

## The Seed And The Soils..

Text: Luke 8:4-15

Suggested Hymns:

262, 265, 264, 267, 515

1) The Presentation Of The Parable

2) The Interpretation Of The Parable

3) The Application Of The Parable

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 8:4-15, <sup>4</sup> *And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:* <sup>5</sup> *“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup> “Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup> “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup> “But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.”* When He had said these things He cried, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

<sup>9</sup> *Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?” <sup>10</sup> And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’*

<sup>11</sup> *“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> “Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> “But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup> “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. <sup>15</sup> “But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The history of Christianity is simply the record of the presence, power, and progress of the Word of God in this world. When once the redeeming work was done, and the gates of divine grace were now open to mankind, it remained that the world be told what Jesus had done, so that sinners everywhere might hear and be saved. This is why the Word is preached.

We are all familiar with the Lord's final commission to His disciples before He removed His visible presence from them, "***Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.***"<sup>1</sup> We also know that the chief effect of that mighty miracle on Pentecost day was the preaching of the Word on the part of the inspired messengers. Out into all the world they went, and the passing of the centuries has not been able to erase the imprint left on the pages of the world's history by these preachers.

It was the Word which established and maintained the greatest and most influential institution the world has known, the Christian Church; which changed howling wildernesses into blooming gardens of God; which brought to the world everything good enjoyed by mankind today; and which is still the one great pivot around which our civilisation turns.

Nations and individuals have perished because they opposed that Word, while other individuals and nations have risen to greatness because they accepted it. And when at last the universe is rolled up like a scroll, it will be because the Word has fulfilled its mission and its work on earth is done.

Our text today gives us an opportunity to study the results of the Word of God when reaching the hearts of men. Let us therefore consider *The Seed and the Soils*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Presentation Of The Parable.**

Let us note the interesting features of this story. It is a simple, homely story, easily followed and understood even by children. It may have happened that while Jesus was talking to the multitude that a peasant was actually walking up and down a near-by field sowing his seed, the rhythmic swing of his arm visible to all who were gathered there.

And although seed-sowing in the fields of our own country is rarely done by hand today, it does not take much imagination to visualise a farmer walking back

and forth in his field scattering seed as the swing of his arm keeps time with each plodding step.

This was and is an important activity, this sowing of the seed. It is necessary for the life and well-being of the world. What indeed would become of humanity if farmers stopped sowing seed. Erecting great buildings, advances in transport, educating nations, writing books, governing a nation, winning the war against terrorism, may all look bigger, seem greater and more important; but all of these activities would cease if the sowing of seed stopped. It is essential that we should realise the importance of this common task around which the Lord has woven this parable.

And now let us dwell on the details of the story. The hand of the sower broadcasts the seed. It is good seed. In it there lives the power to germinate, and grow, and yield a harvest. But it must have good soil.

Now follow the grains as they fall. Close by is a path, running along the edge of the field. The seed which falls on its hard, smooth surface cannot penetrate and take root. The birds which follow the sower see it, flutter down and snatch it up before a softening rain can come to its aid. No harvest will be reaped on that path. What grains remain are soon trodden under foot by those who pass that way.

Look in another direction. Here to the left is a rise in the soil. There is a rocky base there, and it is very close to the surface. The shallow layer of earth, having been well warmed by the spring sunshine, received the seed readily, enables it to take root quickly, and to send up an early blade, possibly even to start an ear.

But there will be no harvest there. Soon it will rain, but hot, dry winds will blow, and the stalks of grain on this rocky rise, having no opportunity to send down deep roots after the moisture under the surface, will dry up and wither away.

Further on there is a fertile corner in the field. The earth is loose and loamy. The seed falls upon it and has no difficulty in sending down its roots and pushing up a tender green stalk. But last year thorns and thistles grew in this place, and although the weeds were cut down and carried away, the roots were left in the ground. These will shortly send up vigorous new shoots, and before harvest time

has come, the blades and ears of the good seed will have been choked and overwhelmed by the worthless thorns and thistles.

How tragic these experiences! But the sower keeps right on sowing, in spite of what he knows is going to happen to some of the grains of seed. After all, he knows that his seed is good and that much of it will fall on good ground. There it takes root and grows. The rains come in their season, the sun shines. The blades grow into stalks, the stalks shoot up the ears, the ears are soon filled with swelling grain. The dry, hot weeks which now follow, instead of killing the waving, swaying stems, mature and harden the grain and prepare the field for the harvest.

