

Licensing Service - The Sower, The Seed, The Soil

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 June 2017

[0 : 00] Then at verse 4, Luke chapter 8 at verse 4, And when a great cloud was gathering, and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, A sower went out to sow his seed.

A sower went out to sow his seed. The parable of Jesus is probably one of the most familiar parables which Jesus told.

And we know that Jesus told many parables to the crowds who followed him. In fact, Matthew tells us in his gospel that Jesus never spoke to the crowds without using a parable.

And Jesus often used parables by drawing them from incidents and situations in which his listeners were very, very familiar. But, you know, we're not to be tempted into thinking that the parables of Jesus were just sermon illustrations used to make the teaching of Jesus easier to understand.

Or that they were just this little story used to entertain his crowd in order to keep their attention. The purpose of the parables was to get the listener deeply involved.

[1 : 15] It was to get us involved and see that we are being portrayed in the parable. And that when we see ourselves in the parable, it is to compel us to make a personal decision about following Jesus.

Because the parables of Jesus, they were to be the test of all his hearers. And the test was to see if our hearts are open to the truth of the gospel.

And so the parables of Jesus, they're all about hearing. And they're all about responding to what we are hearing. That's why Jesus says in the parable, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

And, you know, this is why Spurgeon emphasized that every preacher should preach upon the parable of the sower at least once a year. It was Spurgeon that said that the preacher must remind his congregation about the purpose of the sower in sowing the seed.

And he said that the preacher must also remind his congregation of the power of the seed to transform lives and to change hearts. And the preacher says Spurgeon, he must also remind his congregation about the types of soil which are present in every congregation.

[2 : 27] And that the response of the people within the congregation, it's directly dependent upon what type of soil the seed lands on. And that's what I'd like us to do this evening.

I'd like us to take the good advice of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and come to this very familiar parable and remind ourselves of the importance of the sower, the seed, and the soil.

And they're outheadings this evening. Very simply, the sower, the seed, and the soil. So if we look first of all at the sower, read again at verse 4. He says, And so when we come to a parable like this one, there's no doubt that we can relate the sower to the preacher of the gospel.

Because the preacher of the gospel is like a sower who goes out into his field to sow some seed.

But you know, when we look at the whole of scripture, there are many other analogies that are used to emphasize the role of the preacher.

Jesus himself, he described the first disciples as fishermen. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to leave their nets, Jesus said to them, Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

[4 : 13] Ezekiel, he also used the analogy of a watchman who was standing in his watchtower. And the role of the watchman was to protect all of the Lord's people.

Because the Lord said, he had said to Ezekiel, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel.

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them a warning from me. So the Lord's watchman was to blow the trumpet in order that the Lord's people were ready and ready to fight an approaching enemy.

But more than that, Paul also used the analogy of the herald. Saying that the preacher of the gospel, he's the king's herald. He's the king's messenger. And he's to go amongst the people and he's to herald the gospel.

He's to be an ambassador of Christ. He's to proclaim the good news. The good news that Jesus Christ is the only savior of sinners. And that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to them

who believe.

And you know, don't you love it in Romans chapter 10? Don't you love it when Paul is writing to the Romans? And he's emphasizing that the king's message of salvation, he says it's for everyone.

[5 : 24] He says everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But then Paul, he asks all these questions in order to emphasize the need to have heralds of the gospel.

Because he says, how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?

And Paul says, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.

So then Paul says, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And so there are all these analogies in scripture of the role of the preacher.

There's the sower, the fisherman, the watchman, the herald. And Peter also says that the preacher is a pastor. The preacher is a shepherd of God's flock.

[6 : 23] And that's what Peter was told at the beginning of his ministry. Remember, Jesus asked him the question after he had denied him, do you love me? And Peter says, yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

And then Jesus says to Peter, feed my sheep. Go and shepherd my sheep. And you know, what's interesting when you read Peter in his letters years later, he is the more experienced under shepherd and he's passing on his wisdom by saying to more young and inexperienced preachers of the word, he says to them, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you.

Not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, says Peter, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

But there's one more, and that's the servant. One more analogy, the servant. And, you know, when you look at all the New Testament letters, whether it was written by Paul, Peter, James, John, or Jude, they all describe themselves as the servant of Jesus Christ.

The servant of Jesus Christ. Which means that they don't elevate themselves, they don't put themselves on a pedestal, and they don't seek the honor and glory of men. No, they are to take the same line as John the Baptist.

[7 : 53] He must increase. We must decrease. The preacher of the gospel is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Because Jesus said that he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And so the role of the sower, you could say, it's all of the above. He's to be a fisherman. He's to be a watchman. He's to be a herald, a shepherd, a servant. The sower is to take his role seriously. He's to live his life consistently. And he's to preach the truth faithfully. Because what the sower carries in his hand is the precious seed of God's word.

