

Parables of Luke 8

Parable of the Sower

The next parable recorded by Luke is found in Luke 8:4-15. This parable is also recorded in Matthew's account (Matthew 13:1-23), where we find some information that is important to understanding the purpose of the parable. There, we find that Jesus called the parable "the parable of the sower" (Matthew 13:18). As we have seen in previous lessons, typically a parable has one main focus or lesson. While there can be more than one lesson taken from the parable, we should look for what Jesus intended for the main lesson first!

In this parable, Jesus told of a sower, who went out to plant his seed. Like many of Jesus' parables, here He once again returned to the agrarian lifestyle that He often drew from. While there are similarities to modern day farming activity in these parables, the methodology of farming has changed so significantly we may miss the imagery. The sower of the first century was not as concerned about the distribution of his seed as the modern farmer is. He would scatter the seed over the land that had been prepared for it, but because of the nature of scattering the seed it would also be distributed on the ground surrounding the planted field. His job was to scatter the seed, and let it thrive or fail where it landed. He was not responsible for prejudging the soil and choosing where he would cast the seed.

The seed fell on four different types of soil:

1. **Wayside:** this was the land that would be along a field, that would have been packed down by people walking along the edges of the field. Jesus said that the seed in this soil were "trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it" (Luke 8:5).

2. Rock: this soil had very little, or no topsoil capable of growing vegetation. There was nothing for the plant to take root in. Jesus said that the seed would spring up, but that it quickly withered because it lacked moisture.
3. Thorns: this was a section of the field that had been overtaken with wild plants, most notably the thorny plants that would destroy any of good plants that they came into contact with. Jesus said that the good seed sprouted, but then was choked out by the thorns.
4. Good soil: finally, there was the soil that was suitable for the growth of the seed. The seed that fell on this soil produced fruit, “a hundredfold” (Luke 8:8).

Jesus ended the parable in a manner that he used at other times: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” This serves as a warning for listeners to pay attention to the message of the parable. The problem was that sometimes the parables were very difficult to understand! In this case, the apostles were baffled by Jesus’ teaching, and had to ask Him to explain His meaning to them.

As Jesus began His explanation, He told the apostles that they were in a special position. He used parables for the purpose of keeping some things hidden. He did not intend for all people to have an understanding of His teachings at the moment. He was, however, going to explain the meaning of His teachings to the apostles so that they would understand. It would take effort on the part of the hearers to understand the teachings of Christ!

Explanation of the parable...

As we saw earlier, in Matthew’s account, Jesus called this parable “the parable of the sower.” It is interesting that He did not call it the “parable of the soils.” He did spend most of the time in His explanation addressing the response of the “soils,” but the importance of the sower cannot be overlooked. Jesus said that the seed in the parable was the word of God. The sower, therefore, is the one that is busy about spreading that word. He cannot cast the seed with any preconceived notions, or prejudices. One cannot tell, in the application of the parable, what type of soil an individ-

ual might be. His job is to merely spread the word all around, and then allow the hearts of the people to respond as they will.

The soils represent the different hearts of people, and the way that they respond to the word of God that was delivered to them. Jesus explained how the different soils represented different responses to the word that was delivered to them. Notice, all of the soils received the same seed. There is only one word of God, and everyone is expected to respond to that word if they are going to bear fruit.

Explanation of the soils:

1. Wayside: These are people who hear the word of God, but before they have any real response to it, the Devil comes and snatches it away from them. This tells us just how active the devil is in his work to keep people out of the kingdom of God. Those with this type of heart allow Satan to remove God's word from them, not even giving it a chance to sprout!
2. Rock: This second group of people are willing to listen to the word of God, and even "receive the word with joy..." But, they have no root to them. They do not allow the word of God to grow, to take root in their hearts. They do not respond to His word, and therefore refuse to make changes in their lives that reflect what they see in the word. These people will seem excited, but that excitement does not last long. As soon as they see that there are expectations placed on them by God's word, they forsake it. When temptations arise, they fall away from the Lord and His instruction.
3. Thorns: This group of people also hear the word, and receive it. The word even takes root in the heart. However, they eventually are choked by the cares of the world. They are unable to put God and His will first in their lives, and they allow the things of the world to distract them from obedient service to the Lord. Jesus said that these people would allow the "cares, riches and pleasures of life" to choke out their desire to serve the Lord. Far too often, this is what happens with those who start down the road of serving the Lord. They decide that the things of the world are more important than what they

know the Lord requires. This becomes a matter of priorities. When things of the world become more important, we cannot possibly serve God appropriately. Paul had some of his own co-workers fall to this issue (2 Timothy 4:10).

4. Good soil: These are the people who have good hearts, which are receptive to the word of God. They are willing to hear, and obey, even when it is not an easy thing to do. Those who are willing to listen, to truly heed the word of God, and allow it to grow in their hearts, will be the ones who produce fruit. Changes will be evident in their lives, as they adopt God's will and shun their own. They will become more and more like Christ with every passing day. His word will direct their paths, and they will carry it to others so that they too can bear fruit!

Notice, Jesus said that those who are the good soil will "bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). This indicates that the fruit borne would not come easily or quickly. The one who is "good soil" will be proven over time, not in an instant, or moment in time.

