

Luke 8:4-21

*What Kind of Dirt Are You?*

Everybody has certain things that interest them more than others. I'm kind of partial to technology and not real interested in gardening. In fact, Sandy and I have lived in a number of places that had gardens and we planted grass seed in them.

One in particular had had a rabbit hutch in the back yard and the garden was well fertilized with rabbit droppings. When I planted grass seed in that particular garden something amazing happened. Grass exploded up in that area. In fact we'd have to cut the grass in that garden area two or three times for every time we'd have to cut the rest of the yard.

The house we live in now has very poor soil in the yard. We built a skate ramp in the back yard, a few years ago, which was 8 feet wide and almost 30 feet long. We sold it last winter and I still am having trouble growing grass in that area.

What's the difference between the two places I tried to plant grass? The soil. One is rich and fertile, the other is sandy and hard. There's a lot of other factors that enter in but the most basic factor of all is the quality of the soil.

In Luke chapter 8 Jesus has something to say about soils and how they compare to hearts. **Turn to Luke 8 Pg 1000 Read vs 4**

What had started with Jesus teaching in synagogues had completely outgrown any buildings. Large crowds were gathering His teachings. Many people were traveling long distances. Jesus was no longer a local phenomenon. More and more distant places had heard about Jesus, and traveled to where he was. The motels were full.

It's significant that Jesus tells the Parable of the Soils at a time when the crowds are increasing dramatically. It says something about how He evaluates the crowd of hearers. This parable is really about the quality of hearing. How people listen. In fact a key word to look out for here is the word *hear*. It's going to come up 6 times in the verses we're going to look at today.

A multitude came and Jesus spoke a parable to them. Sometimes people get hung up on trying to interpret parables in the Bible. They read something in to every detail and get confused. Remember a parable is a story that illustrates a truth. Usually one main truth.

The word "parable" comes from the Greek language. *Para* means "beside" (a

paralegal works beside a lawyer). And *ballo* (bowling) means to “cast or throw.”

So a parable is something thrown down beside the main teaching to illustrate truth, or in this case, as we’re going to find in verse 10, to hide some of the truth.

The parable starts in verse 5. **Read vs 5-9**

For us this parable might not be that striking. For most of us the only seed we scatter is a little grass seed. But his disciples lived in what was basically an agrarian society. Most people depend greatly on crops. Seed was precious. The average person just managed to etch out a living. Nobody would just throw precious seed out so carelessly.

You just couldn’t afford to throw seed by the wayside or on bad ground. So Jesus’ disciples must have been really puzzled. They said, “What does this parable mean?”

Before we look at the explanation of the parable, look how Jesus answers their question: **Read vs 10**

I believe Luke chapter 8 marks a turning point in Jesus’ ministry. Up until this point He’s not really used parables. But opposition to Jesus is growing rapidly now. Jesus is gaining a lot of attention, but not all of it is favorable.

So He starts to speak in a way that reveals and conceals at the same time. If anybody wanted to know what these things meant they could ask or hang around with His disciples and He’d give the explanation. That’s what He’s about to do here.

It’s hard for us to understand, but God effectively says, “When people reject my truth consistently, over a long enough period of time, I eventually hide it from them so they can’t see it.”

Jesus quotes from **Isaiah chapter 6. Turn back there with me. pg 659**

Isaiah has seen a vision of God Himself. Then this great call comes out in verse 8. **Read 8**

Isaiah has seen a vision of God and realized his own sinfulness. God cleanses him

and Isaiah is ready to obey. God says, "I need someone to carry my message to my people Israel. Who'll go?"

Isaiah raises his hand and says, "Send me. I'm ready to go."

So God says, "OK but here's what you'll find:" **Read vs 9-10**

"Isaiah, I'm sending you to a people who won't listen." That's real encouraging.

What was happening was this: Israel had disobeyed God for so long and in so many ways that God said, "I'll give them what they want. If they don't want Me or My word that's their choice. But then when they hear the truth they won't understand.

By the time Jesus came the people of Israel were confirmed in their hardness. God handed them over to their own hardened hearts till they were spiritually blind and deaf.

Jesus Christ came fulfilling, in detail, prophecy after prophecy. He was unquestionably Israel's Messiah. But what happened?

John 1:11 *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*

Steven, the first martyr, put it this way. *"You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."*

The Apostle Paul wrote in II Corinthians: *But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament... even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.* (II Corinthians 3:14)

That's pretty scary, isn't it? God says, "If you willfully stop up your ears and close your eyes I'll make you blind and deaf so that you can't understand the truth when it's staring you in the face."

I'm afraid that in many ways that's becoming a description of our country. Sometimes when I hear news reports on congress, our judicial system, our schools I wonder are people really that blind to the obvious truth. Can't people see the

spiritual implications of the decisions they're making? Then I remember this Biblical principle and I realize, no they can't.

Remember, Jesus used parables to conceal truth from the crowds, while revealing it to His disciples. We can see from the passage that the disciples didn't understand Jesus' parables any more than the crowds, but He did explain the meaning to them later.

