

The Sower

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Preacher: Aaron Lockhart

[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. It's lovely to be with you. I think I know most of you here, but for anyone who doesn't know me, I'm Aaron, as was introduced, and I'm a member here in the church, and I have the privilege tonight of opening God's Word with you. And especially tonight, as this is the first in a new series that we're going to be going through in the evenings, a new series in Luke, specifically looking at the parables as we go through the book. The passage today is in chapter 8 and verses 4 to 15. Thanks, Johnny, for reading that. I hope no one here has ever been in a situation where they've had to use a duress code, as they're typically only used in dangerous and hostage-type situations. So if you do know what they are, I do hope it's only from films you've seen or books you've read. If you're not sure what a duress code is, it's when you need to get a message to somebody, an important message to tell them something, but you don't want anybody listening in to know what the true meaning is. For example, during the war, the World War II, when British agents were undercover in Europe, if they were going to visit another safe house, they would call ahead, and if it was okay on the other end, the agent on the other end of the phone would say, no, I'm busy. And that was the signal that it was all clear. Whereas if they were actually in danger or they were held at gunpoint, they would say something like, yes, come on over.

So that was the sign that actually things weren't okay, but anybody listening in, for example, the enemy, they would think that that was an innocuous, a normal response, but in fact, it was actually a distress signal. I also believe that airline pilots have a verbal hijack code so that they can let anybody in ground control know what's going on without actually having to alert any of the hijackers what's going on and that they're calling it in.

Anyway, these are just examples of being able to say something to someone, and yet to anybody listening in, it means something quite different, which is something that we're going to see happen in the passage today, as the Lord Jesus does. As he begins to speak in parables, he's speaking to everyone, but the truth in his words are only being revealed to some. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And it's really all about our response to hearing the gospel. So just for a bit of scene setting and context, this is an important passage in the Lord's ministry, an important moment, as it really marks a change. Jesus had begun his ministry by preaching on the mount first, and he preached very practically about life and how to live what he was teaching. And then after that, he went and demonstrated his power in the form of miracles, where he cleansed a paralytic, a leper, he calmed a storm in the sea, and he even removed the demons from a possessed man. He was able to show them that he had power not only over people and illnesses, but over the natural elements as well.

And what he was doing is he was showing that there is power in his words, particularly to the doubters of the day, who thought he was, particularly those who felt he was falsely claiming to be who he said he was. But now he very deliberately begins to speak and teach in parables. And this one in particular is the first parable. It's recorded in all of the first three gospels, and he uses this one also to then explain to the disciples afterwards why he's doing that. I would split up the passage like this. I think the first section is from verses 4 to 8, and that's really the parable of the sower. That is him telling the story. Then in verses 9 and 10, he explains the purpose of parables. And then in verses 11 to 15, the Lord gives his interpretation of the parable.

[3 : 5 8] So that was the parable of the sower, verses 4 to 8. And he gives the purpose of parables in verses 9 to 10. And then in 11 to 15, he gives his interpretation of the parable.

So from verse 4, or really from verse 5, we have his explaining of the parable of the sower, which at first reads fairly simply about what would have been a common occurrence in these days, particularly in these parts. I'm not sure about today. I don't know if there's any farmers in.

I myself is not a farmer. But the story is fairly simple to understand what's going on here. So the sower is sowing his seed. It would have been by hand, I imagine. And there are four different ground types that are described.

And as the seed lands on each kind, there is a very different result, which at first seems simple enough, and it makes sense on a surface read. So the first seed we have here in verse 5, it lands on the path.

The path wouldn't have been necessarily a paved path, but it would have been the area that you walk along beside the fields. It's likely they wouldn't have had sort of built up fences to separate different fields, but everybody would have known where one person's patch ended and started.

[5 : 06] And when everybody walked along, it would have formed a kind of, the constant footpath would have formed a hard packed pathway. So obviously any seed that found its way onto that pathway would have had no soft soil.