The harvest day comes. The reapers go out and gather in gratefully what the field so abundantly yields. This is a delightful parable. But what does it mean in this connection? The disciples asked and we, too, want to know.

## 2. The Interpretation Of The Parable.

The Lord's own interpretation is given in our text. *The seed is the word of God.* <sup>12</sup> *“Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.* <sup>13</sup> *“But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.* <sup>14</sup> *“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.* <sup>15</sup> *“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*

Let us firstly consider the sower. — The sower, of course, is God Himself. It is God who loves mankind, takes pity on a world lost in sins, and desires and determines to save the lost. It is God who has worked out the great plan of redemption through the sacrifice of His Son for the sins of mankind. God wants all people to know, possess, and enjoy what has been done for them. God earnestly wishes to raise a harvest of saved souls. To carry out His intention, He works not only personally and directly, but especially through the use of certain means.

Let us look at the seed. — This is the Word, the divine message as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. It is the Word as spoken by Christ Himself and as, later on, proclaimed by the tongue and pen of those inspired men of God who *“spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>2</sup> This Word, as we find it today written on the pages of the Holy Bible, truthful and eternally reliable, is still the seed out of which saved souls grow for heaven’s harvest. Particularly it is the Gospel of Christ which is the *“power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”*<sup>3</sup>

It seems a weak and insignificant thing indeed, this simple Word, entirely inadequate for the great task of saving a lost world. Many, even of those who use it, have come to think little of it, to lose faith in its power, and to seek other means with which to save the souls of men and build the kingdom of God.

But there is nothing like it anywhere in this world, nor has it lost even a fraction of its germinating power. It is still the source of real life, for in it lives that great Fountain of Life who says of that Word, *“If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”*<sup>32</sup> *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*<sup>34</sup> But, like seed, the Word must be sown.

Let us now consider the sowing. — The Word is sown through the circulation of the Bible. The Bible in your home is the good seed ready for its work in your heart. It is also sown through preaching and teaching and in the Holy Sacraments. The pastor in your pulpit, the teachers in your school and Sunday-School, the fathers and mothers who teach their children to know the Lord and to pray to Him, the missionaries who make known the saving Gospel to benighted people everywhere, the printing-houses which print and spread Christian literature, — all these are the Lord’s hands used by Him for the sowing of the good seed.

Be thankful that the good seed is being sown richly in your midst. There is no need to wait for some special revelation, for some particular miracle; rather receive the Word for your own salvation and spread it for the salvation of others; no more than that is needed, no less will do. What happens when the good seed is sown?

Let us look at the results of the sowing. — Not in every case is there glad reception, faith, growth, a harvest. This is because there are sin-hardened hearts, stubbornly resisting the Holy Spirit, they are impenitent, and wholly indifferent to

the Word of God. When the Word reaches their ears, as it sometimes does, either they themselves wilfully reject it, or the devil provides some diversion, distraction, or other obstacle to keep the Word from making a lasting impression. The number of such people is on the increase.

There are hearts of shallow soil, hearers who seem ready to accept the Word, whose hearts quickly take fire and burn with apparent enthusiasm and devotion, who are ready with quick promises of eternal faithfulness. But what happens when trials and conflicts come, when sacrifices and self-denial are required, when losses and persecutions must be borne for Jesus' sake?

The fire dies down, the voice of loyal profession is silent, the brave, sword-swinging Peter is turned into a cowardly, denying Simon. Then follows backsliding, defection, surrender to the enemy, as in the times of the first centuries of persecution. The same occurs today.

There are hearts full of thorns. These, too, at first accept the Word, seem glad in the possession of spiritual blessings, begin with being willing members and workers in the church. There is life and growth. Soon, however, there follows security, they fail to be watchful, exposing themselves to evil influences, and associate themselves with the enemies of the Church.

It is then that the affections of the flesh, like weeds that were not completely rooted up, begin again to grow and thrive. Riches, pleasures, worldly ambitions, prosperity, even worries and cares, begin to take up more and more time and interest. Spiritual life begins to grow weak, the interests of the kingdom of God are crowded into the background, and the willingness to work wanes.

