

A Farmer Went Out

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[0 : 00] Alright, well we are continuing our way through the Gospel of Luke and we are in chapter 8. And at this point in the story Luke gives us a little bit of a big picture, a little bit of a summary about what is happening around this time with Jesus.

Let me just read it for us from Luke chapter 8. 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, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out.

Joanna, the wife of Chusa, the manager of Herod's household. Susanna, and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

So Jesus is preaching. And again, Luke's reminding us that Jesus was not just a healer and a miracle worker. He came with a message.

[1 : 14] And his message was good news. Good news about what? The kingdom of God. The good news of Jesus is the kingdom of God.

Already when we get to this point in the story, we might scratch our heads and wonder, what is the good news of the kingdom of God? Well, in another occasion, Jesus was heard saying these words in Mark's gospel.

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. So this was his message, that the kingdom of God has come near.

And what kingdom is this? As I said last Sunday, to really understand this, we need to look back in our Bibles. We could look back to the kingdom that God established for his people through Saul.

And then later, especially through David. God made some amazing promises to David. He not only chose David to be the king over Israel, but he promised that David's throne, his kingdom, would endure forever.

[2 : 33] And then we can think back to what we heard at the beginning of Luke's gospel. What did Gabriel reveal to Mary? Gabriel said that her son, to be born, would be given the throne of his father David.

And that he would reign over Jacob's descendants forever. In a kingdom that would never end. This is the kingdom that Jesus is talking about.

It's the kingdom of God, because it's the kingdom that comes from God. It's established by God. It has its source in him. And this kingdom is near, because the king of this kingdom has now come.

He has been born. And he is here. And his people put their faith in Jesus, the king. The citizenship of this kingdom is growing. And yet, at the same time, many people had different expectations of this kingdom.

Many expected that it would resemble the kingdom of Israel from ancient times. Many anticipated an earthly, geopolitical government and rule, with the Messiah leading the charge and kicking the Roman Empire out.

[3 : 54] Establishing an earthly throne. And already, Jesus has not been acting or measuring up to those kinds of expectations. And yet, Jesus continues to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

He continues to call people to repent and believe this good news, that the great kingdom of God is near. As we'll see eventually, the rise of this kingdom will defy all expectations.

The path of Jesus to the throne will be through suffering, death, and resurrection. And the full establishment of this kingdom awaits the second coming of Jesus in the distant future, when he returns from heaven.

So, Jesus went from one town and village to another, preaching this kingdom. And Luke tells us that the twelve were with him. The twelve disciples. And not just the twelve, but also a large cohort of women.

And there's certainly some interesting details in there about the women. But, for time's sake, we'll pass over those this morning. What Luke really wants to get to and tell us about is what happened on one occasion, and possibly more than one, where Jesus gave the people this teaching.

[5 : 14] Verse 4. While a large crowd was gathering, and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable. 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. Some fell on rocky ground.

And when it came up, the plants withered, because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it, and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop a hundred times more than was sown.

When he had said this, Jesus called out, Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. Now imagine for a moment that you just traveled several hours to hear Jesus on foot.

[6 : 23] You've heard so much about him. And this is what he says. A farmer went out to sow his seed. The seed landed in four different places, and based on the condition of the soil in each place, there was a different outcome.

One of the four outcomes was good. Only one of them was the kind of outcome that the farmer hopes for. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

What's your reaction to this? I imagine there were many people thinking, What's the point? What does this mean?

Why is he telling us about this? Is there a deeper meaning to this? On its own, this teaching is kind of ambiguous. It's kind of cryptic. What are we supposed to do with this?

Is there some wisdom in here that we're supposed to discover? And then there's the statement of Jesus at the end, which is rather strange. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

[7 : 28] Don't we all have ears? Aren't we all here listening to you, Jesus? One modern translation attempts to highlight the force of the last part of Jesus' statement.

It says, The one who has ears to hear had better listen. Are you saying that we're not really listening, Jesus? Are you saying that some of us don't have ears, that we're deaf?

And what does all this have to do with the farmer? And the seed? And the four kinds of ground?

Like, what are you talking about, Jesus? Even a closer examination of the details of Jesus' parable don't really get us much further.

