

The Parable of the Sower

The Setting of the Parable (Luke 8.1-3)

The Lord Jesus had moved out from preaching in the synagogues (Luke 4.44) to spread the gospel 'throughout every city and village' (v.1). The word 'throughout' indicates the thorough way in which every road was traversed. He searched for interested hearers every foot of the way. He had been rejected by the religious and rich (Matthew 1-12), now He turned primarily to notorious sinners, outcasts and the poor (cf. Luke 8.4, 19, 40, 45, Isaiah 61.1). The Lord Jesus 'preached' and 'shewed the glad tidings of the kingdom of God'. Preaching is 'to herald'. When a herald proclaims he is representing the king which brings authority to his message. This speaks of the **manner** with which the Lord Jesus presented the gospel (Luke 4.36). To 'shew' is to 'evangelise' or 'bring good news'. This speaks of the **content** of His preaching; it concerned the good news of the kingdom of God: **repentance** (Matthew 4.17, Mark 1.15), **baptism** (Mark 1.4, John 3.26, 4.1-2), **faith** in the Lord Jesus as King (Mark 1.15, John 3.16, 8.24, Acts 19.4), **forgiveness** of sins (Mark 1.4, 2.5, 10, Luke 7.48, 8.12), and the demand of a changed **life** displaying the works of righteousness (Matthew 3.8, Luke 3.8).

As the Lord Jesus and the disciples travelled, certain women took the opportunity to minister to their daily needs (vv.2-3). He had first ministered to their needs (they had been 'healed of evil spirits and infirmities'), now they ministered to His. They sought to demonstrate their genuine gratitude in a practical way, at their own expense. For example, **Mary Magdalene** (always mentioned first in any lists of women associated with the Lord) had been possessed by seven demons (complete occupation). After meeting the Lord there was complete liberation! **Joanna** ('Jehovah is a gracious giver') was the wife of Chuza, house steward of Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great). How delightful it is to see that she stayed with, and ministered to, the Lord Jesus all the way to the cross (Luke 23.55) and beyond (Luke 24.10). It is not what we possess that matters, but rather our **devotion** to Him! Would this take us as far as the cross? Would we be willing to endure the shame, suffering and personal cost of being devoted to Him?

The Sower and the Seed (Luke 8.4-8)

The gospel was being preached in ever wider circles and more and more people came to listen (v.4). This parable was therefore used by the Lord to challenge his audience. How would they receive the word He was speaking?

'The **sower** went out to sow his seed' (v.5). The sower is not identified in this parable, but elsewhere speaks of the Son of Man (Matthew 13.38). The sower represents Christ, and His servants after Him, preaching the kingdom of God. This commenced at His public ministry (Matthew 4.17). The **seed** is the word of God (v.11). Like a seed, this has inherent life and can produce life (1 Peter 1.22-25). This seed is called 'good seed' (Matthew 13.24), 'precious seed' (Psalm 126.6) and 'incorruptible seed' (1 Peter 1.23). Luke speaks of seed (plural) being sown, whilst Mark mentions single seeds. *Mark 4.4: And it came to pass as he sowed, **one** fell by the wayside (JND). This suggests both the *individual responsibility* that is ours to sow the seed and the *value* of a *single* seed sown, perhaps amounting to just one or two spoken words from our lips.* It is important to notice that the seed is sown into the hearts of those who hear (vv.12, 15). This is the introduction of the life-giving principle into a person so that they now **become the seed themselves** (cf. Matthew 13.38). They are then planted in the soil. A person's response to the word of God will therefore determine their fruitfulness. This is more about the nature of the **seed** than it is the nature of the **soil**. *Matthew 13.23: But **he** that is sown upon the good ground... (JND). As the servants of Christ today, it is ever our responsibility to **sow**. We are not told to tear up the thorns, remove the stones or chase away the birds. We sow the word of God and have total confidence in its inherent power and life (Isaiah 55.10-11). Note that the sower 'went out' to sow his seed (v.5). The people knew well that the sower did not sow near his own house or in a fenced or walled garden. He went out into the open country where the road passes through cultivated land. Are we willing to go **out** to sow the seed?*

The seed was sown and fell in **four** different places, resulting in **four** different outcomes:

| Place | Matthew 13 | Mark 4 | Luke 8 |
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| Way Side <i>Satan</i> | Fowls came and devoured them up. <i>Understandeth it not. Wicked one catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.</i> | Fowls of the air came and devoured it up. <i>Hear the word. Satan comes immediately and takes way the word.</i> | Trodden down. Fowls of the air devoured it. <i>Devil takes away the word. Lest they should believe and be saved.</i> |
| Rock Stony Places Stony Ground <i>Flesh</i> | Not much earth. Scorched. Had no root. Withered. <i>Hears and receives the word with joy. Has no root in himself. Endures for a while until persecution arises</i> | Not much earth. Scorched. Had no root. Withered. <i>Hear and receives the word with gladness. Have no root in themselves. Endure for a time.</i> | Withered away. Lack of moisture. <i>Receive the word with joy. For a while believe. In time of temptation fall away.</i> |

