

Luke 8:11-15
April 14 and 28, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are continuing our study of the parable of the sower. As a refresher, let's revisit the context: Jesus' ministry was immensely popular (8:4). People were journeying from great distances to hear Him speak. He is preparing His disciples for ministry as it relates to sharing the gospel. He wanted them to understand that there will be a variety of listeners on any given day with a variety of different heart conditions. In this parable, Jesus describes four types of heart conditions that His disciples will encounter.

Transition: Let's pick up where we left off last week by reading v.4-15 to get the text fresh in our minds.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.4:

- While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

V.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.

V.6:

- Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

V.7:

- Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.

V.8:

- Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

V.9:

- His disciples asked him what this parable meant.

V.10:

- He 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.'

V.11:

- "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.

V.12:

- Those 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.

V.13:

- Those on the rock (Mark 4 - rocky places with little soil) 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.

V.14:

- The 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.

V.15:

- But 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.11: What does the seed represent? [The word of God]

Q: Why does the seed have so much power? [Because the seed is the word of God, which is **alive**. It imparts life to those who are spiritually dead. The Word of God can germinate in the human heart and do a mighty work of transformation. Just as a seed can produce a tree that bears much fruit which gives nourishment, sustains life, and in turn produces more seeds to produce more trees and fruit, so the Word of God can bear fruit in human lives.]

Q: Who does the farmer represent? [The sower of the seed]

Q: What does the "soil" represent? [The heart condition of the "hearer of God's word"]

Q: Who does the "bird" represent? [The devil who plucks seed]

Q V.12-15: Jesus describes four different types of heart conditions. As a reminder, Jesus is spelling this out to His 12 disciples so they won't get discouraged when the gospel seed doesn't germinate well. Let's start with v.12. What is the first heart condition that Jesus describes? [The seed falls on the "path," which represents a hardened heart.]

Q V.12: What is the first heart condition you see? [A hardened heart. An UNRESPONSIVE heart.]

Q: What happens to the seed when it lands on a hardened heart? [The bird/enemy plucks it. Although the seed is powerful, it still needs good soil to bear fruit.]

Q V.13: What is the second heart condition you see? [A heart that is initially receptive, but shallow soil. It's an IMPULSIVE heart.]

Q: What circumstances cause this person to fall away? [Times of testing. This represents the person who impulsively welcomes the gospel without counting the cost. Perhaps he heard that following Jesus would magically solve all his problems and that Jesus offers an abundant life, so he emotionally responds. At first, he seems to be zealous for the Lord. He seems to make rapid progress in the faith. But then, trials hit. Because his Christian experience was based more on emotion than on truth, he has no deep roots into the Word.]

Q V.14: What is the third heart condition you see? [A heart that is crowded by life's riches and pleasures, worries. A DIVIDED heart]

Q: Why does the seed fail to flourish with this kind of heart? [This is the person who wants the best of both worlds. He professes to believe in Jesus, but his heart is divided. He is still drawn after what this world has to offer. This heart among the thorns is not fully committed to seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He is trying to serve two masters, but he really is serving mammon, not God.]

Q V.15: What is the fourth heart condition you see? [One that is fertile and genuinely RECEPTIVE to God's word.]

Q: What is the result of a person who receives the gospel seed with a fertile heart? [He produces a big crop. He bears much fruit through *perseverance*]

TRANSITION: All of us have heard this parable and have a good understanding of the different heart conditions we'll run into. Let's take time for application questions!

1. In light of this parable, should we give new believers the assurance of salvation? Why or why not? [Let people engage]
2. Do you agree that only one soil is truly saved? Could types two and three be "carnal" Christians? What difference does this make? [Let people engage]
3. When we sow the seed of the gospel, to what extent should we try to be persuasive and to what extent should we fall back on the sovereignty of God (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 2 Cor. 5:11)? [Let people engage]
4. How can we guard against worries, riches, and pleasures choking out the Word in our lives? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Many confuse popularity with fruitfulness. When large crowds flock to a church, the preacher and the congregation think, "Look how God is blessing!" But, is He *truly* blessing? Jesus knew that large crowds did not equal God's blessing unless those in the crowd were truly responding to God's Word with saving faith. Jesus knew the selfish and fickle hearts of sinful men. He also knew the intensity of the spiritual conflict when the gospel is preached, that Satan waits to snatch the seed before it can take root in hearts. So, He spoke this parable as a warning of the danger of a superficial response to the gospel.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 200–201). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Teaching: Hearing God's Word (Luke 8:1–15)