And it couldn't bed, and it would have just lay there. And so it says the birds came and ate them, or devoured them, it even says. And then the next group of seeds in verse 6, it lands on the rocky ground, where there was some soil, but only a thin layer.

So the seed sprouted up quickly, but because it was only a thin layer of soil, it wasn't able to grow deep roots, had no solid foundation, and so when the sun came up, it scorched it, and the seed withered away.

And then in verse 7, there were the seeds that landed on the thorny ground. Here the seed itself started growing well, but the real growth was impossible, because it was intertwined in the presence of thorns.

And as the seed grew, the thorns choked it and killed it off. And then finally in verse 8, we have the seed that landed on good ground, fertile ground, unaffected by any of the adversities that obstructed the others, and so it was able to sprout and yield a good crop a hundredfold, or a hundred times more than what was originally sown.

[6 : 22] And then the Lord says this interesting and important statement, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Which even the disciples didn't actually understand initially, and so they ask him, and he explains why, why he said that, and why he is now speaking in parables.

So this is this key verse here in verse, it's really in verse 10. After the disciples ask him what's going on, he said, He says in verse 10, 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, and though hearing they may not understand.

There's quite a lot in just those few verses, but I want to unpack it just a little bit. And I think it's interesting how Luke explains this compared to the other Gospels. Luke is very brief and to the point, as is his orderly account of the whole Gospel.

But I think what he's saying here is that he's speaking in parables to conceal what he's saying from some, while also revealing it to others. He's calling it the secrets of the kingdom. So he's revealing them to some, but keeping the secrets concealed at the same time.

This includes to the disciples, who didn't actually understand it either, until he explained it to them afterwards. You'll also maybe note, depending on what kind of Bible you're looking at, the end of verse 10 is in quotations.

[7 : 44] So this part here is actually a direct quote from Isaiah. And I think by using that direct quote, what he's doing is, he's showing that he is now fulfilling that prophecy that Isaiah gave hundreds of years before.

And it also shows that what he is now teaching and saying is consistent with what Isaiah said hundreds of years before, as it sort of confirming that there's consistency all the way through the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament.

It's also showing that parables are complex. Like there are many layers deep. In fact, so that even children can understand and get learning and benefit from them. I mean, they're very often used as Sunday school stories.

But what he's also saying is, they do conceal much deeper truths. So that for anybody who wants to understand, across the ages, he's not saying something that they aren't able to. This is an encouragement also for Christians, in case they feel disheartened after sharing what they believe to be true with someone and not necessarily seeing the response or the results that they're looking for.

And even for those of us who do understand the gospel, it reminds us that there is always more to learn. We must just continue to seek the knowledge and then the Spirit can reveal it to us.

[9 : 03] The people here, including the disciples, they had to ask questions if they wanted to understand more. And so do we. That's the same for us today. There is so much about God that we will never know or understand while on this earth.

But with the desire to learn more, he will reveal himself more to us. This is why things like hearing, coming to church is important, but also discipleship and fellowship with each other.

Smaller Bible studies, the one-to-ones, home groups. These opportunities to really study the Word and ask questions together are really important. And yet, despite all that, the seed can be sown within our hearts so that even a child can understand their position before God.

A hopeless sinner in need of a Savior. And the way to rectify it, it's not complicated. Simply accepting your position as a sinner in God's eyes and accepting and believing that Jesus' sacrifice is enough to forgive you in God's sight, that is enough to be saved.

We recognize that even though once planted, before there can be growth, a seed that is so needs to be looked after, fed, watered, cared for spiritually, open to prep.

[10 : 18] Although placing your faith in Jesus is a simple step, it's a hugely significant one, one for your life, and it is not to be taken blind or as an uninformed decision.

And then, from verse 11 to the end of the passage in verse 15, is the Lord giving His interpretation of the parable.

It explains the different responses that people have towards the Gospel, specifically four very different responses from four different causes, giving four different results.

