

The Powerful Purpose of Parables, part 1

Luke 8:4-10

We're going to be looking at the first part here of Luke 8:4 through 10. The Parable of the Sower is about one's response to the word of God. Jesus tells us plainly in verse 11 that "the seed that the sower sowed is the word of God," the word of God. He pictured then the receptivity to the word of God in the way that the four different soils received the sower's seed. It's a very simple story, very easy to understand, doesn't take a lot of extra exegetical skill to understand the story itself.

But in the simplicity of the story do not miss the incredible profundity of the lesson that Jesus is teaching. It is vital for us to understand how different people receive God's word and then what explains those different responses that we see. Have you ever stopped? Just in your own heart, in your own mind, in your prayer, prayer, life, have you ever stopped to wonder? Why we as Christians find Christ so precious. Why we taste and see that God salvation is so sweet.

Why it is that we find forgiveness of our sins to be such an incredible relief, such a burden removed from us? Why we find that a clear conscience before God is more precious to us than any possession you could offer us? Why is it that for us, that the question about how a guilty sinner can be reconciled to a holy God is the single most important question in the world. Bar none. Why is that?

By stark contrast, why is it that we are in such contrast to everybody else in the world that we meet? Why do others seem so indifferent to those matters, as if they're untroubled? Why are others frankly bored by spiritual matters, spiritual conversation, why? Why do they get irritated with us when we want to keep on having that conversation? Or worse, why are they even hostile, offended at the gospel? Why do people come into a church like ours and roll their eyes, look at their watches, yawn, scratch their head, look around. Wonder when is this going to end?

That's the normal response. If you look if you call what this world is as normal, that is the normal response to everything we're doing here. Why do so many reject the word of God outright? Why do some seem really interested at first, but then very quickly fall away? Why do some seem to go along well for a time? But then they drift in and out of Christianity, in and out of the church, only to eventually depart permanently.

Well, those are the questions that are answered by one of Jesus' most important parables, the Parable of the Sower. If you're one of those Christians who's actively involved in evangelism, you have a heart for and you are praying for lost people in your life by name, friends, coworkers, relatives, even strangers you meet that you don't know their name, you're praying for them too.

But point one is about the gathering crowds. The gathering crowds who had the eyes to see something spectacular. They had eyes to see something spectacular, and you say, Doesn't everybody? Yes, that's the point: everybody does. Luke sets the scene here with Jesus' growing popularity as Jesus has been passing through the towns, towns and the villages of Galilee, he

came to them not only teaching, but also healing, casting out demons, performing mighty, mighty works.

The crowd could barely believe what their eyes were seeing. Look at verse 4 again. It says there Luke 8:4, "When a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him." Stop there. We wanna remember that Jesus had been traveling around through the hamlets and villages and towns and cities of Galilee for quite some time. He's been preaching. He's been healing. Verse 1 reminds us of that there in Luke 8 that Jesus went through the cities and the villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And when he proclaimed, he proclaimed with power. Power that made a difference. It made a physical difference. But he wanted the physical lessons that they saw and learn the spectacular power that he was displaying to point them to his deep power to get to the deep issues of sin and righteousness and coming judgment.

So the twelve there they accompanied Jesus along with female disciples as we learned in verses 2 to 3. But this itinerant ministry, as he went along, it seemed to be emptying the other towns and villages of Galilee, as people said, You

know, what? I don't care what I got to do today I'm going there. I'm going to follow that guy. People started to leave home to go where Jesus was.

Not only was the crowd size creating a practical logistical challenge for him and his teaching, something more important was at stake. The popular excitement about Jesus presented a spiritual challenge as well. The multitudes of people signaled something of a crisis in Jesus' mind. And it's important to understand this, that the large crowd did not encourage him. It didn't excite him in the slightest. If our Lord's not encouraged by big crowds beloved, neither should we be. Many are called but few are chosen.

And Jesus here is concerned that his few disciples are relatively small group in comparison with the throng of people surrounding him and following them, he's concerned that his disciples, his twelve, the men, the women that are following after him, he's concerned that they're going to be, come to some

very wrong conclusions about the path of discipleship ahead of them. That it's going to be all popularity and happiness.

And looking at the crowds around them, Jesus knew that in a relatively short period of time these same people would turn on him. They'd turn on him. They would stop coming to him to call out for his mercy, and instead they would start rejecting him and cry out for his blood. Not only that, but they'd say, "His blood be on us and our children." These people, these crowds, he knew these people only had eyes to see something spectacular, but nothing truly spiritual, no eyes to see something of eternal significance. One day soon they would eagerly trade the spectacle of Jesus' Ministry for the spectacle of Jesus' crucifixion.

