

## *The Parable of the Soils, Luke 8:4 - 15*

*4And when a great multitude were coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: 5“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6“And other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7“And other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it, and choked it out. 8“And other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.” As He said these things, He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

*9And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. 10And He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND. 11“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. 12“And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13“And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14“And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15“And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

Last week was burning man up at Black Rock playa. 70,000 people were there, and at the evening of the final night, a man walked onto the stage, took the microphone, and a hush fell over the masses because they wanted to hear what he would say.

The week builds as it goes and they know tomorrow will be a dust festival while they're all trying to exit. But this night is what they've all waited for. The man begins to speak. This is what he said;

"Listen to what I'm about to say people. Last year Fidelity investment group put money in mutual funds, stocks, fixed income bonds & CD's, and 529 College Savings. The 529 funds evaporated into nothing. The fixed income bonds and CD's started out like gangbusters and then went flat. The mutual funds were gaining steadily until that scandal mid year at the big plant and corporate greed gobbled them up. But the stocks paid out 100 times."

And then he turned and walked off the stage. 70,000 people looking at each other going What?? What is *they* talking about. We didn't come 300, 600, 1200 miles to hear some person talk about Fidelity Investments. What's going on? What just happened? We came to see the burning *they* burn up. Who cares about Fidelity Investment.

Just now you're thinking to yourselves I think Jim has come up with a bit of fiction. I did. That didn't happen. But it's a modern parallel to what Jesus does in our text this morning.

20,000 people have walked from all over Israel to hear and see Jesus. Matthew tells us there were so many that they were pressing in on Him until finally he gets in a boat and sets out a few feet from shore.

The sea of Galilee has become His stage and the slope up from the shore has become a natural amphitheater. The glassy sea will reflect His voice. Everybody is waiting in anticipation, and Jesus starts talking about soil and crops.

And what He says is so painfully obvious that every person there already knows the ABC's of what He's saying. This is basic stuff. Nothing new. To them, any 7 year old in the region could have given a more insightful

lesson about crops. This is more than obvious stuff.

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What's going on? Why did He just say stuff we all know. Who cares about this. We know this. Everybody knows this. It's rudimentary. What does it mean? Is there some hidden meaning. Is that all He's going to say?

Even if you're a cut above the ordinary folk and surmise that He's got some parallel meaning, what He said is too general to know what the parallel might be.

It's impossible to know what the parallel universe to what He just said might be. You can't just start making stuff up. If this is all you got, you're lost for a meaning.

It could mean different things to different people. 100 different people, a 100 different meanings. It's basically worthless, because the face value is so rudimentary there's no value at all. Nothing new. And if it means something in parallel, you don't have enough information to assign a meaning that has any value.

Now some of the parables He says up front, The Kingdom of God is like . . . In that case you've got at least that beginning clue. Something

about what He's going to say has a parallel truth in some facet of the Authority to reign of God.

But in this case, all three synoptic gospels tell us, He did not do that. He just starts in with a story about a guy sowing seeds, and the soil conditions regulate the yeild later on. So what? We all know that Jesus. We aren't stupid.

Luke tells us, as do the other gospel writers, that He does give a single clue. *As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

That's cyptic. In other words, some of you will be able to hear and others will not. Are you a person with ears to hear? Then what He says will have meaning. And the anti-thesis is obvious. Those who don't have "ears to hear" won't.

There is an unavoidable sovereign selectivity in those words. The elect will hear. The non-elect will not. If you have "ears to hear - then hear" And that, in effect, is what the parable is about.

The good soil are the people with "ears to hear". The poor soils are the people who are tone deaf to what Jesus will be saying. They came for the Jesus show. See a few miracles. Be amazed. Go back home. Move on to other things.

And His disciples are like, wow, this is the most perfect conditions yet to get this movement moving. Thousands of people. Natural amphitheater. Perfect day. The boat is the perfect stage. There's a hush, the people are waiting in anticipation. And He starts talking about nothing. What in the world?

Nothing He said seems to have any value for our cause. Our movement. We think you dropped the ball Jesus. What was that about. You had it

goin on and you talk about crop yeilds. This is Galilee. These folks already know more about crops than you just told them. Their kids know more about crops than you just told them.

But we've got to give the disciples a little more credit than that. They DO have "ears to hear." Something's up. They have a curiosity. They believe Jesus does what He does for a reason. They hope there's a good one, because no one else on earth who's trying to build a movement would have done what He just did.

*As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

What do you do with what Jesus just taught, if indeed you have "ears to hear"?

*9And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be.*

The few. The elect. They don't go home and forget about the nothing sandwich lesson about the soil and crop yeilds. It means something. But they're going to need help figuring it out. So they go to the source.

That's the difference between the folks with "ears to hear" and the rest who are tone deaf. The tone deaf people are already in their cars looking for a Denny's or a Burger King. They've already forgotten the dopey lesson about the crops. They won't think of it again.

How many of you have had this experience. You're out on the playa at Burning Man and you're moving among the burners and engaging them in talk about spiritual things. Jesus and the Bible.

There's a large percentage of them, and we've all heard it, "Oh, I've read the Bible from cover to cover many times, many times" And they're out

in never land some place a million miles from anything the Bible ever said.

Been there, done that? How does that happen. Well, they may have read the words, but there was no connection. They are tone deaf. They never went to the source to ask what it means. In one deaf ear, and out the other.

Oh, I've read the Bible. I'm very spiritual. But I don't need organized religion for my take on spirituality. I'm very spiritual, very spiritual. Read the Bible many times, many times. Standing there with your dreadlocks pointing straight up in the dust watching a giant human form that's on fire. Very spiritual. But deaf as a stone.