But just before we get into those, there are three key elements in this parable that I think are important to know first as they're really essential to understanding the application of this to us today. And so there in verse 11, we have the first key aspect in explaining this parable, and that is what the seed itself is symbolizing, which was the word.

[11 : 20] The word of the kingdom, which might also be called the Gospel, or we often call it just the Good News. But I would suggest it goes further and is applicable to all of the expanded teaching and spoken word of the Lord Jesus.

A seed, depending on what you have in your imagination, is probably something similar. It's something very small and innocuous on its own and in isolation, just like words are. Except when that seed is planted and cared for, then a seed is actually in possession of great power, as it can sprout and grow and transform into something amazing and unrecognizable from what it was before.

This is the word of God. The work that it can do in the human heart when it is planted and accepted is mighty and wonderful and completely transformative. Like a seed, which can end up growing into a huge tree and bear fruit and sustain life and then produce more trees and more fruit, so does the word of God in human lives.

But it can only happen when we really get to know him and his word. The gospel truth cannot be fully understood or appreciated unless we really know who Jesus is, which we find out about as is revealed in his word.

And for anyone who is a Christian, then it's on them to be the ones sharing the seed and showing others who this man Jesus is and why his word can transform them. Which brings us to this next element, which is in the parable, which is who is the sower?

[12 : 52] So the sower is the person who's proclaiming the gospel and sharing God's word. So in this particular context, the Lord was obviously speaking about himself as a sower, but it can be any one of his followers.

The sower, any one of his followers then or now. And so anybody who faithfully shares the gospel to those who do not yet know the Lord for themselves can see themselves as the sower and recognize the duty that we have to sow, to share, to tell others.

And there's also, I think, important to say there's nothing particularly special about the sower.

There's no qualifications required other than being saved. It's about the seed that they're sharing. It's about the truth. The truth of the word of God, that is where the power is. And we are merely the messenger trying to share. I think some people can often feel unqualified, like you need to be a pastor or have some degree to share the gospel, but that's not true.

It's often the newest converts, the newest Christians, who actually have some of the strongest witness, because people who know them can see the immediate change in our lives. I've often found myself, sometimes it can feel like you don't know all the answers, so you're almost scared to get into the conversation.

[14 : 11] You're not sure what to say, but if you can really just articulate what God means to you and how he's changed your life, then that is enough to share with others. I think it's also important here to say that the seed has not changed through time.

We don't now proclaim and preach a different message than what's in the Bible or than what Jesus taught. It's as true and applicable now as it was then. And that's also why we can't get too disheartened by a seemingly disappointing response when we share it.

It doesn't mean that there's an issue with the sower, with you, or with a lack, or it doesn't mean that there's a lack of effectiveness of power in the seed, but it's with the soil itself.

And we're going to come to that in just a minute. We can't be consumed with trying to predict and then analyzing the outcome of our sharing of the word, but rather just trust that in faithfully scattering the seed, that which the Lord intends will yield a crop.

And obviously, while there's a clear evangelistic theme here, there's also a challenge for the Christian as we look at our own lives. Are we continuing to sow and nourish and water the word of God in our own life?

[15 : 26] I think it's quite common to read this passage and maybe be overly familiar with it, but also just associate yourselves into one of the scenarios and think that that's final and that there's no room to see something of a few of them in our lives.

Even though if we're saved or if you consider yourself a Christian, it is so easy, isn't it, to be consumed with our own lives, whether it's our family, work, hobbies, the news.

And if we don't continually prioritize spending time in the word of God, it can result in us either just coasting or even slowly drifting away without realizing that we are no longer growing in the things of God.

We need to be watching out for this and not letting too much get in the way of our spending time with him and his word because it can have a really negative effect on our relationship with him and it can be dangerous for our spiritual health.

We need to sow God's word into our hearts repeatedly and regularly so that it continually grow in us as well and so that we can bear fruit and nourish it and not neglect it.

[16 : 36] And then finally, the soil. The soil, if you haven't sussed already, is the human heart. The seed is always good and very powerful, but it needs to land on good soil to grow and bring fruit.

