Sunday, January 19, 2020


Golden Text: “And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand” (Luke 8:9-10).

I. INTRODUCTION. As Jesus taught, He often used parables to reveal truth to his listeners. A simple definition of a parable would be an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables are used by Jesus to relate certain spiritual truths through common experiences. To understand parables takes careful thought. When it comes to Jesus’ parables, He wants us to consider seriously what He is teaching. In this week’s lesson, we will study one of Jesus’ best known parables that teach about the importance of the spiritual soil of our hearts.

II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON. According to Luke’s Gospel, our lesson takes place not long after Jesus healed a centurion’s servant (see Luke 7:1-10) and raised a widow’s son from the dead (see Luke 7:11-18). After these
acts of healing, while John the Baptist was in prison (see Luke 3:19), he sent two of his disciples to Jesus for confirmation as to whether or not He was the Messiah. Jesus told John’s disciples to go tell John that they had seen people healed, raised from the dead and they had heard the gospel preached (see Luke 7:19-22). Once John’s disciples departed, Jesus proceeded to tell the people who had gathered all about the greatness of John (see Luke 7:24-35). When Jesus finished, Simon, a Pharisee invited Him to dinner during which a woman (who was called a sinner) came in and with her ointment, she washed Jesus’ feet and kissed them (see Luke 7:36-39). When the host saw this, he said within himself (as if Jesus didn’t know what he was thinking), “if this man were a prophet, He would know that the woman who was touching Him was a sinner” (see Luke 7:39). In response to the host’s thoughts, Jesus gave the parable of the two debtors (see Luke 7:40-43). Then Jesus chastised Simon for not doing for Him what the woman had done, and He forgave her of her sins because of her faith (see Luke 7:44-50). Sometime after these events, Jesus and His disciples traveled through every city and village in the province of Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, followed by women who ministered or served Him (see Luke 8:1-3). Our lesson begins with Luke 8:4.

III. JESUS TEACHES USING A PARABLE (Luke 8:4-9)

A. The seed and the soils (Luke 8:4-8).
1. (vs. 4). Our first verse says, “And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable.” As Jesus moved through Galilee, a large crowd of people “gathered together.” These “people” came to Jesus from “every city” in the region of Galilee, and on this occasion He took the opportunity to teach them using “a parable” or an illustration. A “parable” is an illustration of an earthly story that has a heavenly or spiritual meaning. It is a simple illustration using something people are familiar with to present something that they are unfamiliar with. The point of a “parable” was to get people to think about the thing they were familiar with and then apply it spiritually. Jesus often used “parables” to teach spiritual lessons (see Matthew Chapter 13). A lot has been said about Jesus’ healing ministry, as it should be. But Jesus did more than heal; He also had the most exhilarating and relevant teaching ministry in history.

2. (vs. 5). This verse says “A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.” Jesus began His parable by saying “A sower went out to sow his seed.” This would have been a familiar image to people living in an agricultural society like Israel. Many of Jesus’ listeners had probably sown “seed” themselves. Sowing “seed” was usually done by taking a handful of “seed” and scattering them around causing some to fall in different places. So as Jesus continued His parable, He said “and as he sowed, some fell by the way side.” The “wayside” most likely refers to the area or pathway that
the farmer walked on to “sow his seed.” Since these seeds fell on areas where people walked, “it was trodden down.” In other words, the “seed” that fell in areas where people walked was trampled on preventing the “seed” from taking root. As a result, “the fowls of the air devoured it” meaning that these walked on seeds soon became food for the birds.

3. (vs. 6). This verse says “And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.” As the sower continued to sow his seed, “some fell upon a rock.” This is a reference to thin topsoil with a hard layer of rock underneath. This thin topsoil allows a plant to grow quickly, drawing moisture from the “rock.” Since there was soil on the rocks, the seed sprouted and “sprung up” or began to grow. Even though these seeds fell on rocks with a thin layer of topsoil and began to grow, under the sunshine the small amount of moisture from the rocks soon evaporated and the plants “withered away” or dried up “because it lacked moisture.” The seed couldn’t get any water.

4. (vs. 7). This verse says “And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.” Then Jesus said “And some fell among thorns.” Since “thorns” are weeds, they tend to grow faster than good plants. As a result, “the thorns sprang up with it (the seed), and choked it.” Although the seed was sown “among thorns,” it still grew along with the “thorns” which soon “choked” out the good plants.
5. (vs. 8). This verse says “And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Finally, some of the seed “fell on good ground.” This refers to nutrient-rich, moist soil which probably had plenty of sunshine. The little seedlings “sprang up” just like the seed that grew on the rocky soil and among the thorns. But instead of withering away or being choked out, these seeds “bare fruit an hundredfold.” In other words, the farmer reaped one hundred times what he had planted.