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| | <i>and offends.</i> | <i>Persecution and affliction causes offence.</i> | |
| Thorns World | Choked them. <i>Hears the word. Care of this world and deceitfulness of riches choke the word. Becomes unfruitful.</i> | Choked it. Yielded no fruit. <i>Hear the word. Cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches and lusts of other things choke the word. Becomes unfruitful.</i> | Choked it. <i>Choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life. Bring no fruit to perfection.</i> |
| Good Ground Holy Spirit | Brought forth fruit. <i>Hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. Hears and understands the word. Bears fruit.</i> | Yield fruit. Increased. <i>Thirty, sixty, hundred. Hear and receive the word. Bring forth fruit.</i> | Bear fruit. <i>Hundredfold. Hear the word. Receive the word in an honest and good heart. Keep the word. Bring forth fruit with patience.</i> |

The Significance of the Parable (Luke 8.11-18)

The primary interpretation of the parable is the response of the people to the preaching of the 'glad tidings of the kingdom of God' at the time of the Lord Jesus, however, a clear application can be made to those who hear the gospel preached in this age and indeed believers who listen to the word of God being taught.

The Way Side (Hard-Hearted). *12 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.* This is one that listens to the word of God but has a hard heart. They **refuse to accept** the word or seek to **understand** it. It is possible that they were once soft and accommodating but through the years have become hard ('trodden down') through the delusion of sin (Hebrews 3.13). In treating the word of God so lightly, they are co-operating with Satan (the adversary) and the Devil (the accuser) who comes immediately to 'lift away' the seed and prevent them from believing (2 Corinthians 4.4, cf. Luke 22.31, 1 Peter 5.8, Luke 18.34, John 2.22). The hard hearted are exemplified in the Pharisees and lawyers who totally rejected the word of Christ (Luke 7.30). What about us? Are we hard hearted believers who will not seek to understand or refuse to accept the teaching of God's word?

The Rock (Hollow-Hearted). *13 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.* This is one who hears the word and receives it superficially, but never allows it to take root in their lives which are full of **self**. There is an **emotional excitement** (joy), but no real conviction. There is profession, but no possession. Consequently, when the testing of persecution comes (sun), they have no real resources (root, moisture) on which to depend and the witness fails. The hollow or shallow hearted are exemplified in those who believed for a while and then walked no longer with Him (John 6.60-61, 66), or the Hebrews, who received the word with joy, but were in danger of withering under persecution. What about us? Do we allow the word of God to grip our souls or do we live for ourselves? Colossians 2.7: Be rooted in him and founded upon him, continually strengthened by the faith as you were taught it and your lives will overflow with joy and thankfulness.

Fell Among Thorns (Half-Hearted). *14 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.* This is one who hears the word of God but becomes so occupied with the cares and pleasures of this world that they are unfruitful. 'Cares' relate to anxieties, responsibilities, burdens and troubles. 'Riches' and 'pleasures' relate to possessions and lustful desires. All these things can suffocate the word of God in our lives making us unfruitful, or bearing fruit which does not come to maturity, or does not develop as it should ('no fruit to perfection'). The half-hearted are exemplified in the rich young ruler (Matthew 19.21-22), Demas (2 Timothy 4.10) and the saints at Laodicea (Revelation 3.17). What about us? Is the world hindering our usefulness for God? Are we distracted by too many anxieties and responsibilities to bear fruit for Him?

Good Ground (Honest-Hearted). *15 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.* This is one that hears the word of God and understands it. They have thought it through in their minds and been enlightened by the Spirit of Truth (John 16.13-14). The word is then received, i.e. accepted and embraced as true and reliable and 'kept' or held fast as a precious possession. This word is their conviction. It becomes part of them and they live their lives by it. This requires patience, endurance and steadfastness in the light of inevitable suffering but results in a life of steady fruitfulness. The honest-hearted are exemplified by the fishermen of Galilee, harlots, publicans and sinners. The Thessalonians also endured persecutions and afflictions with patience (2 Thessalonians 1.4, Hebrews 12.1). What about us? Do we hold fast the truth we are taught. Has it become part of the fabric of our lives? Would we cling to it in the face of persecution?