's ready to be released. It's ready to sprout; it's ready to grow and to grow up and bear fruit as it says there, “to bear fruit,” in verse 15, “with patience,” with endurance, with perseverance, bearing fruit to the end. That’s the idea.

Seed has inherent power. As Mark 4:28 says, “First the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear.” All that the seed needs to release that life-giving, fruit-bearing energy is what? Good soil. That's all it needs. Good soil. Listen, that is the key that we need to open up this secret, to reveal this mystery of the kingdom of God, and Jesus has just handed that key to us.

What is the secret? What's the mystery that's here revealed? Just this. The good seed must find good soil in order to produce good and lasting fruit. As Jesus tells the parable, most soils are unproductive soils even if at first they seem to so, show signs of life. Most soils are unproductive. But good seed must find good soil in order to produce good and lasting fruit.

And the knowledge of that mystery just now revealed before you has a profound and far-reaching implications for the kingdom ministry, starting with the indispensable wisdom of discernment. We need to discern the difference between good and productive fruit-bearing and that which is not. Just as the seed has inherent power, so also does the almighty word of the Almighty God.

So the seed is the word of God. It's the word that comes from God. It is the divine word. It's powerful, it's energetic, it's life-giving. It is transformative. It's a fruit-producing word, a fruit that lasts for the rest of the lifetime and keeps

on being produced in the lifetime. That is the power of the word of God. We know that from 2 Timothy 3:16, that it's a *theopneustos*. It's a "breathed out by God" word, and therefore Paul tells Timothy it's "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." All that the word of God needs to release that life-giving, fruit-producing power and energy is what? Jesus tells us plainly in verse 15 an honest and good heart.

So if the seed is the word of God, what does each soil represent? Each soil represents a different kind of heart, each heart with a different response to God's word, each one a different outcome of the seed that's sown, each one a different outcome of the word that's heard.

There is this, as verse 4 tells us, there is this gathering, growing, swelling crowd of people. They were thronging to Jesus simply because they had physical eyes to see that in him and in his ministry and in his teaching and in his power there's something quite spectacular going on with this man.

As they came to him, though, Jesus knew they didn't come with right motives, with receptive hearts. Many in that crowd lacked faith to see anything deeper than just the spectacular. They just looked at his works. They were, their ears were tickled by his teaching. And so as he spoke to them, he sowed the word of God, and he sowed it to the only sensation that they seemed to have at the moment. He spoke audible words, and he spoke familiar words to their ears. They had ears, physical ears, the, the perception of audible understanding.

They had ears to hear something, so Jesus spoke something familiar to them. He gave them something they're familiar with. "The sower went out to sow his seed." They probably could look behind him on the hills behind him and see the terraced farming and see sowers out sowing seed at that moment. And so he told them a parable. A parable. He tucked into familiar language and imagery this sower sowing a field. What he tucked in there was important truth for those with a heart to understand something deeper.

That's what the word, *parable*, in fact indicates. It comes from the Greek verb *parabole*, which means, to throw or to cast alongside of. So a parable is a story, a familiar story, or familiar imagery and ideas where a truth is cast alongside something that's familiar. That's what Jesus did. That's what all Jesus' parables were. Like all Jesus' parables, these are not mere illustrations that shed light on spiritual truths.

That's part of it, but parables served a dual purpose. To hide the truth from the hard-hearted is one of the purposes. To hide the truth and veil the truth from the unbelieving, that's one purpose. The other purpose is the one we're familiar with; it's to reveal the truth to, to believers, to true believers, those with ears to hear. They are the ones who hear. Parables are like stained-glass windows in the cathedral, dull and lifeless from the outside, but brilliant and radiant from within. That's how most of the crowd heard Jesus, like those who were on the outside looking in and seeing and hearing something dull and lifeless to them.

That's how so many people hear Jesus' teaching today. They miss all the clues. They fail to recognize Jesus speaking about

something deeper. They fail to recognize the spiritual meaning, something of tremendous spiritual significance. As it was then, so it is now. External response to God's word reveals the hidden condition of the heart.

Luke tells us in verse 9 that his disciples asked him what this specific parable meant. And in Mark 4:10, we learned that this was a, a larger group than just the Twelve. Those around Jesus with the Twelve asked him about the parables is what Mark 4:10 says. And since they had ears to hear, they, they sense something deeper. They look for an explanation of the meaning. They look for a right interpretation of a, of a deeper truth that they sensed was beneath the surface. They were also looking for a reason that Jesus spoke in parables to begin with. Why did Jesus speak in parables? That's another question that they had, a more general question.

In Matthew's parallel, Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked that more general question, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" They want to understand not just the meaning of this parable, but why parables? Why are you telling these truths in familiar language? What is your strategic reason? What's the

tactical decision you've made here that you would start speaking in parables?