The farmer sows seed, and it falls on these different places. And what happens in each of these places is basically what we expect. If it falls on the path, it gets trampled on.

Or the birds come and eat it. That's expected. If it falls on the rocky ground, the plant can hardly eke out its existence. It's got no depth, and so it withers.

[8 : 34] And it dies. If it falls among the weeds, well, we've all seen things trying to grow alongside the weeds, and we know how that goes. That's expected. Really, the only unexpected thing is maybe how Jesus describes the seed that falls on the good soil.

He says, The plants came up and yielded a crop a hundred times what was sown. This is what every farmer dreams of and hopes for.

A hundred times what was sown is the ultimate bumper crop. We're talking like a wheat yield of around 160 bushels an acre.

With that kind of yield, the farmer would be hooting and hollering all the way up and down the field during harvest. So that would be great for a farmer. But what's the point?

And surprisingly, Jesus didn't explain the meaning of all this to this large crowd. He just left it at that. Many of them went away wondering what on earth Jesus was talking about.

[9 : 41] Later on, Jesus' disciples asked him what the parable meant. Verse 9. His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 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.

From there, Jesus goes on to explain the details of the parable to them. So there was a deeper meaning to this little parable or analogy of Jesus.

And we're going to get to it in just a moment. But before he explains it to them, there's this explanation of why he speaks in parables. And perhaps it's a little surprising.

These particular words of Jesus have been discussed and debated thoroughly through the centuries. We'll start with the clear part. Jesus says, The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom has been given to you.

[10:53] The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you. So what's clear is that there are secrets. There are mysteries, as some translations put it, to the kingdom of God.

But this kingdom Jesus has been proclaiming has secrets. It has elements that are hidden from plain sight. It has inner workings that are not obvious or expected.

Jesus says, The knowledge of these secrets has been given to you, to his disciples. According to Mark's gospel, Jesus isn't just talking about the twelve, but to the twelve and others of his disciples. Probably it included these women as well, that we've just heard were there, and a good number of others as well. And so what is clear is that there's this sort of insiders group, and then there's an outside group.

And Jesus says to the insiders group, The secrets of God's kingdom have been given to you, but not to those on the outside. And then Jesus explains the meaning of the parable to them.

[12:10] He goes through each element, and he tells what it represents. We'll get to that in a moment, in verses 11 to 15. In other words, when Jesus says the secrets of the kingdom of God have been given to you, what that means is that as Jesus tells these parables to the crowds, he gives the explanation of them only to his disciples, only to the insiders group, and not to everyone.

And this is just one of the many parables that Jesus told. He told the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the prodigal son, the parable of the wheat and the weeds, the parables of the hidden treasure in the field, and the pearl of great price, and many more.

And Jesus, we notice, begins quite a number of those parables with this saying, this phrase. He'll say, The kingdom of God is like, and then he'll give this analogy, he'll tell a parable, where the kingdom of heaven is like, by one count, a dozen of the parables told, which begin with those words.

Though some have pointed out that probably about 25 to 30 of the parables have to do with the kingdom of God. They seem to almost all be focused around this. And so Jesus is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom to the crowds, and as people ask questions, well, what's the kingdom of God like?

How's it going to go? Jesus is answering those questions with a variety of parables and analogies. But, Jesus is explaining these parables and their details only to his disciples.

[13:56] Only to those who are traveling around with him and following him. To the twelve, and to others who are part of that inside group. The close followers of Jesus. Now, why did Jesus do it like that?

Why not just explain the meaning of the parables to everyone? The details to everybody, the whole crowd. Here's where it becomes a lot less clear.

Here's what Jesus says about it. He says, He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, who prophesied 700 years earlier.

What does that mean? It almost sounds like Jesus is saying he uses the parables deliberately. But why?

Like, are you saying that the purpose of them is to conceal or obscure the truth from people who are hearing them? It kind of sounds like that, doesn't it?

[15:16] To others I speak in parables so that those seeing, they may not see. Though hearing, they may not understand. So, what does that mean?

Jesus, do you want them not to see? Do you want them not to understand? Don't you want them to see and to understand everything that you're saying? This apparent tension has led to all sorts of different explanations of these words of Jesus.

But before we consider a few, I just want to remind us that this is a difficult passage to interpret. And there's a number of reasons why. The first reason has to do with this quoting the Old Testament prophet.