So the mixed nature of the massive crowds was really a confusion. That's the spiritual challenge that Jesus saw in front of him. It was a confusion about the clear message of the gospel. It was a confusion about the nature of the kingdom. It was a confusion about the true citizens of the kingdom, in contrast to all the false pretenders.

Jesus knew some sifting was required. He needed to cull the crowd a bit. As Frederic Godet says it, he says, "If on the one hand it's necessary to draw the spiritual into closer attachment. On the other hand, it is of importance to keep the carnal at a distance." That's what's happening in our text. Jesus is not fooled here by the size of the crowd. He's not fooled by its apparent outward external interest in him and his ministry. He's not deceived one bit into thinking popularity represents legitimate, sincere seeking.

And so Luke 8:4, Jesus here makes a strategic decision. Look at Luke 8:4, "When a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him. He said in a parable," or through a parable. Yes, they had eyes to see the spectacular. They were curious they were interested in seeing more miracles. They're eager to see, receive more healings, nothing special about that.

But Jesus here expose the heart by teaching them in parables by speaking spiritual truths to them, yes, but veiled

in a cloak of familiarity. Because, point two, they did have ears to hear something familiar. They had ears to hear something familiar, and so he gave them something familiar. Look at verses 5 to 8. "This is what he said, '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. 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. Some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundred fold.'

"As he said these things he called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'" On the surface, that sounds pretty straightforward and quite simple. But it is a parable as Luke has told us it's a parable. The word parable is an English transliteration of the Greek word *parabole* which comes from the verb *parabalo*. *Parabalo*, the verb means, to cast alongside of, and that's what a parable is. It casts a truth alongside something that is familiar.

It's interesting because the parable that he tells us about, a sower that's casting, casting, casting and that's what

he's doing here. He's casting a truth alongside something familiar. Parables by design are simple, but the closer you look, the more carefully you study them, you come to see that Jesus' parables are something profoundly brilliant. They are evidence of a divine mind behind them. They're memorable. But understanding the meaning that they teach is something that's granted only by the Holy Spirit. That's why you can, hear so many unbelievers, so many people in the world quoting Jesus' parables, they got no clue what it means.

That's why Jesus spoke to the truth to the spiritually mixed crowd. He was hiding the truth from the casual and the lazy listener, but he's provoking the interest of the spiritually enlightened. Both things are going on, hiding from the unbeliever, revealing to the believer. I like how the commentator, James Edwards, explained parables. He said this, quote, "Parables are liked are like stained glass windows in a cathedral. Dull and lifeless from the outside, but brilliant and radiant from within." End Quote.

That's exactly right. That's a great word picture the difference in perceiving the beauty and meaning of a stained

glass window is when you look at the window from the inside when it's illuminated by the outside sunlight. When you look at it from the outside with no illumination, you can't tell what it is. You do not, you're not really overawed at that stained glass window, and the difference is all in where you're standing, whether you're on the inside or on the outside.

Same thing with parables to those standing inside of God's favor, looking at the parables with light shining through Jesus, parables are brilliant and radiant. But for those who are on the outside without the light, Jesus' parables just appeared dull and lifeless. Nice sayings good proverbial quotes. Great morals for our kids. But they're standing on the outside, looking in, and they really see nothing profoundly important.

Most of the people listening, as I said, missed a deeper meaning. But they did hear this: "A sower went out to sow his seed." It's actually likely that if they looked beyond Jesus out where he was sitting in the boat and looked onto the shore or looked around them that they would have seen men walking through

the fields, sowing seed, casting seeds around. Broadcast sowing so that you get the most spread with the most seed, sowing fields.

So Jesus here continued, "The sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path. It was trampled underfoot. The birds of the air devoured it." Not hard to figure that out. The path that refers to pathways that bordered the farmers' fields kind of like sidewalks surrounding the crops. Hard packed baked by the sun. The seed that fell along the pathway by the sower was not intended by the sower for the pathway. He didn't intend to get it there, it just happens. That pathway is hard packed by all that foot traffic that pounds along baked by the sun. The continual watering kind of would bring water to the soil. That hard packed soil, and then it would dry up in the sun would bake it. Just turn it into veritable cement.

So while sowing the, the field using this broadcast method of casting seed, some of the seed was inadvertently going to fall along that pathway. Passersby, they could watch people walking by trampling on the seed, beneath their feet, trampling

it, destroying it. It's not going to be effective. Birds of the air swooping down onto that pathway and ingesting that seed, eating it and ingesting it.