But as you know, in order to bring forth a good crop, and as every good crofter knows, the sower must prepare the ground. The sower knows that he must do as Hosea says, he must break up the fallow ground, because it's time to seek the Lord, that he may come and reign righteousness upon the land.

The sower who sows the seed of God's word knows that he must prepare the ground for sowing by seeking the Lord. The sower knows that he must break up the fallow ground by waiting upon the Lord in prayer.

[9 : 16] The sower knows that he must fill his pouch with precious seed, so that he will sow the seed of God's word bountifully. Because his sermons, they can't be half-hearted.

His preparation can't be anything less than his best. His commitment to the field which he has been given, it must be 100%. The sower must fill his pouch with precious seed, the precious seed of God's word, and he must sow bountifully.

The Bible reminds us that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. And you know, you're brought then to think of what Paul said, and his love for the Corinthians.

He said, I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. Paul was willing to give his all for the sake of winning souls to Christ.

That doesn't mean he worked himself into the ground. It means he gave 100% commitment to the work of the gospel. 100%.

[10 : 26] But you know, the saying is true, especially, I suppose, in the life of a sower, sometimes you are plowing a lonely furrow.

And I think I can say this, having only been in the ministry for three years, or even less than three years, people think they understand what the ministry is like. I thought I understood what the ministry would be like.

But you know, nothing prepares you for it. No amount of theological education can prepare you for the ministry. No amount.

Nothing can prepare you for it. But don't get me wrong, the ministry is the greatest privilege. The best job in the world, the greatest privilege in all the world.

But it's only when you're in it that you understand it in a measure. because sometimes the life of the sower is like plowing a lonely furrow. And far too often, you know, we forget that the sower is human.

[11 : 35] He's just a poor, weak, feeble, human being that needs to be coated in prayer. And before I went in for the ministry, I read about what Spurgeon said about prayer.

And he said that Christians in congregations should pray for the preacher in their pulpit before they pray for their own family. And at first, I thought that was a bit extreme.

But now I understand why he said it. Because my friend, the sower is the number one target of Satan. And so if you're in a congregation with a minister, pray for your sower.

Pray for your sower. Tell him that you're praying for him. Encourage him. Support him. Be there for him. Pray for your sower who carries in his hand the precious seed of God's word.

Pray for these sower who are to be licensed to sow the seed. Pray that the Lord would protect them from the evil one and surround them with his care. Pray that the Lord would keep them.

[12 : 36] Pray that, as the words of the psalmist that we were singing in Psalm 121, pray that the Lord would keep their going out and their coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

pray for the sower. And so by coming to this very familiar parable, we can remind ourselves about the importance of the sower. But secondly, we can remind ourselves about the importance of the seed.

The importance of the seed. If you look at verse 9, it says, And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. But for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God.

The parable of the sower is said to be the first parable which Jesus told, and it's also said to be the first parable which Jesus explained. And it seems that Jesus explained the parable simply because the disciples asked him to explain it.

[13 : 44] Why do you speak to them in parables? But Jesus' answer is not what we expect because we expect Jesus to say that he spoke in parables to make his teaching easier to understand.

But that's not what he says at all. He says in verse 10, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. But for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand.

And with this, Jesus emphasizes that the kingdom of God is a mystery which is only revealed to some. Therefore, as we said, the parables are not to be seen as sermon illustrations, but they are to be the test of all the hearers.

And the test is to see if their hearts are open to the truth. The test was to see if their hearts were willing to submit to the authority of King Jesus. And by this, Jesus is saying, he's saying here that we must sow the seed everywhere.

The seed must be sown everywhere. The gospel must be proclaimed to everyone. No one is to be accepted. No one is to be left out. The gospel must be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

[14 : 58] But the seed is not to change because the response to this sown seed will depend entirely upon the soil. And this is why Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6 here in verse 10, seeing that they may not see and hearing that they may not understand.

And what's interesting is that Jesus quotes from the passage in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah himself has been called to be a sower and proclaim the message of the Lord.

Because you'll remember in Isaiah chapter 6 when Isaiah is given that heavenly vision. He says that in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and his train filled the temple.

And in the passage of Isaiah 6, it says, Isaiah says himself, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? And Isaiah says, Here am I.

Send me. And the Lord said to Isaiah, Go. Go and say to this people, Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.

[16:09] And then you hear Isaiah asking the Lord, Lord, How long? How long? How long do I have to sow this seed for? How long do I have to persevere and continue preaching the message, this message you have given me?

And the Lord says, Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste. The Lord called Isaiah to keep preaching the word of God, even in the face of opposition and persecution.