Quoting Isaiah. Isaiah wrote the part that Jesus quoted 700 years prior. He starts his sentence, Jesus does, and then ends it with the quote from Isaiah.

If I quote Shakespeare but you're not familiar with that quote or work of Shakespeare then it's not going to make sense. And it's the same with this. So we flip back to Isaiah chapter 6 to try to understand what Jesus means.

[16:38] But then once we get to it, we realize that Isaiah 6 is itself a difficult passage to understand. The prophet Isaiah who lived during the reign of King Uzziah had a spectacular vision from God.

He saw the Lord high and exalted seated on a throne. and he saw these strange looking angel things worshipping God and there was smoke in the vision and the ground shook in the vision. And Isaiah is in the presence of God and he's crying out sensing that he's about to be destroyed because he's a guilty sinner in the presence of a holy and perfect God. But then in the vision God takes his guilt away and makes atonement for him and then sends Isaiah to speak on his behalf to the people of Israel.

It's like a commissioning of Isaiah to be a prophet. But what God says to Isaiah in this commissioning is maybe unexpected. He said go and tell this people be ever hearing but never understanding be ever seeing but never perceiving make the heart of this people calloused make their ears dull and close their eyes otherwise they might see with their eyes hear with their ears understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.

[18:17] Then I said for how long Lord? And he answered until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.

Do you see what I mean? Isaiah chapter 6 is a difficult passage to understand. He's sending Isaiah God is but it sounds here with Isaiah like God's purpose is not to call them to repent and be saved but rather to bring about punishment on them for their sins.

It seems as if God is telling Isaiah right from the get go that people will not respond favorably to his words. And we're still left with the question of what's meant by this statement go and tell this people be ever hearing but never understanding.

Be ever seeing but never perceiving. Is God pronouncing judgment on Israel here? Is this punishment?

Is it that they're kind of left to a sort of spiritual blindness and deafness? Is God giving them over to hardness of heart and blindness with these words? Or you could almost take it the complete opposite way too.

[19:47] Is God goading them with these words? Is he trying to provoke a response from their dull hearts? Is he trying to get them to see that they think they're wise and understanding but in fact they aren't?

Is God's aim with these words really stated there in the passage that they might turn to him and be healed? Or is God mainly just expressing to Isaiah what he knows what will happen?

what he knows will be their response? Not that he wants them to ignore and become callous but that God knows that as Isaiah preaches to them this is going to be the result. They're going to harden their hearts until the heart's calloused.

They're going to tune him out with their ears until their ears are dull and unable to hear his voice. And then there's the question of when this will happen.

how long is this to go on for? Verses 11 to 13 of Isaiah chapter 6. Is Isaiah saying that the Jewish people, the nation of Israel will be deaf and blind to the word of God until Jerusalem is destroyed and the Jews scattered in the first and second century?

[21:03] You see what I mean about this passage being difficult to understand? And so it's quite reasonable that there's different opinions on what these words of Jesus mean. One idea is that Jesus speaks in parables as a form of divine judgment.

Deliberately concealing the truth from the people so that the people of Israel will get what they deserve for their wicked stubbornness toward God. And yet at the same time though that there's this remnant that God has chosen by grace and by his mercy and granted understanding to them so that not all will perish.

Another idea is that Jesus simply is focused on explaining how their response to his preaching is the same as the people's response to Isaiah long ago. God would rather they repent and turn and

be saved but because of the already hard hearts of the majority they will hear and see wonderful things from Jesus yet many will never understand or believe or turn back to God and be saved. Some even suggest that these parables have a sort of dual effect. In their outside form they have kind of the function of a veil and they cover the truth that's inside.

They only reveal enough to invite and to provoke people to draw near to come to God to come to Jesus for more and then whether people press in and come to Jesus and ask what does it mean is the thing that determines whether or not they will receive the secrets of the kingdom.

[22 : 42] It's sort of a litmus test about what's really in the heart of a person. Do they really want to understand God's kingdom? And if so they will draw near to Jesus they will follow him they'll become one of the inside group but if not they'll just listen and go their way and ignore the teachings of Jesus.