And so as we're about to move through the remainder of the passage, the Lord is going to explain the parable by explaining each of these different soil types to our life. And they're all relatable, but only one of them produces a crop.

So when the Lord says, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He wants everyone to examine their own heart and make sure that they're doing what they need in their own life to make sure that they become the good soil.

Ultimately, it's only God who has the power who can give us the repentance for our sins and change our lives. But the responsibility is on us to go to Him and acknowledge that and accept that. That is still with us. So, from verse 12, this is where the Lord starts to expand on the first soil scenario, which was the path, the hard-packed walking path.

[17 : 43] This, you'll maybe have noticed, is the only one of the scenarios where the hearer doesn't accept it at all. Just like the paths along the edge of the field that had been walked on so much, and they were almost like pavement, rock solid, unable to take seed, so are these hearts.

This is the sad situation, really, where men and women's hearts have been hardened. And it says here, clearly, that it's Satan that takes it away, the devil who takes the seed away before it plants. He is the bird snatching out the gospel from hearts so that there is no response, no transformation, and no fruit to come. It's not just a figure of speech, either.

It's a real spiritual battle that happens to all of us. The devil will use any kind of distraction or other beliefs and ideas to make us reject and refuse God.

I'm sure, like me, maybe many of you know somebody like this, and so would it be your prayer that God really breaks up that hard ground in their heart so they might yet be open to receive the truth of the gospel?

[18 : 53] Sometimes it's those who are most opposed, seemingly, that are actually acting that way because they're feeling the most, they're feeling very convicted and conflicted with what they want to believe, and there is always hope for these individuals, these people.

And then, so in verse 13, we have the rocky ground, or sometimes known as the shallow soil. This is because it wouldn't have been straight onto a bunch of rocks, as I maybe used to think, but it would have been a thin layer of soil over hard limestone rocks.

And so, although the seed takes, it has no strong root amongst the rocks, and then it just results in it withering away and dying. This represents those who obviously receive the word with joy, it says, which is a good start, and they believe for a while, but when they're tested, they fall away.

This is a hard one because we love to see a positive response to the gospel, don't we? What a joy it is when we see someone who shows interest and that seemingly gives their life to God and really seems to be on fire for them, making rapid progress, and in the sadness when it comes clear that they didn't really grasp what it means to be a follower of Christ.

They don't lose their salvation, but rather they were probably never actually saved in the first place. Maybe the quickness with which they received it could be evidence for a lack of deeper understanding of the implications and what it means and what it would mean for their life.

[20 : 19] Sadly, also, this could be because of how it was represented to them, which is why it's so important for us when we're sharing the gospel that we share the real truth exactly as it is in Scripture.

Exactly as the Lord sets out, we can't sugarcoat it or make any promises about what becoming a Christian is. It's simply not true. We heard Andy talking about that this morning. People are trying to add their own bits to it to make it more appealing and end up watering down the truth.

The Bible is very clear that the life of a Christian will be difficult at times. Although we are blessed immeasurably and look forward to an eternity with God, that doesn't mean eternal material blessing while we're here on earth.

And we actually are to expect trials if we stand firm in our faith in this world. But it could also be a case of selective hearing. Somebody is looking for answers so they hear what sounds good.

They see all the positives and they're like, yep, great, this is an answer to all of my problems. But they ignore and overlook the cost implications. And so when they're forced to make a choice, they end up falling away quickly.

[21 : 28] And then the third scene starts in verse 14. This is the thorny one, literally. Here, the seed lasts longer than it does amongst the rocks.

It takes and it grows. But because it is amongst the thorns, they eventually choke it out to where it doesn't produce any fruit. So this represents those who have a much better grasp of the word than those in the rocks and what discipleships involve and what discipleship involves.

So they make good progress. But they never truly give their whole life to God and free themselves as what it calls here, free themselves of the cares of this world. They understand what's involved in following Christ, but they're unwilling to give up the desires and the pleasures of this world and it is stifling their faith and spiritual growth.