Undoubtedly, this great yield can be attributed to the “good ground” or rich soil the seed fell on. It should be noted that both Matthew and Mark record this same parable, but they write that the farmer or sower reaped from his seed “some an hundredfold, some sixty fold, some thirtyfold” (see Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:8). Matthew and Mark speak of a variety of yields from the “good ground,” while Luke’s version simply notes the fruitfulness of the good soil by using a single example. There is no problem here. The point that all three Gospel writers are making is that the seed that fell on “good ground” not only grew, but it was also fruitful, yielding a very large crop. At this point, Luke writes “And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” The fact that when Jesus finished His parable “He cried” means that He called out to make sure that His hearers paid attention to what He was saying. It’s very important that we pay careful attention to Jesus’ teaching. With the words “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” Jesus was saying that only those who really were seeking the truth would understand what He was
saying in the parable. There is a difference between hearing and just listening, and hearing and understanding. Jesus was well aware of the fact that some of His hearers would understand the parable, but others would not. **Note: This parable is not about an irresponsible farmer who is scattering seeds randomly. He is sowing his seed in the normal way of seeding a large field which was tossing the seed around by hand through the field. The idea is to get as much seed as possible to take root, because there is always the possibility that some seed will not get into the good soil. The fact that in the parable some of the seed didn’t produce any crop doesn’t mean that it was the farmer’s fault. The amount the farmer reaped from his sowing depended on the condition of the soil the seed fell on. Although this parable is called the parable of the sower, it would better serve as a parable about the different soils. As we shall see later in this lesson, when Jesus explains the parable, His focus is on what happened to the seed and where it was sown and not on the sower who sowed or planted the seed.**

**B. The disciple’s confusion (Luke 8:9).** This verse says, “And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?” It appears that Jesus’ “disciples” were aware that Jesus was talking about more than farming, but they didn’t know exactly what. So, as in most situations, the best way to get understanding is to go to the source and that’s what they did. “**His disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?**” In other words, they asked Jesus what the parable meant.
IV. JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLE (Luke 8:10-15)

A. Jesus’ strategy (Luke 8:10). This verse says “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” In response to the disciple’s request to know the meaning of the parable, Jesus said “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” The pronoun “you” here is in the plural tense referring to more than one person, specifically the disciples who were believers in Jesus. Jesus made them aware of what a great advantage it was for them and all believers to have the opportunity and privilege of hearing the mystery and meaning of His Word, which others had not. As He said, “Unto you it is given.” So Jesus explained to them that the “mysteries” or secrets of “the kingdom of God” were given to true believers and “disciples” of Jesus Christ. In other words, those who listen and learn from Jesus will receive “the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” The “mysteries” of God’s Word are revealed only to believers (see Romans 11:24-25; 16:25-26; I Corinthians 2:6-9; 15:50-52; Ephesians 1:8-12; 3:9-10; Colossians 1:25-27). After He declared that His disciples will have the privilege of knowing “the mysteries of the kingdom of God,” Jesus then added, “but to others” He would speak “in parables.” But the “parables” do not only reveal secrets to the “disciples;” they also conceal truth from outsiders; those Jesus calls “others” in this verse. When a person trusts in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will
teach him or her deep spiritual truths (see I Corinthians 2:9-10; Ephesians 3:2-7). However, unbelievers cannot understand the things of God because as Jesus said, those things are hid from them (see I Corinthians 2:7-8), so “that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” It appears that Jesus took these words from Isaiah 6:9. **Note: It’s interesting that the same kind of seed fell on different types of soil. Each seed had the same potential for growth as the others, but the difference was in how the seeds were nourished. Jesus was not really talking about farming and growing crops. He was making a point about the “kingdom of God,” specifically why people can hear the same gospel message, but respond in totally different ways with totally different results. People are like different soils, and the gospel message will only thrive in one type: good, wholesome, weed-free soil. It is absolutely true that everyone needs God’s truth, but it is also true that not everyone will benefit from it. Many will reject the truth no matter how clearly it is presented, and if the truth is clear, the hearers are subject to greater judgment. The principle of greater judgment on those who knowingly reject God’s truth is repeatedly brought out in Jesus’ teachings (see Luke 12:47-48; John 9:41; 19:11). The danger in being exposed to revelation is that if we do not respond in faith, eventually hardness sets in and God acts to judge. The good news is that when Jesus hid the truth from the crowds through parables, He was showing mercy to those who were bent on rejecting Him and His salvation. But God’s greatest mercy by far is experienced by those to whom understanding of the truth is given along with the
grace to receive it. None of us would ever come to Jesus without that grace (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

