



Luke 8:11–15

11 ‘This is the meaning of the parable: the seed is the word of God. 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. 13 Those on the rocky ground 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. 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. 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.

Reflection

The French (who love wine) have a word so distinctive and revered that, in wine circles, it has made its way across into the English language. The word is 'terroir'. It means the earth, the soil, the rich fertile ground and complete natural environment in which grape vines grow. Good 'terroir' is highly prized terrain, so much so that some

of France's greatest wine houses mark individual bottles down to the particular slope, hill, or block within their vineyard from which the grapes of that particular bottle were pressed. It is thought that the terroir – as much as the climate, viticulture process, and age and nature of the vine – brings the distinctive flavour and quality to the wine. So much so, that some speak of hints and notes of trees growing nearby that they imagine they can taste or smell in the wine's bouquet. And perhaps they can, although this level of appreciation is certainly beyond my humble palate!

Some of the finest and most highly prized terroir in France is not, however, what you'd expect. The ground is often hard and unyielding. This means that very few grape vines survive. Only the most hardy, those

bursting with life manage to yield fruit in these conditions, and when they do, there is no glut of grapes, certainly not kilo after kilo; every single grape struggles to form; the yield is very low. But the grapes that are produced are of the highest possible quality, with a concentrated richness and perfection that produces none but the finest wine. It may take eight vines to yield enough fruit for a single bottle – but that bottle then dons the label of Domaine de la Romanee Conti or Chateau Lafitte Rothschild; compared to a dozen cheap bottles from a single vine grown in inferior quality terroir.

With a heritage like this, those French with ‘ears to hear’ (8:8) as Jesus puts it, must appreciate more than most Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. I’m going to read the full par-

able again today and then follow up with Jesus' explanation of it. So, reading from Jesus' words from Luke 8:5–15, about the terroir of the human heart,

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 ate it up. 6 Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 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, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let them

hear.’

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 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.”

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The Gospels contain more than sixty parables of Jesus. Indeed, Mark goes as far to say that there were periods in Jesus' ministry when he only taught in parables (Mark 4:34). Of the 27 parables of Jesus

that Luke records, the Parable of the Sower is just number five. And so, it is worth us revisiting again today briefly the nature of Jesus' parables, as we will do from time to time.

One of the best-known and most helpful definitions of a parable was provided by Welsh New Testament Scholar and influential Protestant theologian C. H. Dodd. He says, 'At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.'¹

Did you get all that? Vivid similes, metaphors, comparisons drawn from everyday

¹ Fred B. Craddock, Luke (Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching; Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990), 108.

life that drew the ancient audience in. But then there's a twist, something strange, something unexpected, that casts doubt on our interpretation. Instead of clarifying like most illustrations, the meaning becomes both clearer and more clouded, forcing the hearer to think for themselves, and to enquire of Jesus exactly what he means – which is what Jesus' disciples do after hearing the parable of the sower.

Agriculturally the parable was crystal clear, but not everyone could understand how it applies to what God was doing through Jesus. And as it turns out, parables like this one were common in antiquity. In Greco-Roman philosophical discussions, for example, the 'sower' is a stock analogy for the 'teacher', sowing his or her teaching into the minds and hearts of their students

so that they might bear fruit. Jesus' parable however is not about the cultivation of minds through education. His parable has political overtones. It is about God planting a renewed, end-times Israel through the ministry of Jesus. This parable then, like most of Jesus' parables, teaches us about the kingdom of God. And more specifically, the nature of hearts and minds that are receptive to the good news of the kingdom.²

Think & Pray

By way of explanation Jesus presents before us four responses to the Gospel: those who respond with hard hearts, with shallow hearts, with conflicted and compromising hearts and with good hearts that

² David E. Garland, Luke (Zondervan exegetical commentary series on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 342–43.

allow God's word to take deep root within. Of these four responses to Jesus, it is only this last, that is the response of true faith. The first three to varying degrees give the appearance of faith, but have never truly experienced saving faith which is proven genuine by its fruit. Let's look at each briefly in turn.

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.

The hard path is emblematic of some people who hear God's word. The busyness, pounding the pavement, the incessant traffic of life, has so hardened them that nothing in God's truth stirs them. And Sa-

tan's work in our culture and their pride snatches the Gospel away before it can have any effect on their hard hearts.

Next, shallow hearts, in verse 13. The Gospel is preached and there is initial joy and enthusiasm from your friend. Your heart soars; only for them to disappear from the faith the moment life gets tough. Jesus says this is because the Gospel never truly took root in their hearts. Then, perhaps sadder still, verse 14, are those conflicted and compromising hearts who want to have it both ways. They seem to sense the truth and beauty of the Gospel, yet the world around them is too seductive, and they fall away, demonstrating that they too were never truly saved.

And finally we have 'good hearts', not good

at all really (they are the first to admit it!) but they are receptive to God's word, allowing it to take deep root within, to flourish in their inner being, transforming them and growing them into the image of Jesus. These are known by their fruit. Over the course of their faithful life, a bounty results; a hundredfold that which has been sown into them, to the glory of God, the advancement of his kingdom and to the great blessing of our world.

Think over and pray for such as these this morning. Pray that you might be one such as these. Terroir with God's word the seed. What does the terroir of your heart look like?