The Lord continued His itinerant ministry in Galilee, assisted by His disciples and partially supported by some godly women. It was not unusual for Jewish rabbis to receive gifts from grateful people, and these women had certainly benefited from Jesus' ministry. The New Testament church leaders were supported by gifts from friends (2 Tim. 1:16–18) and from churches (Phil. 4:15–17), and Paul supported himself by his own labor (2 Thes. 3:6–10).

The word *hear* is used nine times in this section. It means much more than simply listening to words. "Hearing" means listening with spiritual understanding and receptivity. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). With this in mind, we can understand the three admonitions Jesus gave His followers.

Hear and receive the Word (vv. 4–15). Initially, the Sower is Jesus Christ, but the sower represents any of God's people who share the Word of God (John 4:35–38). The seed is the Word of God, for, like seed, the Word has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22–23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted (John 12:24). When a person hears and understands the Word, then the seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil.

Jesus called this parable "The Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:18), but it could also be called "The Parable of the Soils." The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless. The human heart is like soil: if it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Jesus described four different kinds of hearts, three of which did not produce any fruit. The proof of salvation is *fruit* and not merely hearing the Word or making a profession of faith in Christ. Jesus had already made that clear in His "Sermon on the Mount" (Luke 6:43–49; also note Matt. 7:20).

The hard soil (vv. 5, 12). This soil represents the person who hears the Word but immediately allows the devil to snatch the seed away. How did the heart become hard? The "wayside" was the path that ran through the common field, separating the plots; and the foot traffic hardened the soil. Whatever goes into the ear or eye finally enters the heart, so be careful who is allowed to "walk on your heart."

The shallow soil (vv. 6, 13). This soil illustrates the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the message, but his interest wanes and he does not continue (see John 8:31–32). In many parts of the Holy Land you find a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of soil. The shoot can grow up, but the roots cannot go down, and the sun withers the rootless plant. The sun represents the testing that comes to all professing believers to prove their faith. Sun is good for plants *if they have roots*. Persecution can deepen the roots of a true Christian, but it only exposes the shallowness of the false Christian.

The crowded soil (vv. 7, 14). This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and "weed out" the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. "Cares, riches, and the pleasures of this life" are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the "crowded heart" comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth "fruit to perfection."

The good soil (vv. 8, 15). This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, is truly saved, and proves it by patiently producing fruit (see 1 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22–25). Not everybody produces the same amount of fruit (Matt. 13:8), but all true believers will produce some fruit as evidence of spiritual life. That fruit may include winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), money given to God’s work (Rom. 15:25–28), good works (Col. 1:10), Christian character (Gal. 5:22–23), and praise to the Lord (Heb. 13:15).

This parable shows that Jesus was not impressed by the great crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of the people did not really “hear” the Word and receive it in their hearts. He gave this story to encourage the disciples in their future ministry, and to encourage us today. When you consider how much teaching, preaching, and witnessing goes on in the course of a month or a year, you wonder why there is such a small harvest. The fault does not lie with the sower or the seed. The problem is with the soil. The human heart will not submit to God, repent and receive the Word, and be saved.

“Faith comes first to the hearing ear, not to the cogitating mind,” said A.W. Tozer, the much-quoted pastor and author. Faith is not a matter of IQ or education; it is a matter of humbly preparing the heart to receive God’s truth (James 1:19–21). The wise and prudent are blind to truths that are easy for the babes to understand (Matt. 11:20–26).

Cole, Stephen (1998) – www.bible.org/seriespage/lesson-34-superficial-and-genuine-believers-luke-84-15

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 225)

8:11–15. Jesus explained **the parable** to His disciples. **The seed is the Word of God.** The words which were being preached by the Living Word, Jesus, was the same message John the Baptist had been preaching. The people’s responsibility was to accept the message which both Jesus and John were preaching.