The application for us from this parable is two fold. First, we must be the good soil. The only acceptable outcome for us spiritually, is to be the kind of soil that truly accepts the word of God, and allows it to grow in our lives, unimpeded. When we are that good soil, then we must, second, be the sowers who spread the word of God to others without prejudice. Our obligation is to cast the seed, and let it fall where it will. The various types of hearts will expose themselves by their response to the word of God. As sowers, we should not get discouraged! Out of four possible heart types, only one responds favorably, in the end, to the word of God.

Parable of the Lamp

Jesus' next parable should be seen as being in conjunction with the previous one. This parable, found in Luke 8:16-18, in some ways is an extension of the applications that Jesus was making in the parable of the sower.

Jesus said that no one lights a lamp and then covers it up with a vessel, or puts it under a bed. Instead, he lights the lamp and sets

it on a lampstand, where it can be seen and give light to any who enter the house.

The physical example used by Jesus in this parable follows principles of common sense. If a person wants light, they light a lamp. If they wanted light in the first place, why would they light the lamp then hide it where it cannot give light? Why would they place it under a bed, where it would become an immediate danger? Remember, the lamp that Jesus was referring to would be an open flamed lamp, and would cause immediate danger if hidden under a bed, which would be filled with a highly flammable material (like straw.)

Given the immediate context, it appears that the light of the lamp is the light of God's word, which shines on those who have accepted it. Light illuminates, but it also exposes. The light of the word of God makes clear what a person should be, how they should behave in order to be pleasing to God. Of course, that also exposes the shortcomings of those who see it. We have to be made aware of our failings before we can correct them. The light of God's word will make sure that nothing is left hidden.

Jesus continued His teaching to say that "nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17). There are a couple of possibilities for understanding this statement. The first is that Jesus was speaking about the revelation of the mystery of the gospel. He was declaring that the time was now coming when all would be made known. While this is certainly a possibility, it seems odd that such a point would be made in the context of a parable which by its very intent was to keep some information hidden (see Luke 8:10). This idea is certainly true. Paul spoke of his role in revealing the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:1-21). This doesn't, however, seem to be the best explanation given the context.

The second possibility is that Jesus was speaking about how the word of God shines to expose everything about a person. He was just addressing the "good soil", those who receive the word of God and allow it to grow in their hearts. This parable addresses how those listeners will view the word of God. Is it something that they

try to hide, thinking that doing so will absolve them of responsibility? Or do they see the word of God as the shining lamp that will illuminate their very being, and show them the way they ought to go? In verse 18 of our context, Jesus said that we must “take heed how [we] hear...” How we hear is just as important as what we hear! Yes, we must hear the truth of the word of God, but we must also hear it in the proper way! Do we use it as a light to show us what we should be, allowing it to expose the shortcomings in our lives so that we can make changes? Or do we seek to discredit its power by listening in a way to try and avoid obedience? There are many who “hide it under a vessel” so that they don’t ever see their own failings. They seem to think if they don’t see them, then it is acceptable to avoid changing them!

To those who hear in the right manner, Jesus said that “to him more will be given.” However, to the one who does not listen in the right manner, He said, “even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (Luke 8:18). To the one who listens properly, more light will be provided. He will be able to dig deeper into God’s word, and get a greater understanding of God Himself, and therefore, a greater understanding of what he should be. But, to the one who does not listen properly, even what he “seems to have” is not any kind of true understanding. It is a farce, a deception even to his own mind. What they “seem to have” will be taken away. When we don’t listen in the right manner, we gain no benefit from the word of God. If we are trying to figure out how to avoid doing the will of God, then we will never be the kind of people that God wants. We will, in fact, never be able to be the true children of God!

The Family of Jesus...

This last lesson in Luke 8:19-21 may not be considered strictly a parable, as there is no real story that is told. However, from the standpoint that Jesus used a well known, physical idea to emphasize a spiritual point, we can see similarities to the more well defined parables. Understanding these differences, we will still include this teaching as a part of our study here.

While Jesus was teaching, his mother and brothers came to speak

with Him, but they could not get to Him because of the size of the crowd that was around Him. When someone came to tell Jesus that they were waiting outside to see Him, He answered: “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

This teaching fits in the context of the teaching that Jesus had been conducting with this crowd in the previous parables. Jesus demanded a commitment to following the word of God. In this statement, He was not disparaging the idea of physical family. He was emphasizing the importance of spiritual family over that physical family! It seems that the crowd thought that Jesus would or should drop what He was doing (teaching about God) to go and see about the physical things of His earthly family. His statement made the point that His priority was the word of God, and the fruit that could be borne from it. Their focus, and their priority should have been the same thing! If they had grasped the meaning of the parables that He had just proclaimed to them, they would have understood that their listening to, and obedience to God’s word was the most important thing. And, if that was the case, then the spiritual family that was produced was also more important than physical family!

Unfortunately, this is one of the great downfalls of many Christians. They become so entangled with their physical family, that they are unable to leave them behind when they stand in the way of faithful service to God. They choose to placate the ungodly, and foster deeper relationships with those who reject God than those who heed His word and obey. They are the seed strangled by the thorns in the parable of the sower. If we allow physical family to keep us from faithfully serving the Lord, then we are not the good soil!