So what did this parable of the soils really mean? Jesus gives the interpretation.

**Read vs11**

This seed that the sower seemed to so casually spread around represents the Word of God. No one sows physical seed like the sower of this parable but it's the way we get out God's truth.

Sometimes we become really impressed with the eloquence of a particular pastor, and exalt the messenger. Because of radio and TV we have access to a lot of good, solid, Bible teaching but we also run the danger of developing "Christian celebrities."

We always need to remind ourselves that the power is really in the Word itself. The writer of Hebrews says,

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

The Apostle Paul, who sowed the Word for most of his adult life, testifies about it:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Romans 1:16)*

According to the New Testament Paul wasn't an eloquent, silver-tongued orator. Other preachers were more impressive. But Paul knew that the power was in the Word itself, not in the sower. It is immaterial who plants a seed. Could be a farmer, a bird, or Johnny Appleseed.

And it's immaterial who sows word of the Bible. Jesus, Billy Graham, a Sunday school teacher, a parent, a friend. The power is in the seed itself. The seed alone has

the power to grow, the power of life. Sowers are to sow -- regularly, faithfully.

It's not our job to figure out people's hearts. It not up to us to determine what kind of soil we're dealing with. We could make all kinds of assumptions about people and so many times we could be completely off base.

At one time in my life my priority and my passion was drugs. That's what I lived for. If you had seen me then you would have said that guy isn't interested in spiritual things. That guy's happy with his life just the way it is.

Actually, inside I was desperate. I had taken so many LSD trips I'd lost count. It was pushing 100. I took every drug I could get my hands on. I used to buy drugs on the streets of NYC. I was robbed at knifepoint in a drug deal in a tenement on the Lower East side. I spent time in two different mental hospitals.

I looked tough on the outside, but inside I was falling apart. Every day I struggled not to take my own life. I couldn't go any lower. But a faithful friend talked to me about Jesus Christ. He scattered some seed and it took root.

What's always amazed me is a discussion I had later with another of my fiends who came to Christ and got out of the drug culture. He said, "I was miserable, and I saw you looking so carefree, I envied you. I wished I could be like you."

How ironic. There was a war going on inside me. I was at the end my rope. I felt like I couldn't go on any longer and he envied me because he thought I was so happy!

Don't ever make the mistake of assuming that someone wouldn't be interested in what the Bible says just because of what you see on the outside. I have no doubt that there are people all around us whose lives are in turmoil. Who are hungering & thirsting for something more than what they've experienced.

They may be dead-end people like I was, or they may be the president of the corporation. We can't see their hearts. We don't know what kind of soil they really are. Our job is just to scatter the seed of the Word.

I look at an organization like the Gideons as seed scatterers. Members of The Gideons distribute scriptures in 175 countries in 80 languages. They focus on:

Hotels and Motels, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Women's Shelters, Schools,

Colleges, Universities, the Military, Law Enforcement Personnel, Firefighters, EMTs, Prisons and Jails

They distribute more than 1 million copies of the Word of God every week. They scatter on all kinds of soils and trust God to do His work.

This is typical of what happens. An inmate at a prison in Ghana accepted a New Testament from the Gideons. He intended to use the pages of Scripture to roll Indian hemp cigarettes and smoke them. The Holy Spirit prompted him to read the pages in the Book. He was convicted of his sin and accepted Christ as his personal Savior. The wardens of the prison noticed a change in him, and he was later released and returned to his family. This ex-prisoner used that Gideon Scripture to lead his entire pagan family to Christ.

The seed is the word of God. And the gospel is the *power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*.

Jesus' parable lists 4 types of soils that word might fall on.

The first is the wayside. **Read vs 12**

The first soil type is the hard-packed path between fields. Verse 5 called it "the wayside." The seed never sinks into the soil and the devil, represented in the parable by birds, gobbles up the seed before it can have any effect.

These are the unbelievers who hear and have closed minds. They are unreceptive. The words just bounce off them. They may have a smart come-back to defend their unbelief, but the Word doesn't penetrate their shell, or germinate in their heart.

You may have some friends, neighbors, relatives, business associates, friends at school who are like this. Jesus affirms something for us here. This kind of unbelief exists! It's not that you don't know all the answers to their questions or you're not knowledgeable enough in the Bible. It's not that you're not eloquent enough. Your words aren't the problem; it's their heart that resists.

Now obviously we need to be careful to communicate the Word of God clearly. The other day someone innocently gave me some wrong directions. I was traveling to an area I'm not real familiar with so I just happened to pick up a map kind of familiarize myself with the area. When I looked at the map I saw the mistake.

Let's say I never looked at the map myself, I didn't even have a map and I just took off for my destination. I would have been lost.

If we're a Christian, our job is to make the gospel clear. To give people the right directions. This week I was listening to a well known pastor on the radio give an invitation at the end of his message. I didn't write down his exact words but they went something like this: If you're at the end of your rope. If you're tired of trying to live life your way, it's time to put Christ in charge. Just pray to the Lord and tell Him you're tired of going your own way. Confess to Him that you're a sinner. Tell Him you're sorry for your sins and invite Christ to take control of your life.

