

## Take Heed How You Hear!

Text: Luke 8:5-8

1) The Parable

Suggested Hymns:

2) The explanation

500, 851, 259, 267, 515

3) The Application

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 8:5–8, <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!”* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Among all the parables that fell from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps none is more beautiful, more instructive, and more practical in its applications, than that of the Sower and the Seed.

Like most other figures of speech used by our Lord, the parable deals with scenes and circumstances that were familiar to those who first heard His words, and which were doubtless being enacted before their eyes at the time that Jesus was speaking to them.

The Saviour was sitting in the bow of a small fishing boat, pushed out a short distance from the shore, and from this improvised pulpit was preaching to the people who were gathered upon the beach at the water’s edge.

Nearby lay the fertile slopes of that country, clad in rich vegetation. Here and there were evidences of farming, and within sight was the familiar figure of a sower moving backward and forward across the well-tilled ground and scattering the golden seed from which after a while he hoped to reap an abundant harvest.

Amid these picturesque surroundings Jesus preached to the multitudes who listened with eager attention to His words. What was the essence of His message? He preached to them, as only He could preach, of how to be saved, and to reach a blessed hereafter.

More favourable conditions for hearing the Word of God would be impossible for us to imagine. Certainly no fault could be found with the Preacher, for Jesus spoke as never man spoke, and the gentleness of His tones, the consistent purity of His life, coupled with the absolute authority with which He declared the truth, gave a powerful effect to His message.

Certainly no fault could be found with the message, for it was so simple that even a little child could understand it, and yet so profound that the most learned among His hearers would find abundant food for reflection.

It was a message of truth and carried conviction to the hearts of all who were looking for a knowledge of the truth. Certainly the conditions under which the sermon was delivered were ideal. No distracting circumstances marred the peaceful calm of the occasion or diverted the minds of the hearers from the train of thought presented by the Speaker.

Would, then, all of those people assembled that day along the shores of Lake Gennesaret be brought into the Kingdom of God? Possibly not!

It is possible that not all in that congregation would be saved any more than will all be saved who hear the Word of God proclaimed in any congregation today. And why?

Jesus gives the answer in the parable of the Sower. The reason is found in the hearts of those that hear. The theme is for today is *“Take heed how you hear.”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Parable**

Jesus begins His parable by telling us that <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!”*

## **2. The Explanation**

The disciples were not clear as to their Master’s exact meaning, and so they quickly asked Him to explain the parable to them.

The sower, Jesus explains, is the preacher of the Word of God — in this particular case, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; later the Apostles and disciples; and today the ministry of the Church.

The seed that is sown is the Word of God. The ground upon which it is sown is the human heart. The harvest which it is capable of producing is an abundance of rich spiritual gifts — faith, hope, love, joy, purity, peace — a beautiful character and a noble life in the world which now is, and a blessed eternal life in the world which is to come.

The power to produce this harvest lies in the seed that is sown — the divine Word. As in each kernel of wheat or corn that is sown in the earth lies the mysterious, life-giving, formative principle which determines the character of the growth that springs from it, so in the Word of God, faithfully declared, lies the power that is able to regenerate the heart of a person and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus.

This power does not lie in the hands of the sower, but altogether in the seed that is sown. No matter who may drop the seed upon a piece of good ground, be it the learned scientist, the experienced farmer, or the careless hand of a little child; it does not matter if it is wafted there by the winds that sweep the valley and the plain, or carried there by the birds of the air - within the seed itself lies the germinating power. In due time and under favourable conditions there appears first the blade, and then the ear, and then after a while the full corn in the ear.

On the other hand, no matter who drops the seed upon the hard soil of the wayside, the shallow ground that covers a ledge of rock, or among the rank growth of weeds and briars, the seed cannot mature properly.

## **3. The Application**

The parable, then, brushes away those flimsy excuses with which people seek to excuse themselves, and shift the blame for their own waywardness from their own shoulders to the shoulders of others. This parable brings home to every heart the truth that if our lives are not fruitful in good works, the fault lies within ourselves. Neither the sower nor the seed are to blame.

For years the good seed of the Word of God has been scattered from the pulpit of many congregations. This seed was powerful to quicken and sanctify those who are dead into a new life in Christ Jesus. It makes little difference who sows this precious seed, just that it is sown.

