

Parable of the Sower

Luke 8⁴⁻¹⁵

Warm Up Question(s) – Choose one

- This is the time of year when many people are going or have gone back to school? What teacher do you remember the most? Why?
- This is the time of year when the harvest is coming to completion. What is the best, or worst, harvest you ever had?

Introduction

Jesus was a good teacher and often taught using stories known as parables (Mark 4^{2, 34}). The word “parable” is a Greek word meaning to place alongside (as an analogy or illustration). In our study and discussion today, we are going to read about a typical situation where Jesus used parables to teach. Imagine the scene. Jesus is surrounded by a crowd on the shore of Lake Galilee in Palestine (Mark 4¹). He wants the large crowd to hear his teaching. He gets into a boat and rows out a little way from shore. His voice can be heard across the still water. He begins to tell a story...

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Luke 8:4-15.** This story is often called “the parable of the sower”. What other titles do you think might also be appropriate and why?
- 2) Is there anything you find surprising, confusing, or unusual in the story?
- 3) What determines the success of the farmer’s work of planting his seed?
- 4) Why do you think Jesus ended his parable the way he did (v.8)?
- 5) What explanation does Jesus give for *why* he used parables to teach (v.10; cf. Isaiah 6⁹)? Were his parables intended to reveal truth (v.10a), or to conceal truth (v.10b) ?¹
- 6) What, according to Jesus is the seed? Who is the sower?
- 7) What, according to Jesus, do the soils represent?
- 8) What happens to the seed in each of the soils? Have you seen or experienced any of these?
- 9) What do you think is the fruit produced in the fourth soil? Who embraces Jesus’ message (vv.1-3) and who rejects it (vv. 19-21).
- 10) How would your thinking and acting change if you embraced the point of this parable?

¹ David Wenham gives a history of interpretation on this in “Appendix 3” his book, The Parables of Jesus and concludes that parables “have a dual function and purpose: to reveal and to conceal, to bring blessing and judgement. The whole of Jesus’ ministry is seen in the New Testament as having this dual function (cf. Mt. 11²⁵⁻²⁶; 1 Cor. 2; etc.)” (p. 244)

Mark 4:1-20

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.² He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables¹² so that,

"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,

and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"^[a]

¹³ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"¹⁴ The farmer sows the word.¹⁵ Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy.¹⁷ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word;¹⁹ but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

Luke 8:1-18

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

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."^[a]

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.

Matthew 13:1-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear."

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹ He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

^a Isaiah 6:9