He was to keep sowing the seed because that precious seed, it would either soften hearts or harden them. And that's the solemn reminder to us that no one ever leaves a church service the same way they came in.

They either leave with a heart that has softened because of the seed, or a heart that has hardened because of the seed. But what Jesus makes absolutely clear is that the seed is not to change. Because as Jesus says in verse 11, the seed is the word of God. The seed is the word of God. And you know, when we read this parable, as we're going through it, you can almost, well, imagine this sower preparing himself and he's filling his pouch with the precious seed of God's word and then having come prepared to his field, he walks out into the middle of his field at the beginning of a working day and he pushes his hand into his pouch and he begins to, he pulls out his precious seed in his hand and he begins to just scatter it as best as he can.

[17:50] He scatters the seed and the sower knows that the actions, his actions of sowing the seed, it could have life-changing and heart-transforming effects. But you know, there's a beautiful reminder here that no matter what type of soil the seed lands on, it's the same seed that is sown.

The seed never changed. The seed always remained the same. And Jesus is reminding us in this parable that the unchangeable seed is the word of God and that this unchangeable, inerrant, and infallible word, it's sufficient.

It's sufficient. As I note what Paul reminded young Timothy as he started out in his ministry, Paul said to him, Timothy, all scripture is given by inspiration of God and it's profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect and equipped for all good works.

Paul was saying to Timothy, he's saying, all you need is the word of God. All you need in your hand is this precious seed because it's profitable for every area in our lives and it's sufficient to meet every need in our lives.

but more than that, this seed, it's self-sufficient because the word of God, it doesn't need anything to make it more beautiful. It doesn't need the ideas of men to make it more appealing.

[19:23] It doesn't need the eloquence of men to make it more powerful. This word, it stands alone. It stands on its own and Jesus is reminding us here that there's only one seed to sow.

There's only one seed to work with. There is only one seed to be scattered among the soil and there's only one book to be brought before the souls of this world because there's no other book that will do apart from this book.

Nothing else will do. Nothing else will change lives. Nothing else will convert sinners. Nothing else will bring people to Christ. Nothing else will give you hope in this world.

Nothing else will bring you comfort in the midst of sorrow. Nothing else will encourage you when you're right down at your lowest. Nothing else will remind you of God's faithfulness in all these times of trial and illness.

Nothing else will show you that life, it's uncertain. Death, it's sure. Sin is the cause and Christ is the cure. My friend, nothing else will do our soul any good apart from this precious seed.

[20:32] this precious seed. And you know, this seed, it comes to us with the greatest promise. The sower has confidence because the Lord has given a promise to this seed.

He says, My word that goes forth out of my mouth, it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing where to I send it.

And don't you just love those words of Psalm 126 that describe to us the confidence that the sower had with his seed. The confidence he had with his seed in his hand.

Because the sower, he had faith to believe that the seed, it would have effect upon the soil. And he says, That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return.

The sower is doubtless because he has confidence in the seed. The sower is doubtless because he knows that sinners, they will be born again. Not with corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever.

[21 : 54] The sower is doubtless because he knows the power that this precious seed has. It's a powerful seed. And it's the word of God.

And so by coming to this very familiar parable, we can remind ourselves about the importance of the sower. We can remind ourselves about the importance of the seed. But lastly, the parable reminds us about the importance of the soil.

The importance of the soil. Look at verse 11. Jesus says, Now the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard.

Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root.

They believe for a while and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear. But as they go on, on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their fruit is not mature.

[23 : 01] As for that, in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience. And so as we can see from this parable, the parable of the sower, it isn't actually about the sower who sowed the seed.

The parable is all about the effect that the sower's labor had. Because the parable is all about the soil and onto what type of soil the seed fell.

And as we know, there were a variety of different people listening to this parable, listening to Jesus. Because we're told back in verse 4 that the crowds they had gathered from town after town, they all came to hear Jesus preach.

They'd all come from different areas to congregate together to hear Jesus. And so it was a mixed crowd, just like it is this evening. Because I'm sure that there are some people in here this evening who are Christians and some who are not Christians.

There are some who are committed and there are some who are uncommitted. There are some who are converted and there are some who are unconverted. But we're all part of this crowd. This field, it's full of different soils.

[24 : 18] And the seed of God's word is being sown in your hearing. And as the seed is sown, it's falling onto the soil. The seed has been sown upon the soil of your heart.

And there are different hearts here this evening. Because there are hardened hearts, there are shallow hearts, there are strangled hearts, and there are open hearts.

And of course, Jesus is making it personal because he's asking us, how's your heart? How's your heart? What condition is your heart in? Because he says a hardened heart, sadly, it's a heart which has hardened over many years and it has no interest in the gospel at all.