I know the guy meant well but those weren't the right directions. Anybody could think, "I need God in my life to straighten me out. I need to live a different way so I'll ask God to take control." That's religion.

We all should give God control of our lives as Christians, but that's not the way to become a Christian. The Bible's very clear.

Let me share with you the Good News the way we've explained it on our church web site.

**1) Every Person Has a Need** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). By committing just one sin, you fail to meet God's standard of perfection. Because God is holy, He cannot allow any sin to enter His heaven. The Bible says, *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23) So how can anyone overcome the penalty of sin and go to heaven?

**2) Being Good is Not the Answer** Going to church, being baptized, and practicing good morals are good, but they do not satisfy God's holy demands. According to the Bible, *a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 2:16)

**3) God Himself has Provided the Answer** God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for sin. He died on the cross to pay for your sins, all of them. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

**4) It Happened at the Cross** Jesus shed His blood and paid for all your sin. Hebrews 9:22 says *without shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) of sin.*

On the third day after His death, Jesus rose from the dead, demonstrating His divine power over sin and death. This is God's great gift to every person: complete payment for sin. All we can do is receive the gift. So, how do we receive it?

**5) I Must Place my Complete Trust in Jesus** The Bible says, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.* (Acts 16:31) Believing means that after you realize you are a sinner, you completely trust in Jesus and what He did for you as payment for your sin.

**6) Trusting in Christ Brings New Life** All your sins are forgiven and you can be confident of eternal life. The Bible says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16) Out of gratitude to God, your desires, actions, will, your entire life - all begin to change. He loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

**7) All may Receive God's Gift of Eternal Life** Recognize that you can do nothing in your own strength to overcome the penalty of sin. Place your complete trust in Christ today! *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

My question to you is, "Where do you stand today? Have you trusted Christ alone for salvation?"

Christians must make the gospel clear. Of course, we also need to make sure that we don't hinder the word by a poor witness in our own lives and actions.

We're to speak clearly, live out the truth by God's grace, and scatter the seed everywhere.

Let me just add too, I know Jesus doesn't say this in the parable because it's not His main point, but soil quality can change -- and sometimes change very rapidly.

Think of what one plow furrow would do to the receptivity of the "wayside" soil. Now the seed can drop into the soil and germinate. It's no longer just birdseed. Life's troubles and problems often have the effect of running a plow through our hardness. Your friends may be totally closed now. Accept that. But continue to

pray that God will bring circumstances into their lives that will make them receptive to the Word. Just remember John Newton was a hardened slave-ship captain. God reached his heart in the midst of a storm at sea. He wrote his testimony in the hymn "Amazing Grace." *I once was blind, but now I see.*

There are three other types of soil in Jesus' parable: **Read 12-15**

The last three are different than the first in that the seed seemed to take. A plant started to grow. The big theological question in interpreting this parable is who's really saved and who isn't.

Some people say the only ones who could possibly be true believers are the "good ground" hearers because they produce fruit. The argument is then made that you can tell who is a real Believer by looking at their lives.

Others say (and I would agree) the three grounds all represent believers. The only ones who were definitely said not to believe and be saved are the first. The others *received the Word* which is a common NT phrase for trusting Christ. That phrase is used 5 other times in the NT always referring to salvation.

The point of this parable is fruitfulness. God's purpose for us is that we would bear fruit with our lives. Only one type of soil produced fruit. Only one reached God's intended goal.

We tend to see life in just two dimensions. Saved and unsaved. Believers and unbelievers. God see life multidimensional. He sees people at different levels. The highest level, the ultimate goal is that our lives bring honor to Him. We saved by grace through faith unto good works.

Our passage closes with another short parable and a unique event.

**Read 16-18**

Remember this passage has been about hearing. Take heed how you hear. God's word brings light. If were honest with the light we have God will give us more. If we turn from it we'll loose what we have.

Those should be sobering words to us who live in the nation with the most opportunity to hear.

"Then" **Read 19-21**

Jesus wasn't putting Mary or His earthly family down but His point is the same as the verses before. The real followers of Jesus are those who have ears to hear and hearts to do what He taught.

All who have trusted Christ are part of the family of God. Those who hear and do live it out.

What kind of dirt are you this morning? For those who have heard the word of God, who have heard the gospel and yet haven't responded, there is a clear word of warning here. To disregard the gospel is eternally dangerous. Satan won't allow the seed to remain for long and the seed may never be sown in our hearts again.

If you have heard the message of the gospel, knowing that you are a sinner in need of God's grace, in need of the forgiveness found only in Christ, and yet haven't trusted Him, you're presuming on the grace of God. You're expecting another opportunity which may never come your way again.

For those who would say, "I've trusted Christ for forgiveness but I'm not concerned with reading my Bible, sharing my faith, serving in a local church, applying the Bible to my life." God is deeply concerned. A redeemed life that doesn't bear fruit is a contradiction. It's opposed to God and His plan for our lives. Do you need to weed the garden?

What kind of dirt are you this morning?