These are some of the ideas Christians have had about these words of Jesus and what they mean but let's just now focus on the parable of the farmer. Back to the parable of the farmer. One of the wonderful things here is that Luke takes us to the insider group's meeting where Jesus explained the details.

We get the details so let's look at that in verses 11 to 15. Jesus goes back over the parable with them in private and he starts by explaining the overall elements.

This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts.

So this is a parable about people hearing the word of God. Matthew's gospel makes it especially clear. In Matthew chapter 13 Jesus says listen then to what the parable of the sower means.

[24 : 04] 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 hearts.

So this parable is actually an explanation of why people respond the way they do to Jesus preaching. With that key now the meaning of all of it is unlocked.

We can understand something of what Jesus was getting at. Now Jesus goes through each of the four places that the seed fell and each one represents the word of God that Jesus is proclaiming being heard by people.

Suddenly what Jesus said at the end makes sense. He who has ears to hear let him hear. This whole parable is about hearing the word of God which Jesus has been speaking.

So let's go through each of these four places and see how Jesus explains them. First there's the seed that fell on the path and was trampled or eaten by birds.

[25 : 16] Jesus says this represents those who hear the word of God but then the devil takes away or snatches the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

That's a pretty sobering thought isn't it? In other words some people are responding to Jesus the way that they are because Satan the devil is at work.

He is influencing them. Personally I find the word choice of Jesus rather shocking here. The devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

Can the devil mess with a person's heart? Can he steal from that deepest part of a person the truth that they've heard? According to Jesus the answer is yes.

And his purpose in doing it is so wicked so that they might not believe and be saved. How evil. The devil hates God and he doesn't want anyone to believe in him.

[26 : 33] He wants you to perish. Now we might wonder how the devil does this and we could talk a little bit about that. We know from other places that his main way of operating is through deception.

Jesus called him a liar and the father of lies. Jesus said that when he lies he speaks his native language. That's in John chapter 8 verse 44.

And it's not like the TV shows where he sits on your shoulder and whispers lies into your ear. He's not everywhere at once but he is deeply responsible for creating and circulating insidious deceptions in our world.

Mix enough truth with a lie and make the lie coherent with other lies and you can explain all sorts of things without the need for God or Jesus.

He doesn't want you to believe in Jesus. He doesn't want you to be saved. And so as far as it depends on us we need to do everything we can to receive the word of God the words of Jesus deeply into our hearts.

[27 : 51] we can't just let the words come at us and sit up on the surface. We need to take it in deeply. We need to do everything we can to soften our hearts towards God and his word.

Otherwise we give opportunity to the devil to snatch away the truth that we've heard. Next there's the seed that fell on the rocky ground.

and we notice that these are people who receive the word with joy when they hear it. The good news of Jesus sounds and feels like good news to them.

They accept it but not deeply. It's still a rather shallow and surface kind of belief. They have no root. The roots can't go down because of the rocks.

the word doesn't go deep into their hearts. They believe for a while says Jesus but in the time of testing they fall away. Right now the crowds are large for Jesus but the size of the crowds doesn't mean that all of them really believe in Jesus.

[29 : 07] When it becomes difficult to be a follower of Jesus later on in the story and the opposition intensifies many will disappear and no longer follow him they will fall away.

This is the story for many in every generation. They grow up going to church with their parents and for many years that's all they know.

It's just what they do. But then when it becomes apparent that there's a cost to following Jesus that it requires personal sacrifice and commitment or when it becomes unpopular to follow Jesus they fall away.

They stop going to church they stop doing the Christian things and it comes out that their faith their commitment to him was shallow from the start. Next there is the seed that among the thorns or the weeds.

Jesus says that this stands for those who hear but then are choked by life's worries riches and pleasures and they do not mature.

[30 : 21] So they hear God's word maybe even make a profession of faith in Jesus but ultimately they do not respond to God's word.

It's choked out. It's crowded out in their hearts and in their lives by a number of things. Life's worries. Riches.

The pursuit of material things. Pleasures. Chasing after pleasures. Feelings. Entertainment.

They're not able to respond to God's words deeply because even though they've heard it there's other things that they're giving the attention of their heart to more.

Are you worried about a lot of things in life? According to Jesus worrying about things in life can affect your hearing.

[31 : 31] Worrying can hinder your ability to hear and respond to the word of God. Or are you constantly thinking about how much money you have?