And it has hardened to the truth of God's word so that when the seed just falls on it, it can penetrate no deeper than the surface. and then we're told that Satan just comes and he snatches it and takes it away.

But Jesus also says that the shallow heart, it's a heart in which the seed has managed to just penetrate through the surface of the soil but not very far.

[25 : 30] Because the shallow heart, it has no depth, no root, and no earth. It has an interest in Christianity, but no deep and meaningful commitment to Jesus Christ.

But then there's the strangled heart. It's a heart which is overcrowded. The strangled heart has too much going on to make a deep and meaningful commitment to Jesus Christ because the strangled heart has been choked by all the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life.

But the last heart which Jesus mentions is the open heart. And as Jesus says, the open heart, it is an honest and good heart which hears the word of God and keeps it and brings forth fruit.

The open heart is a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ. The open heart is a committed Christian. But you know what always challenges me about this parable is the last word of verse 15.

Patience. Patience. Because when the sower finished sowing in his field after a hard day's work, it would have looked no different to when he had started.

[26 : 53] The results weren't instant. But as all good crofters or good gardeners know, waiting is part of the process. Patience is required. Waiting upon the Lord in prayer is required.

And that's what Paul reminded young Timothy when he was encouraging Timothy to be faithful throughout his ministry. He said, preach the word, be instant, in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all doctrine and patience. Patience. The results aren't instant. Waiting is part of the process. And that's a hard one. But you know, it was J.C. Ryle who says in his commentary and I love J.C. Ryle and I'd recommend him to anyone.

He said, the parable of the sower is preeminently a parable of caution. And caution about the most important subject, the way we hear the word of God.

[27 : 55] The parable, he says, was meant to be a warning to the apostles not to expect too much from hearers. It was meant to be a warning to all ministers of the gospel not to look for too great results from sermons.

And it was meant not least to be a warning to hearers to take heed how they hear. Preaching is an ordinance, says Ryle, of which the value can never be overrated in the church of Christ.

But it should never be forgotten that there must be good preaching and good hearing. And you know what Ryle says there, it got me thinking and maybe I'll mention it anyway.

It got me thinking about the larger catechism. Now we often neglect the larger catechism, but it's full of treasure and it's well worth studying and meditating upon. Because question 158 in the larger catechism, it asks, by whom is the word of God to be preached?

And it says, the word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted and also duly approved and called to that office. Well, that's why we're here tonight.

[29 : 03] We're here to license men who are gifted, approved, and called to the office of the ministry. But then the larger catechism asks, question 159, it says, how is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?

And it says, they that are called to labor in the ministry of the word are to preach sound doctrine diligently in season and out of season, plainly not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power faithfully making known the whole counsel of God, wisely applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers, zealously with fervent love to God and the souls of his people, sincerely aiming at his glory and their conversion, edification, salvation and salvation.

And you know, it's a great challenge to the preacher, but it's also the greatest privilege to the preacher to preach the word of God. But I want us to conclude with the next question that the larger catechism asks, because this is ultimately what the parable of the sower is all about.

It's about hearing the word of God. And the larger catechism, question 160, it asks, what is required of those who hear the word preached?

And it says, it is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation and prayer, examine what they hear by the scriptures, receive the truth with faith, love, meekness and readiness of mind as the word of God, meditate and confer of it, hide it in their hearts and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

[30 : 42] My friend, in order to hear the word of God correctly, we must have an open heart.

Because in the parable of the sower, Jesus is reminding us about the importance of the sower, the seed and the soil.

And he's asking us all tonight, whether we are in this crowd as a Christian or not a Christian, he's asking us, how's your heart?

How's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Is it a shallow heart? Is it a strangled heart? Or is it an open heart?

And Jesus is saying to us tonight, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy precious word. And we pray that thou werest implanted in our hearts, that it may bear fruit to thine own glory.

[31 : 48] O Lord, that thou werest water it by thy spirit. And Lord, we plead that thou werest doing us and for us, far above and beyond our asking or our thinking. Continue with us, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We shall sing again this time in Psalm 126. Psalm 126, page 419, in the Scottish Psalter, the blue book.

Psalm 126, we're singing the whole psalm. When Zion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody. They among the heathens said the Lord, great things for them hath wrought. The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought. we'll stand to sing the whole psalm to God's praise. When Zion's bondage God turned by us men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

[33 : 17] They mocked the heathens said the Lord, great things for them hath all.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us, his brought.

As dreams of water in the sound are bought his laundry love, whose love in tears are revealed in time of joy joy they shall.

That man who bailing precious seed can point forth the Lord, his helpless bringing back his sheet rejoiced shall return.

Amen.