So as Luke records here in verse 10, he's actually answering both of those questions. He gives us the, the reason for both. Jesus gives both answers. Verse 10, "To you it has been given to know the secrets." Or another, as we said last week, another way to translate that is the word, not secrets, but mysteries. Those are truths hidden by God in ages past, but now revealed to God's elect. "To you it's been given," granted by grace, "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God," once hidden truths now revealed to the sons and daughters of the kingdom.

Jesus' parables therefore serve the purpose of distinguishing the regenerate from the unregenerate, as well as serving to bless the regenerate with spiritual truth. By speaking in parables, Jesus is here identifying the line that God has drawn down the middle of all humanity. He's revealing who the elect are by how they respond to the word of God. All those who respond righteously to the word, they are blessed with even more truth. But for those who stand on the outside, for



those who sense nothing of spiritual significance, they are in danger of losing the truth and falling into further darkness.

And that is why Jesus warned there, down in verse 18, look at it there in your Bibles, Jesus warned, "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." See the two groups, there? The haves and the have nots.

The haves are the elect. The haves are the chosen of God. They are the regenerate. They are the believing. They are the ones to whom God has granted the right to become children of God. They have the privilege of knowing the secrets of the kingdom of God, and if you are a fruit-bearing believer in Jesus Christ then, guess what? You are among the haves. "And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God."

Who are the have nots? Well, they're the other three soils in the parable. The sidewalk seed falling along the hard-packed

path. The shallow seed falling upon the bedrock. The suffocated seed falling among the thorns.

Before we jump into today's outline, I want to begin with a question for you to think about as we walk through the outline. Of all the soils here, which group do you think is the most difficult to evangelize? Which is that, I'm not asking which is most responsive or receptive because we see different responses, but which is the group that's most difficult to evangelize? Is it (a) the pathway soil? Is it (b) the rocky soil or is it (c) the thorny soil? Hardest to evangelize? Least responsive to your evangelism?

After all, we need to recognize, verse 12, that's why the sower sows the seed, right, to get a harvest. That's why those who preach and teach and share the word of God do all that preaching and teaching and explaining. That's why we as Christians take the time with our unbelieving friends and neighbors and family members, because we're concerned about their souls. We don't want to see people go to hell. So we teach. We preach. We share to get a harvest, so that people may believe, verse 12, so they may believe and be saved.

So which soil seems least receptive to the seed when it's sown by the sower? If you think (A) it's the first soil, the hard-packed pathway soil, you're correct. The seed that falls into the second soil, verse 13, that seed is eager to be evangelized. When they hear the word, they receive it with joy.

The seed that falls into the third soil, verse 4, verse 14, they're also those who hear. They seem to sprout up, but they drift away later on. They seem receptive to evangelism. They want to sign the card. They want to go forward. They want to be baptized. But they drift away later on. They produce leaves, but there's no fruit.

The hardest soil, though, the least receptive to evangelism, is the hard-packed pathway soil. That hard-packed soil, they already think they have all that they need. And so they are impenetrable. The net effect is the same for all three soils, but with the first soil there's no penetration whatsoever. The first soil represents no penetration of the seed.

The second and third soils represent unproductive penetration of the seed. It's only the fourth soil that is soft and deep and pure, so that seed gets in deep, into good soil, healthy soil, to result in productive penetration.

But the hardest of them all, with no penetration whatsoever, is represented by that first soil. It's the seed that fell alongside the pathway. So it's the first of those soils that's going to be the subject of our study today. They're hardened. They are hardened because they think that they have, and so they refuse to receive the word. They see it as unnecessary, or they think, I've heard all this before. I've heard it. I've been in church. I have been listening to the sermons. I read all the good books. I know. I got it. As Jesus warned in verse 8, 18, though, "Take care then how you hear." It's not just that you hear; it's how you hear. "Take care how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given. But from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

Several things I want you to see and understand about the hard-hearted. First, understand that God has condemned them. It's a hard truth. God has condemned them. Second, you need to understand their true condition, and third, you need to discern the devil's involvement, that the devil attends closely to the hard-hearted.

Understanding those things is going to give you discernment about the people with whom you interact. It's going to give you discernment about the people who profess Christ in their (your) life, but do not possess Christ in their life. It's going to give you discernment about people with whom you share the Gospel. It's going to give you discernment about the people who you think are Christians and are fine, but may not be.

Let's get into point one, point one in our outline. It's there in your bulletin. The first point: The divine condemnation of a hard heart. The divine condemnation of a hard heart. Last week we talked about the reason Jesus spoke in parables, but we only looked at the first part of verse 10, there, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God." So it's, the first purpose is to us. Jesus spoke in parables to identify

the regenerate as the regenerate, to bless the regenerate, to give them more truth, more understanding.

