



Luke 8:4–10

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

Reflection

Today and tomorrow, perhaps Jesus' most famous parable – Jesus says of it in Mark's gospel,

‘Don't you understand this parable?
How then will you understand any
parable? Mark 4:13

Down throughout the centuries it's come to be known as the Parable of the Sower. But in truth it would be better titled, the Parable of the Seed, or even better, the Parable of the Soils. Which one are you? Let me read the passage to you, Luke 8:4–10,

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ing and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 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.'

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Jesus is speaking to men and women of the land, beside the sea of Galilee. Fishermen and farmers. He’s teaching them about the kingdom of God. And he is doing so in parables, starting with his magnum opus, the parable that explains all parables.

A parable is a brief maxim, saying or figure

of speech drawn from everyday life that involves a comparison or picture. Parables are common in the Old Testament and in ancient Jewish writings but Jesus developed the art of teaching in parables to a level unparalleled in the Old Testament, among the rabbis of his time, or even in Greco-Roman antiquity. Jesus' parables came to define the art. And his most characteristic and insightful teaching comes in the form of parables of which we have approximately sixty in the Gospels. They teach us about the kingdom of God, vividly and memorably illustrated through everyday episodes of fishing and farming, housekeeping and family life, royalty and banquets and the like. Parables are tantalising; but not always easy to pin down. No special vocabulary is required to access them, making them available to all

and yet they are often far from simple or easy to understand. Jesus' parables often confront hearers with the unexpected, confounding them and forcing them to perceive things in a new light. They do not simply dispense good advice. They are good news, but the good news cannot be understood apart from the one who announces it. We must have encountered Jesus for his parables to take effect in us otherwise,

“though seeing, they may not see;
though hearing, they may not understand.” 8:10

The Parable of Sower is the parable that enables us to understand all parables (Mark 4:13) because this parable explains the condition of the heart that receives

God's word and is changed by it. So, not so much the Parable of the Sower (who is God); better, the Parable of the Soils (human hearts), the parable of hard hearts, shallow hearts, compromised and conflicted hearts, and fertile hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to received God's word (the seed) and grow.

In Jesus' imagery some of this seed falls on pathways, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and some on good soil. And in this, Jesus captures perfectly what we know of first century farming conditions in Palestine. Conditions were difficult and uncertain. Farmers would so unsparingly in order to maximise their chances at getting a crop. And, so intent on receiving a crop is this farmer that he sows every square inch of his field. So too is God

unsparing with his word, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Pet 3:9) – no matter how unlikely they might appear to respond to the Gospel. In fact, mathematically, with paths, rocky ground, thorns and good soil, it would appear that 75% of this farmer's sowing is in doubt – and yet God's word goes out to all.

Thinking about it however, perhaps my Parable of the Soils is misnamed because at its heart this parable is about the power of the germination in a seed, the power of God's word. In the Greek, not the soil, but the seed is three times emphasized in Jesus' opening line,

A farmer [Greek: sower] went out to sow his seed

And in tomorrow's passage the seed will be expressly revealed by Jesus as the word of God. The word of God taking root in good soil, in hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to grow, to bear fruit, to yield a crop a hundred times more than was sown and so continue to grow the kingdom of God. The change is gradual at first, a small seedling; but at the end of a faithful life lived uncompromisingly for Christ, there is a great harvest.

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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.

And as we think back through Luke's Gospel so far we've seen it all haven't we? Jesus preaching amongst friends and neighbours in his hometown in Nazareth (4:14–30) who heard his sermon from Isaiah but were unwilling to accept what he was saying; the word trampled upon, and the birds of the air eating it up. Then there was Simon (7:36–50), the Pharisee who invited Jesus into his home for a meal, he obviously wants to give Jesus a hearing, but what Jesus says and does is so unexpected and shocking – well, it is all too much for Simon. The seed landed amongst his self-righteousness, his rocky prejudice, and failed to penetrate his hard heart. Then there are the people of 'this generation', Jesus' sweeping statement

in Luke 7:31 about the vast numbers who have failed to respond to either John the Baptist or himself. The seed preached to them has landed amongst thorns, compromised and conflicted hearts seeking a Messiah after their own design, the good news that they've heard is being choked and will soon be but a distant memory.

But then there is the Gentile centurion (7:1–10) who believed in the authority of Jesus and that Jesus could heal his servant with a word from a distance – a faith that astonished even our Lord. Or Levi (5:27–32), the turncoat traitor, the tax collector who left it all behind to follow Jesus. Or more recently the woman of ill repute (7:36–50), likely a local prostitute, who was so overcome by the forgiveness of Jesus and the new life dawning in her heart that she washed

his feet with perfume and tears in Simon's house. Good soil. God's word sinking in, taking root, beginning to flourish in good soil by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the delight of God.

Think

Perhaps you're commuting to work right now in a bus or train or in your car. If so look out the window at all the people passing by. What sort of soil do these people represent? What messages are being sown into them today? God doesn't want even a single one of these people to perish. His word is lavishly, abundantly and indiscriminately being preached to all through the natural world and through the church. What can we do to plough up rough ground, to remove stones, to remove obstacles, to

weed out thorns in order to reach these people more effectively with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

But perhaps firstly and most importantly, we must reflect on our own lives. How much mature growth, how much fruit, what kind of crop or harvest is beginning to show in your life? Has God's word truly taken hold of you? Is new life dawning in your heart? Is the good work God has performed in your life beginning to spill over and bless those around you?

Pray

Spend some time now to close, praying for the people you see all around you. Pray that God's word would take deep root in your life and result in a hundredfold bless-

ing to yourself and to these people, leading them to Christ and then transforming their lives and the world in which they live.