No seed that falls along any of those pathways is going to bear any fruit, just counted by the sower by the farmer as a net loss. It's a calculated loss when sowing seed, but it's relatively small, acceptable. They move on. They don't even think about it. That's the sidewalk seed.

Look at the second seed verse 6, the shallow seed. "Some fell on the rock. As it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture." Now no farmer sure no farmer in here is going to allow rocks to remain in his field. He's done the hard work of plowing and he's turned up the soil exposed all the loose rocks and he's gotten rid of the rocks. He doesn't send, the farmer doesn't send the sower out to sow unless he's prepared that soil and pulled out all the rocks, to do otherwise is to waste resources by casting seed into a rock infested soil. That's not going to be productive.

So this section here is not talking about a bunch of rocks in the soil. What Jesus is referring to is a reality of farming in Palestine, which is, there is underneath the soil hidden from your eyes and deep enough to be missed by the plow a limestone rock bed beneath the surface. It's hidden and undiscovered. The plow isn't deep enough to get down there, and the presence of that rock bed, which is a foot or two beneath the surface, is it going to be deep enough to sustain any productive crops.

What's going to happen? Is the seeds going to fall into that soil? It's going to germinate like the seed does. It's going to start growing developing roots that try to shoot down deep to make sure that there's moisture feeding the, the plant. But because the roots can't grow deep enough, all the energy that's within the seed to go down into and develop a strong, healthy root system, since it hits that rock bed, it cannot grow further, and so all that energy goes upward. So those crops breakthrough the surface rather quickly. Too quickly, in fact, for the observant and the experienced farmer. When he sees that he sees signs of problems when there's an over zealotness on the part of the crop to break through the surface and start to flower.

He knows something is wrong. He can reveal something wrong deep within the surface because in a short while, as the sun passes over those shallow rooted plants, the sun's heat is going to cook the plants. Without a sufficient root system unable to grow beyond that rock, rock layer unable to reach deep enough to into the earth to find that life-giving water, that fledgling plant is going to wither and die almost as soon as it springs up. That's the shallow seed.

Look at the next verse, verse 7. We get the sidewalk seed. The shallow seed. Now here in verse 7 is the suffocated seed. "Some fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." Now again. Just like the previous two unproductive soils, no farmer is going to intentionally sow precious seed into soil that he has not weeded. He's not going to put it intentionally into weed infested soil. That just happens. Certainly there's no intention to sow into a visible bed of weeds, but the good seed can sometimes fall into soil that's already been, unbeknownst to the sower, infested with weed seed.

When that happens, there's a stifling choking and suffocating effect. In a sin-cursed world, thorns, weeds, every kind of noxious plant grows remarkably well. Doesn't take any work at all to grow weeds. They thrive in a sin-cursed earth. Isn't it frustrating? I heard, It really is. How politely said.

In contrast to everything useful to us, the weeds are robust and aggressive. Weeds intrude upon whatever it is you want to grow, and they take over the space. They devour the soil's nutrients. They drink up the moisture in the soil, and when they grow up next to your crops, the weeds always outpace your other crops, faster, higher. They steal all the sunlight from the grains and the vegetables that you hope to grow.

The weeds kill the good plants by choking them out, by suffocating them. Weeds starve the good plants of food. They dehydrate them of water. Weeds rob them of the energy from the sunlight. It's a slow death for those beautiful little plants we're trying to plant. But eventually the weeds choke out the life of the plants that sprout from the good seed. It's death by suffocation. This is plant murder.

So we've seen the sidewalk seed along the path. The shallow seeds sown on top of the bedrock. We've seen the suffocated seeds sown among the thorns. Let's look at the healthy super productive seed. Super productive. Verse 8, sown in good soil, "Some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundred fold." The good soil, it's not hard like the first. It's not shallow like the second. It's not unclean like the third. The good seed is cast into good soil, and the rich nutrient filled earth of a freshly plowed field.

The soil is soft, able to receive the seed. It's deep, it's capable of developing a deep root system that shoots roots down to life-giving water. And it's pure soil free from the seeds of weeds, free from the influence of noxious life-stealing murderous weeds. And in Jesus parable, that's the kind of soil that yields, what we see here is incredible growth. It turns out an extraordinary profit. In fact, this hundred fold profit is totally unrealistic. This is such a staggering return on investment that we should see a hundred fold yield here as nothing short of supernatural. And that's exactly what Jesus

PILLAR OF
—TRUTH— 

intends for us to surmise. Good seed in good soil with
supernatural growth from God.