B. Jesus enlightens His disciples (Luke 8:11-15).

1. (vs. 11). This verse says “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.” Jesus is now about to explain to His disciples what the “parable” means. He started by declaring that in the parable, “The seed is the word of God.” In the context of this lesson, it is clear that “the word” here means the preaching of the kingdom of God (see verse 10). Therefore, Jesus’ message is about entering into God’s plan for humanity and His rule. We don’t know for sure, but maybe, just maybe, when Jesus referred to the “word of God” here, He may have been thinking about the message that both He and John the Baptist preached concerning the kingdom of God, repentance and salvation (see Matthew 3:1-2; Matthew 4:17). The gospel message that we preach today includes the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see I Corinthians 15:1-4). Where a person will spend eternity depends on his or her response to that gospel message. Typically there are four responses to hearing the gospel as illustrated by Jesus’ parable. Jesus reveals those responses in the remaining verses.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Jesus’ explanation of the parable to His disciples begins with “Those by the way side
are they that hear.” The “way side” soil refers to those who “hear” the Word of God, the seed, but don’t understand it. As soon as they “hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.” Satan is ready to snatch the seed, or the Word of God away from them before any learning can take place. The “devil” does this “lest they should believe and be saved.” In other words, Satan “taketh away the word out of their hearts” to prevent them from believing and being saved. “Their hearts” are like those well walked-on paths that are too hard to grow anything (see verse 5). “The devil” is a subtle and spiteful enemy, who makes it his business to hinder our growth by “the word” of God. He takes “the word” out of the “hearts” of careless hearers “lest they should believe and be saved.”

Note: It seems that Jesus added this about “the devil” for at least two reasons. First, it teaches us that we cannot be saved unless we “believe.” The “word” of the gospel will not be a saving “word” to us, unless it is mixed with faith. Second, it teaches us that “the devil” does all he can to keep us from believing “the word” when we read and hear it; or if we heed it, for the moment he makes us forget it, and let it slip (see Hebrews 2:1). And if we remember it, the devil tries to create prejudices in our minds against it, or turn our minds away from it to something else. All this Satan does “lest we should believe and be saved.” Please, let’s not let him get away with that! The “heart” of man is like soil to the seed of God’s “word;” it is capable of receiving it and bringing forth the fruits of it; but unless that seed is sown in man’s heart, it will bring forth nothing
valuable. So the question that all believers should ask, is what is the purpose of having the seed of the scripture, if we are not going to sow or plant it in the “hearts” of men and women? And what is the purpose of having good soil in our own “hearts” if our “hearts” aren’t sown with the seed of God’s “Word?”

3. (vs. 13). This verse says “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.” The “rock” or rocky soil that the seed fell on, Jesus said “are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy.” These are people who both “hear” and “receive the word with joy” at first, and “for a while” they “believe” the “Word” which is the seed. However, since this type of soil or person has “no root,” the seed or the “Word” cannot grow (see verse 6). As a result, “in time of temptation” or when trials, tests and storms of any kind take place, they “fall away” or abandon their faith. So, what little spiritual growth that has occurred is destroyed. Both Old and New Testaments issue dire warnings about the consequences of falling away or departing from faith (see Jeremiah 3:13-14; Daniel 9:9; I Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12).

4. (vs. 14). This verse says “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” Now Jesus addresses the soil that was full of “thorns.” Some of the farmer’s seed fell “among thorns” (see verse 7)
which as Jesus said “are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” The Lord was saying that those people who He likened to thorny soil or ground, “have heard” God’s Word, and continue with their lives. But they allow themselves to be “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” In other words, the thorny soil represents those who are “choked” out of their walk with God by life’s distractions. They allow such things as the worries of life, the pursuit of wealth, and getting involved in activities that bring fleshly “pleasures” to remove any benefit the seed has to offer. This indicates that there was no real repentance and no real decision to follow Jesus. As a result, Jesus said that they “bring no fruit to perfection.” In other words, they don’t grow spiritually (see Galatians 5:21-25).

5. (vs. 15). Our final verse says “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” Finally, Jesus describes those He identified as “good ground” (see verse 8). He said those are the ones who are “honest” and have a “good heart.” The fact that they “having heard the word, keep it” means that they embrace the gospel message and won’t let it go. The Word of God becomes important to them, and they live their lives according to it. Those identified as “good ground” receive God’s Word gladly, and then become sowers of the Word of God themselves. They will also “bring forth fruit with patience.” Three of the examples Jesus gave in His parable end with the seed or God’s Word failing
to produce what it was sown for. God’s purpose for sowing or planting “the word” is to bear “fruit” in a person’s “heart.” Only by patiently clinging to what God offers does the seed reach maturity. Such reliance on God’s Word is called faith. **Note:** *This parable is not about a response to the Word at any given moment. It sums up the different ways the Word is received over a lifetime of being exposed to it. It takes time to fall away from an initial attraction to God’s Word. It takes time for the pleasures of life to erode the effectiveness of the seed, God’s Word. This parable calls for reflection. We need to cling to the Word in patient faith. If we want to be fruitful, especially given that the obstacles to fruitfulness are so many and varied, then we must hold fast to God and His message of hope. We can focus either on God’s promise, or on our own circumstances. Whatever we choose makes a difference: one leads to fruitfulness (see John 15:4-5, 8), the other to barrenness.*

**V. Conclusion.** In this week’s lesson, Jesus was preparing His disciples to be sowers of God’s Word. In their ministries, they would encounter the four types of hearts illustrated by the types of soil we have discussed. In the same sense, as we share our faith, we cannot expect everyone to accept the gospel message. Our responsibility is to faithfully sow the seed and leave the results to God. Jesus’ story of the soils also should cause us to examine ourselves and raise questions in our own hearts concerning what kind of soil we
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are and whether or not we are bearing fruit (see John 15:1-5).

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