They know the cost, but they're just unwilling to make it. And it's not a lack of knowledge, but really of priority and of commitment. I think it's important to point out he's not condemning riches here.

I think that's important just to make sure, or even pleasures that we can give God thanks for. It's the living for them that's the problem rather than for God and thanking Him for what He blesses us with.

[22 : 46] I think of the first three, this is the one that can be most challenging for us who would call ourselves Christians as we know that while we're still living in our human bodies, we can still feel the temptation of greed and sensuality that is so widely advertised, encouraged, and promoted in the world around us.

And so we need to continually examine our hearts and make sure that we weed out any of those thorns that still cause us to fall. There's maybe, it can look different for each person, but there's maybe a habit or an interest that you have that you stay involved with, but you know it's really affecting your spiritual growth, but you've just not quite been able to actually cut it out for good, and you're succumbing to the temptation for the short-term perceived pleasure.

But we see here very clearly that if we don't deal with it, we will ultimately be choked out by it and no longer produce any spiritual fruit. And then, so we have the final example in verse 15.

This is the good soil. This is the one that plants, grows, and bears much fruit. It says, those with a noble heart, a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering, produce a good crop.

This is the goal. This is the ideal response and outcome from hearing the word of God. And while a lot of Christians probably automatically see themselves in this soil scenario of the four, and I hope that for many that is true, but I would suggest that based on everything we've looked at so far, we can't be complacent.

[24 : 28] And this is not a permanent landing spot. It's what we should all be striving for, but it takes work and commitment to stay here. This is a heart made good by God, by the miracle of regeneration.

The person has heard the word and holds it close and is living a life of a disciple. And through perseverance, over time, they will produce fruit, and they're not only a hearer of the word, but also a doer.

They are feeding on it instead of the world, constantly challenging the sin that comes into their life, and then they can live a life more pleasing to God.

And by not being conformed to this world, they are becoming more Christ-like. This is what we should all want to be aiming for. To see it is an amazing encouragement to others.

It's lovely when somebody else really starts to make that commitment, and it pleases God immensely. So, as Christians, I think we all want to see and be ourselves in the good soil, but are we?

[25 : 36] Or can we really see something of the other soils in our lives? Does any of that resonate? And if so, what are we doing about it? I think also just another common mistake when considering this passage and applying it is thinking that it's all about a momentary, immediate response to the gospel.

But it's not, really. It's really about our response over time. You see, it takes a while for a seed to grow and sprout and then only to wither, or to grow up and then ultimately be choked by thorns, or to grow up strong, well, and bear fruit.

This is a long game. So we must continually evaluate and cultivate the word in our own lives to ensure we keep ourselves and our hearts as good soil. We can only ever grasp God's truths with help from the Holy Spirit working in us.

They really are beyond our comprehension, but he can make them known to us. So while this is often and largely an evangelistic parable with hope, it's also a warning for those that do hear but don't act on it.

So just in closing, I trust that you'll be challenged by considering what you're doing with the seed in your own life, ensuring it is being cared for properly and watching out for the shallow soil traps and the thorns that can come for all of us.

[26 : 58] And if you realize that you have never opened your heart to the seed that is the good news of the gospel in order that he might work a miracle of regeneration in your heart, then I challenge you not to delay in addressing that, but rather come to him and accept him for what he can do for you today.

Thanks. Let's just have a closing word of prayer for a hand back to the band. Our God and Father, we thank you for the time we've been able to spend in your words this evening and for the simple but yet deep truths that are contained in your parables.

We thank you for the reminder about the power that is your word and the challenge to share it no matter what soil type we think we're telling it to. I pray that we would also just feel the challenge ourselves to strive to be that good soil, aware of the traps that can await for all of us and how they can really affect our spiritual growth.

And Father, I just pray that we would constantly strive to sow the word into our own hearts so that we might be less like the world and more like you and indeed get to know you more.

So we just pray that you'll bless us all now in your son's precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.