But what about the unregenerate? What about them? What's the purpose of the parables for the unregenerate? Verse 10 says, "for others." That's all the rest. Others, they, that is, the secrets the mysteries of God's word, the kingdom of God, "they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand." That's why Jesus spoke in parables to the unregenerate, to reveal the futility of their natural ears and natural eyes to get to spiritual truth. In order to get to spiritual truth, they need something that they do not have. They need the power of God's word.

Three purposes of parables for the unbelieving which we'll apply here directly to the hard-hearted. The first reason Jesus spoke in parables was to provoke the unbelieving to discover the truth. Parables are meant to provoke interest, to raise questions, which shows us, regardless of one's response, Jesus spoke in parables to serve what was really a kind and gracious purpose with unregenerate people.

Yes, they have physical perception of hearing. Even if they've missed all the clues, they could physically hear Jesus call out audibly, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What's he doing there? He's calling the unbelieving to ask and seek and knock. He's calling them to go deeper. He's calling them to inquire further. "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

He spoke to crowds in parables in order that they may not rely on their physical senses alone, their sight and their hearing, so that they might perceive something deeper beyond their natural ability, going further than their natural ability can take them, spiritual truth beyond human intuition, beyond human learning and formed by natural perception, the seeing eye, the hearing ear. They had to go deeper. This is a gracious purpose, actually, even to the unregenerate, even to the unbelieving. He's so kind, so merciful.

But that purpose leads immediately to a second reason Jesus spoke in parables. That is to, secondly, expose the

unregenerate. To expose the unregenerate. They are the ones who have physical ears and eyes, yes. So they can see and hear everything that believers can see and hear on a physical level. But they have no spiritual perception. They are exposed as unregenerate unbelievers by the fact that they don't understand what believers understand, and they make no real effort to discover it.

As they face difficulty in learning, obstacles, spiritual obstacles, they turn away. As they face opposition, they, they melt away. They're distracted by other things. They peel away. They chase those distractions. That's what Jesus' parables do. They expose the unregenerate as the unregenerate. They reveal the hard-hearted as the hard-hearted. They hide the truth just enough to repel those who are not serious. Those who are not serious, for them it reveals the harrowing reality of divine condemnation. Sobering thought.

That leads to a third reason that Jesus spoke in parables: to judge the unrepentant. So it's not only a gracious purpose,



to provoke curiosity and raise questions. It's not just to expose and reveal who's who. But it's also to judge the unrepentant. Parables are an indication of divine judgment on the hard-hearted. It's pretty clear in the Greek text, in fact. "To the rest in parables." And then there's a purpose clause there. *Hina*: in order that. It's a subordinate conjunction showing purpose: "in order that seeing they may not see, in order that hearing, they may not understand." And folks, that is judgment, it's condemnation.

That's not just my word; it's from Scripture. That quotation comes from Isaiah 6:9 and 10, when after Isaiah is brought into that scene of the throne room of God, where the burning ones are flying around, the seraphim, saying, "Holy, holy, Holy." Isaiah says, "I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the Lord of hosts. I am destroyed." God sends one of the seraphim with a coal burning from the altar to touch those unclean lips, the most sensitive part of the body, to cauterize them, to burn them. Yes, atonement is painful.

God asks, "Who will I send? Who will go for me?" One who has their sin forgiven. Isaiah raises his hands through those blistered lips. "Here am I; send me." So God said, "Okay, go and say to this 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."

Isaiah knew from the very beginning that his evangelistic ministry would be a failure. And he went anyway. He's a prophet of God. He's sent to preach divine condemnation to a people who are hard-hearted, calloused in their religion.

New Testament writers quote that text more often than any other from the Old Testament, except for Psalm 110 verse 1. But this is an oft-quoted text used by the early church often, referred to often to help them understand the rejection of the Jewish nation. Why would the people crucify their own Messiah? Oh, it's because they don't have any spiritual perception. They found no room for repentance, and the nation experienced judgment from God, a judicial blindness, a judicial deafness, a

judicial hardening of their hearts. It's judgment upon people who profess themselves to understand everything perfectly. But they refused to humble themselves at the preaching of the Prophet. They refused to repent. They refused to believe.

Leon Morris put it this way, "Jesus looked for more than a superficial adherence. So he intensified his use of parables, stories which yielded their meaning only to those prepared to search for it. The parables demand thought and spiritual earnestness. They separate the sincere seeker from the casual hearer. Parables both reveal and conceal the truth. They reveal it to the genuine seeker, who will take the trouble to dig beneath the surface and discover the meaning. But they conceal it from him who is content simply to listen to the story. They are a judgment on the casual and the careless." End quote.

Parables are a divine judgment upon the hard-hearted. A casual, careless attitude is one of the many indications of an underlying hardness of heart and in turn, a hard heart is evidence of divine condemnation on a life.