Four kinds of people are represented by the four soils. All four kinds receive the same news. The first group consists of those **who hear** but do not **believe** at all, because of the work of the devil (v. 12).

The second group are those who listen and rejoice **but** then do not stick with the truth of the message for **they have no root** (v. 13). The fact that **they believe for a while but ... fall away** means that they only accept the facts of the Word mentally and then reject it when “the going gets rough.” It does not mean they lose their salvation, for they had none to lose.

The third group are those who listen but never come to maturity (v. 14). These may be those who are interested in Jesus’ message but who cannot accept it because of their devotion to material things—**life’s worries, riches, and pleasures.**

The fourth group consists of those who listen, **retain** the Word, **and ... produce a crop** (v. 15), that is, they bear spiritual fruit, evidence of their spiritual life. Their hearts were changed for they were **noble and good.**

As Jesus’ ministry progressed, it was evident that each of these groups surfaced: (1) The Pharisees and religious leaders refused to believe. (2) Some people rallied around Jesus because of His miracles of healing and feeding but refused to stay with His message (e.g., John 6:66). (3) Others, such as the rich ruler (Luke 18:18–30), were interested in Jesus but would not accept Him

because of the strong pull of materialism. (4) Others followed Him and were committed to His Word regardless of the cost (e.g., 8:1–3).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 24–248). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

8:11 Luke omitted Mark 4:13 in his abbreviated account. This may have been due to his desire to omit the negative comment about the disciples.

The seed is the word of God. In Mark the seed is “the word,” which Luke qualified with “of God” (cf. Luke 5:1; 8:21), because this expression had not yet been used absolutely, i.e., without qualification. (Contrast Mark 1:45; 2:2.) In so doing Luke emphasized that the gospel message the disciples proclaimed and which he was writing has God as its source, not human beings (cf. 1 Thess 2:13). Later “the word” will be used without qualification throughout Acts (cf. 4:4; 6:4; 8:4; 10:36). Luke did not mention the sower in the interpretation. Because the seed that was sown was God’s word, Luke probably understood the sower as representing every preacher of God’s word. See comments on 8:5.

8:12 Then the devil comes. Luke substituted the Greek name translated “devil” for the Semitic “Satan” found in Mark 4:15. In the interpretation the birds’ actions represent the devil’s removal of the word of God.

And takes away the word from their hearts. The devil does this “so that they may not believe and be saved.” For Luke “faith” was clearly the means by which salvation comes to the individual. For “heart” see comments on 1:51 and 6:45.

So that they may not believe and be saved. Luke associated this with the work of the devil. In Mark 4:12 the inability to believe is more directly associated with Jesus’ teaching in parables.

8:13 Although the four soils represent various kinds of people, there is a certain looseness in the metaphor, and at times the plants produced by the soils represent the various kinds of people rather than the soils. This does not cause any major confusion, however, for each kind of soil produces its own particular kind of plant. The second kind of soil hears and joyfully receives the word. The term “receive” is a Lukan expression for responding positively toward Jesus, the gospel, or the gospel messengers. These hearers even receive the word with the proper attitude of “joy” (cf. 1:14; 2:10; 24:41, 52).

They have no root. They believe for a while. Criticism is not directed to the quality or kind of faith these hearers possess. The problem is rather that they only hold this faith “for a while”; but as the rest of this text and the full canonical message suggest, this faith is not saving faith.

But in the time of testing they fall away. Whereas Mark and Matthew emphasized the temporary nature of their faith as being due to tribulation and persecution, Luke emphasized a particular aspect of this danger. This is the danger of succumbing to such testing in times of tribulation. The term “testing” or “temptation” can refer to temptation toward immoral conduct, but it is used by Luke in the context of persecution in 22:40, 46; Acts 20:19 (cf. Luke 11:4), and so the testing referred to here probably refers to the temptation to fall away during times of persecution. “Falling away” frequently is used in the Bible to denote falling away from God (1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12; Jer 3:14; cf. Wis 3:10).