The one factor which determines whether the seed shall take root and spring up and bring forth fruit in the lives of those that hear it, is the condition of their own hearts. If people come with open and honest hearts, the seed that is sown will bring forth in due time an abundant harvest. But if they come to church with hearts cold and indifferent, with emotions superficial and changeable, with minds cumbered with the affairs of this world, they will not receive the Word nor be benefited by it, even if it was proclaimed by the most eloquent among the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

The all-important thing, therefore, is the condition of the heart and mind with which one listens to the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus says, in summing up the teachings of this parable in Luke 8:18, *“Therefore take heed how you hear.”*

Our Lord distinguished four classes of hearers. These four classes were found among those that came to hear Jesus preach on the kingdom of heaven and life everlasting 2,000 years ago, and they are to be found in nearly every congregation that assembles to hear the preaching of the Gospel today. Let us look a little more closely at these four classes of hearers described by our Lord.

First, there are the Wayside Hearers. There is a class of people that is dead to religion and the things of God, hardened and set, who do not realise their duty and destiny. They have souls, but are utterly unconcerned about them.

Like the hard and trampled soil, they beat down every spiritual impression and do not care at all about the future. Those who belong to this class certainly make up the devil’s “highway.” However, the teaching of the text does not speak of such people.

Rather, it speaks of those who do come to church, to the preaching of the Word, and who derive a certain amount of enjoyment from the Services of the sanctuary. They are more or less familiar with the teachings of Sacred Scripture and can judge the strength or weakness of a sermon. But they have a mind and heart that is hardened to divine truth like the hardened footpath. They depart from the house of the Lord in the same condition as that in which they entered.

They show no evidence of the living power of the Gospel in their daily lives. Their characters do not change with the passing of the weeks or the months. They are the same today as they were a year ago.

There has been no growth, no progress, no ripening harvest in their lives. They are like the ground of the roadside, trodden hard by many passing feet, and upon its surface lies the good seed until it is snatched away.

Could there be any of that group of people listening to me at the present? Let there be a little self-examination on your part. Why have you come here to God's house today? What was the motive? What prompted you to come? Was it to worship God and to be taught out of His holy Word and be made wise unto salvation, and to pay your vows and adoration unto the Most High? Was it to be informed in the knowledge of God and to be comforted? I pray that it is!

Or are you here from mere force of habit, to please your parents, to see or to be seen, to enjoy the strains of the organ or the melody of song?

In our day there is a great deal of going to hear a certain preacher for his mannerisms, his wit and humorous jokes, not so much for the divine truth he may be expounding and seeking forcibly to bring home. Some people listen more to be entertained than to be instructed. As the holy Prophet expresses it, the minister's utterances are to them as a *"lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument."*<sup>1</sup>

Or while the Pastor in the pulpit proclaims truths that the angels of God listen to with devout attention, truths that will determine man's future state in heaven or in hell, there are signs of frivolity, there is exchange of gossip, or paging the leaves of the hymnal. Or while there may be the outward observances in church decorum, the thoughts run off on other matters, so that when the person asks himself at the sermon's close: What did the pastor in the pulpit say, what was the divine truth or truths he was seeking to bring home to my heart today? He must

candidly confess, *I do not know, for my thoughts were running to the end of the earth, anywhere and everywhere, instead of being fixed on the sermon.*

As our Lord was speaking, his eyes were in all probability resting upon the sower going up and down in his field, and He may have seen a flock of birds circling around him and darting down to pick up every stray grain which lay exposed on the road. And so in application Jesus says there is another bird that is busy.

The devil has been busy, like birds, picking up the seed grains lest they should sink down into the heart. It is indeed terrible to think that the enemy of God and man, should make the very house of worship, the sacred precincts of the sanctuary, his recruiting station; that while we are found here in holy meditation, he should intrude to carry on his malicious designs against the soul, rob it of the salvation so dearly purchased and so freely offered.

Therefore Jesus, the Divine Teacher, warns us not to be ignorant of the devil's devices, to beware of wandering thoughts, distractions, when the Word is being preached. ***“Therefore take heed how you hear.”***

The second class of which Jesus speaks is the Rocky-Ground Hearers. The seed fell on the soil that lay in a thin layer on the top of a rock where it sprang up early, giving hope of promising results; but when the sun arose in its strength, it withered away, because, having no depth, it lacked moisture.

What class of hearers does this represent? There are those people who, when they come under the influence and sway of the Word, take up religion and promise growth. They are most enthusiastic and deeply affected. They are stirred by strange and lively emotions. One is led to expect great things from them. But, says the parable in the most expressive language: ***“They have no root.”*** They have no depth.