Eventually there is cessation of Bible-reading and prayer, absence from church and the Lord's Table, wasting away of soul life, followed by spiritual death. The latter state then is far worse than the first. Many are going this way today.

But let us turn to the enjoyable fact that, after all, there are still hearts in which the good seed of the Word finds lodgment and grows up into a glorious harvest. For God says in Isaiah 55:10-11, <sup>10</sup> *"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, "* <sup>11</sup> *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return*

*to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

It is not because of inherent excellence or through powers of their own, but through the operation of the Holy Spirit that such hearts acknowledge the truth of the Word, reach out for, and lay hold of, the Gospel gifts of forgiveness, comfort, help, and hope, become new creatures in Christ, begin to be active in serving God and their neighbour according to the grace measured out to them, some thirty-fold or more, and remain faithful to the end.

There have been many millions of these throughout the history of the Christian Church, there are many millions of them today, and there will be further millions of saved souls as the Gospel proceeds to win one victory after the other in the far countries of the world.

The Last Day will be the great harvest day, on which all who are saved will be gathered into the home of eternal glory. What a great and joyful day that will be, and how we shall delight our eyes with the sight of the vast throng which will be gathered in the palace of the King for the marriage of the Lamb! Will you be there? May this question ring in your ears as we now consider the final point.

### **3. The Application Of The Parable.**

What was the Lord's purpose in relating this parable? Surely it was not merely to show in a historical manner what the experiences of the Gospel were and would be. The words *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”* suggest the application Jesus intended.

As a matter of fact, Jesus encountered the various kinds of hearers wherever He stopped to preach, even in the larger circle of His disciples. It was time that some of them should begin to examine themselves and give serious thought to the manner in which they were receiving the Word. Likewise we need to do this.

What kind of hearer are you? Ask yourself this question today and take home whatever instruction, admonition, warning, or encouragement applies to you.

Are you in the class of wayside hearers? Has it happened that you have at times stubbornly refused to accept the Word — hardened your heart against certain instructions, admonitions, warnings, refused to repent of certain sins, to

humble yourself before those whom you had wronged, to forgive certain debtors, to correct your life in certain habits and improper practises?

Are you involved in some such situation today? Have you grown cold and indifferent toward the Law and the Gospel? Are you permitting the devil to carry off the lessons of a Sunday's sermon before you can put them into practise on Monday?

Or do you perhaps find yourself shallow soil? Are you easily stirred up and warmed by appeals from the Word only to become just as quickly depressed by discouragements and other disheartening experiences? Is your faith constant? Is your interest in the things of the kingdom of God always at an even temperature? Are you always ready for works of service and charity? Do you never grow weary in well-doing and in making sacrifices? Or have you lost that first exalted faith, that first burning love, that once so lively interest, because troubles and trials came into your life and you could not meet them with courage and hope?

Or has your life become a soil full of thorns and thistles, tares and weeds? Do you keep down the flesh, avoid temptations to sin, seek first the kingdom of God, and keep yourself unspotted from the world? Or have you perhaps already become careless about the evil impulses that, like wild animals, ought to lie chained and caged within you? Are the lusts of the flesh and the selfish desires of your Old Adam taking new root and sending up a new growth of evil into your spiritual life?

Do you permit your money, your business, your ambitions, your home, your friends, your pleasures, and your cares to come between your God, your faith, your church, and yourself?

In brief, if there is anything wrong in connection with your hearing of the Word, whatever it may be, take warning today. Now is the time to seek God penitently, to ask for pardon and grace in Jesus' name and to pray that God may renew your heart through His Holy Spirit *“<sup>43</sup>for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”<sup>5</sup>*

You are truly blessed, if your heart is good soil for the seed of the Word, and you can honestly say that you gladly hear the Word of God and keep it; if you delight in coming to the house of God and taking part in the works of the kingdom of God; if you by daily contrition and repentance overcome the evil



within you, renounce the devil and all his works, and are fruitful to all good works.

But do not praise yourself as though you were naturally better than others. To God alone and His undeserved mercy belong all honour, praise, and glory. And continue, by the help of God, in the way in which you have come this far; it is a happy way, and it will lead at last to the greatest harvest of joy in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16:15

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>4</sup> John 8:31

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:13