Or the next thing that you'd like to obtain or buy? This is another thing that can affect our hearing. The pursuit of riches, wealth, material things.

Or is it pleasure? Could be even as simple as being addicted to our phones. habitually scrolling on a device, an excess of movies or games or sports or social media.

Or it could be something bigger like the next great experience that we're hoping for, the next luxury getaway or a new romantic relationship.

And God has made this life and this world with pleasures, things for our enjoyment. But the problem happens when we turn our hearts primarily towards getting those pleasures,!

[32 : 37] That's the main thing for us. And it can affect our ability to hear the word of God and to have the word of God have its intended result in our life. Finally,!

There's the seed that fell on the good soil and produced the ultimate bumper crop. Jesus says the least about what this looks like in the life of a person, but we notice just a few details.

We notice that the word of God is retained. There are those who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering, produce a crop.

That word persevering catches my attention. God's word can do great things in a person's life, but that doesn't mean it's going to be automatic, instant, or easy.

it requires that we stick with the words of Jesus. It requires that we hear them and go on through our lives holding on to them deeply as true.

[33 : 45] But if we do, it leads to the most amazing outcome, the great bumper crop, which, if we translate the metaphor, salvation, life as a citizen in God's kingdom, which is coming.

And so this is one of the first secrets of the kingdom. Not everyone, sadly, will enter into it. Many will hear about it, or at least hear about the king of this kingdom, and yet only some will end up with the good outcome.

And it comes down to what happens when we hear the word of God, the message of Jesus. Jesus. It's not enough to just hear it, we must believe it.

And it's not enough to believe it in a surface way, to just agree with it, or think it sounds pretty good, we must believe it in the deepest depths of our hearts.

We must take Jesus' words as truth, as the very words of God to us. and it's not enough to add Jesus' words to the collection of all the other things that we value, but you know, kind of keep it on the side while we go after all these things.

[35 : 04] We must value the word of God as the very word of God and prioritize it above all else in life. And it's not easy to do this, but the good outcome, the kingdom of God will be found and enjoyed by those who do.

Just a brief word on what to do with all this. You know, the first place of this parable was probably very helpful was no doubt for the disciples. Think of how they followed Jesus in their own day and time, and they watched the crowd swarming Jesus, and everybody is excited about him.

Surely they wondered though, why all of a sudden some people just stopped following. And then as it gets closer to Jesus' death, the crowds are getting really thin.

Maybe even at times they felt discouraged and had doubts and were even tempted to give up on Jesus as they saw where this was going. And so this, I think, was encouragement for them to understand what's going on.

It was encouragement for them to persevere and hold on tightly to the word that Jesus was saying, even with the opposition. But I think we can find wisdom and insight in these words too as we see how people around us today respond to the good news about Jesus.

[36 : 34] It helps us at least to understand a little bit of why so many fall short of becoming full-fledged followers of Jesus. Jesus. It tells us to expect this and not to think that there's some kind of problem with the seed or with the message that we've believed.

saved. But I think more important than all that is just this simple question that this parable leads us to. It's a question I've never been able to get away from. Every time I read this parable I'm reminded of it.

And I hope it's the question that you leave with today. Which of these four soils am I? which of these four soils most describes my heart?

My response to the word of God? Could it be that I've been seeing but not really seeing? That I've been hearing but not really hearing his words?

Has my heart become calloused toward God like the path? And my ears dull to his voice? Which of these four soils am I?

[38 : 00] We may not understand the full purpose and intention of God and all he does and why he uses these parables like this but I hope the reminder that Satan does not want us to believe or to be saved.

I hope that reminder drives us to Jesus and back to Jesus words. Whatever the past has held, if you've fallen away or maybe never really believed and you know it or maybe you have but you're tempted to give up on Jesus, know that there is a good outcome for those who persevere in faith and cling to the words of Jesus to the end and it's not too late.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we ask that you would go to work in our hearts by your spirit. Lord, convict us.

We need that. Speak the truth to our hearts. Help us see which soil we are, which soil we've been this past week. Call us and draw us near to yourself.

We want to be that good soil. We want to know the joy of that bumper crop in our lives. Pray this in Jesus' name.

[39 : 31] Amen.