Such people have not stopped to “*count the cost*” involved in taking up Christian discipleship. They have not considered the temptations to be met and overcome, the self-denial that will be required, the fortitude that will be necessary in the struggle of sanctification; and so when the time of testing and of trial comes to them, their inner life shrivels up and withers away.

They are like the boy standing on the seashore on a bright summer's day and watching the large ships sailing majestically over the sea. “*Ah,*” he cries, “*how*

*fine to be a sailor and sail far away across the trackless ocean!*” But he has not thought of the storms which sometimes lash the ocean into fury and imperil the lives of all who may be traversing its waters.

Had the boy stood upon the shore during a storm and seen the surges beating with relentless power upon the beach, and had he seen some large vessel struggling against wind and wave, trying to keep afloat in the midst of the angry elements, then probably he might have said: *“Ah, never will I put out to sea.”*

The wise person, before putting out to sea, considers both the joys and the dangers of such a life. He is a wise man who before commencing to build a tower calculates the cost of it and ascertains whether there are sufficient resources to carry the undertaking to a successful ending.

So in the Christian life, and in the hearing of the Word, it is well to look not at a part, but at the whole of the truth, to think not only of the delights, but of the duties involved; to weigh well the cost in self-denial and self-sacrifice as well as the rich rewards that are promised to him who endures to the end.

Lest there be, therefore, the sad sight of a backslider sticking up in the soil of the church like a withered, unfruitful stalk, consider the cost, that there must be a denial of the world, the flesh, and the devil, the forsaking of all sinful pleasures and indulgences, and entire consecration to God and His service, a heartfelt love to the neighbour, and above all a conviction of what Christ is to your soul and what He has done for you. *“Therefore take heed how you hear.”*

The third class are the Thorny-Ground Hearers, whose hearts have good, rich soil for the reception of the divine Word, but who never bring forth fruit because the thorns of worldliness hinder all spiritual growth and development.

The thorns of which Jesus speaks are of two kinds — the cares of this life and pleasures of this life.

In the home of Bethany we have an example of the first. Martha was so concerned about the daily tasks of her household that she could not spare the time to listen to the words of Christ or meditate upon them. Do you set time aside for family devotions?

There are many men and women in this country who would make excellent Christians were it not for the fact that their time and thought and energy are so

completely engrossed with the duties of the home or of business that they have no opportunity for Christian service or Christian growth. The thorns of worldly care effectually choke off the spiritual life within them.

The thorns of worldly pleasure likewise interfere with the proper fruition of the Word of God within us. Many Christians into whose hearts has fallen the good seed of the Word and who have given good promise of a rich and fruitful spiritual life have had the inner life killed by following too eagerly after the vanity of earthly pleasure.

It is not that some of the pastimes in which they have indulged are wrong in themselves, but they have taken the mind and heart off more important things and have developed tastes and desires which have gradually superseded the nobler aspirations of the heart after holiness. We must seek to keep our hearts free from such thorns if we want to follow the injunction of Jesus, ***“Therefore take heed how you hear.”*** Just think for a moment how sport and shopping have overtaken Sundays!

Lastly, there are the Good-Ground Hearers, whom Jesus likens to fertile, well-tilled soil, who receive the Word of God into sincere and honest hearts and who in fair weather and foul, in paths of ease and paths of hardship, make it the rule of daily life.

These are the people who study their Bibles in the privacy of their homes, who come to the house of the Lord to hear the preaching of the Word, with an earnest desire to know the will of God and to bring their own lives into harmony with it. They receive with eagerness and meekness the Word, which is the bearer to them of the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

They listen to the Sacred Word; they are honest about it; they are earnest about it; they take it for what it really is — God’s infallible truth; they hold on to it against assaults made against it, and against all attempts to snatch it away from them, whether by arguments of men or the trickery of Satan.

They cherish it above all else, above occupations, connections, possessions, as the most precious thing on earth. God wants all people to belong to this class!

So in summary, the seed of the Word is being constantly sown upon human hearts. In some cases it is taking root, and in others it is not. What causes the difference?



It is not in the seed, for that is the same whether cast upon the hearts of the indifferent, the shallow-minded, the pre-occupied, or the earnest and sincere heart of the Christian believer.

It is not the fault of the preacher, for it is the same preacher who speaks to all. The difference lies altogether in the hearts of those that hear. Each man or woman who hears the Gospel proclaimed belongs to one of the four classes so strikingly described by our Lord. To which class do you belong? Jesus says, ***“Therefore take heed How you hear.”*** 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> Ezekiel 33:32

<sup>2</sup> Luke 8:13