8:14 The third kind of hearers hear the word; but as life goes on, worries (cf. Luke 12:22–34; cf. also 21:34), riches (cf. 6:24; 16:1–13; cf. also 12:15), and pleasure (found only here in Luke-Acts) choke out the gospel message. Like the second soil, there is a start in faith but no perseverance. Such hearers do not continue overcoming until the end (Rev 2:26). The expression “life’s” modifies all three of the dangers listed.

8:15 The fourth kind of soil represents those who hear the word of God “with a noble and good heart” (cf. Tob 5:14, LXX; 2 Macc 15:12). This qualification is in an emphatic position and denotes what is different about this group. The other soils also hear the word of God, but this soil hears it *with a noble and good heart*.

By persevering produce a crop. Like the woman in Luke 7:36–50 who produced the fruit of love, so they also produce a crop. The term *hypomonē* is better translated “with perseverance” (cf. 21:19; 22:28; Acts 11:23; 14:22) than “with patience.” Luke omitted the *thirty, sixty, one hundred times* found in Mark 4:20. He may have omitted this to show that there are no degrees of success or levels of status in the Christian life (cf. Luke 9:46–48; 22:24–27). Or perhaps he simply omitted this material due to his desire to abbreviate the Markan account. Exactly what this “crop” consists of is not described, but Luke no doubt expected his readers to understand this as involving a life of heeding God’s word.

The Lukan Message

In its present form the parable of the soils is an allegory. There has been a lengthy debate concerning the original meaning of the parable, and almost always the presuppositions of the interpreter have predetermined what Jesus originally meant. If it is predetermined that Jesus never gave interpretations to his parables, that Jesus never included any allegorical details in his parables, then the authenticity of the interpretation found in 8:11–15 must be rejected. Yet it would be strange if, as claimed, it seemed perfectly in order for the disciples and Evangelists to add allegorical details and interpretations to a parable, that Jesus absolutely could not have done so himself. Our task in this commentary is limited in that we have focused our goals on the investigation of Luke’s understanding of the material in his Gospel.

For Luke the meaning of the parable is fairly clear. The picture part of the parable involves a sower, seed, and soils. Of all the versions of the parable, in Luke the sower is least important (cf. 8:11 with Mark 4:14; Matt 13:18). The key picture parts of the parable in Luke are the seed and the soils. Luke tells us what the reality part represented by the seed is in Luke 8:11, where the seed in the parable is said to represent God’s word. The soils represent different responses of those who hear (8:12, 14–15) or receive (8:13) God’s word.

Thus the Lukan version of the parable is best named “the parable of the soils.” The parable deals with various responses of people toward God’s word. Luke was warning his readers that they need to take heed as to how they respond to God’s word. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (8:8).

Several unique Lukan emphases are in this parable. Luke warned against a faith that believes for a while but eventually falls away in time of testing (8:13). For Luke it was important not only how one begins the Christian experience, but it was even more important to persevere until the end (8:15). One must be aware of the danger of riches and pleasures (8:14). As a result Luke’s readers should take note that they have not believed in vain but that they have believed with a noble and good heart and persevere (8:15). Then they will indeed be fruitful. Since Luke did not specifically designate whom the fruitless soils represent, it would be speculative to assume that we are to see in the parable the lack of response to the gospel from Jews in contrast to the positive response from Gentiles. Luke probably left the soils undesignated in order for his readers to wrestle with what kind of soil they themselves are.

The question is often raised about which of these soils represent true Christians. Who of these will be saved (8:12; Acts 16:30)? There is general agreement that the first hearers were not true Christians (Luke 8:12c) and that the last hearers were. Despite such phrases as “receive the word

with joy” and “believe,” the second and even more so the third kind of hearers should be grouped with the first. For Luke “faith” and “hearing” were valuable only if those who believe also endure and bring forth fruit (3:8–9; 6:43–44; 13:6–9; 20:10). The faith that leads to salvation is a faith that does not fall away or endure only for a time (8:13). It is on the contrary a faith that perseveres until the end (8:15). Luke’s emphasis in the parable is not on “eternal security” but rather on “the persevering of the saints.”

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