People with ears to hear go to the source. And in my experience, I have to say, most don't. People who go to Jesus to get more, to find out, to learn from the Master, are few. Most folks are listening with deaf ears and while Jesus is speaking they're thinking, you know, there's a ball game at 2:30. Or is it 3:30. I'll have to check. No wait a minute, I've got my phone, I'll just google it right now while this guy is talking about crop yeilds.

*9 And His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. 10 And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.*

For most people, the doctrines of sovereign election are a bitter pill. I don't know how you parse this any different. Jesus plainly says, God grants to some that they'll know the mysteries of eternal life. And to others God grants blindness and deafness.

There are two distinct groups in that sentence that Jesus just spoke.

Look at it again. "to you" is one distinct group. "to the rest" is another distinct group. And the subject is the action verb "granted"

Two groups are receiving something that God in His sovereignty is granting to them. Listen again to a verse that we shared just last week if you were here. Incredibly important truth.

When we broach this difficult topic of Sovereign choice, Sovereign election our first reflex is to say That's not fair. How can I worship a God that isn't fair. He can't just pick one group and "grant them ears to hear" and another group and grant them deafness and blindness.

That isn't fair. That makes my brain hurt. My god that I've invented in my mind, the nice god, has to play by my perception of fairness and granting life to one group and death to another, that's not playing nice. I won't let my god do that.

Listen again to Jeremiah 27:

*'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, thus you shall say to your masters, 5 "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.*

Sorry. Over-ruled. God says; The earth is mine, and all that is in it is mine. God owns it all. God grants to whom He pleases, what He pleases. You need to bow the knee, to a God who didn't make your brain as big as His. He's God. You don't get to understand everything He does.

You get to submit to this book that says, He is altogether righteous in all of His judgements whether you understand it or not. He's big. You're little. He is Holy. You are not.

That's bitter, at first, and then after you've submitted to the Almighty, it

becomes sweet. I love it that my brain is too small to understand what He does. I humbly bow down to a God who's every judgement is righteous altogether, whether I understand it or not.

When we begin to understand this book more clearly we stand in awe of the mercy that granted any one a pardon. Not only granted but paid for the pardon with His only Son. He didn't have to save anyone. We were all lost and wicked and soiled with sin. He could have sent every one of us to hell and He would have been righteous to do it.

The fact that He saves some is an incomprehensible mercy.

Jesus couldn't say it any more clearly than He does right here. *10 And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.*

It was God who granted those two outcomes. To you, life. To them, death.

Now you could stop me right here, and most will, and say, but . . . but . . . but surely God did that based on previous actions. The disciples believed. The pharisees rejected. God did what He did because He's reacting to faith on the one part and dis-belief on the other. That's very popular.

We have to sort of save God from Himself. He isn't mean. He just reacts to what we decide. He's up there in heaven wringing His hands, hoping, hoping hoping we'll believe. But it's all up to us. He's helpless to do anything about it. He bends to our wills.

Sorry, that isn't what Jesus just said. To you God granted life. You get to know all the mysteries. OK, not all the mysteries, we haven't figured

this one out in this world in 2000 years so far, but still, Jesus says, you get to know the mysteries of the kingdom, by God's command, and they get to be deaf and blind, by God's command. God grants those to whomever it pleases Him to grant them to. He's God. We just accept it until we see Him face to face.

Those who have "ears to hear", we find out in Revelation, their names were written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world. Long before they believed. It's the other way around. We find out in Paul's writing to the Ephesians that the faith that saved us was a gift. Granted to us by God. Not based on anything we did. Or didn't do.

Think about this if you want your brain to hurt a little. If you had armored sheilding and a fireproof suit and a bullet proof vest, you could walk into a conference of 5000 men of the muslim brotherhood, and preach the good news of Jesus, crucified for our sins, risen from the dead, and soon returning to depose Satan and rule this world on David's throne, and if God has people with "ears to hear" in that group, they will believe.

That truth is what drove missions in the great missionary movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. God has His people everywhere, who DO have ears to hear. Our job is to take the message. Our job is to sow seed.

And I just gave away the plot that Jesus is going to teach about the soils. It's our job to throw out seed. It's God who makes good soil. It's God who quickens the seed in the soil. It's God who brings forth life. At His pleasure and by His will, He causes life.

God has sovereignly closed the door to Israel's belief. Jesus at this point begins to teach with parables. Words that are meaningless to those who are deaf, and words that are full of wonder for those that He has granted; life. That's our introduction to the parable of the soils.

But hopefully with that long introduction, the parable itself and Jesus explanation to the disciples will make perfect sense in light of what we've just said.

*11 "Now the parable is this: the **seed** is the word of God.*

Matthew says the word of the Kingdom. But even that is redundant, because this book, from cover to cover is the story of paradise lost and forfeited to Satan, and then recovered and restored by Jesus.

The entire book is the story about the authority of God to reign on earth. It's a story within a story, because within that recovery is the story of redemption.

God purchases us out of our sin and slavery and restores us to Himself with a righteousness not our own. He clothes us with the righteousness of Jesus. He removes our sin and pays the penalty of death, death on a cross, in our place. He places us in His kingdom, clothed in white garments, sin removed, paid for, and forgotten.

That's the story within this book, and any word, any where in this book is some portion of that story. All of the words of this book are the seed. But particularly, I suppose, the gospel story about Jesus.

R. C. Sproul, I'll grant you, he is a special case, there's no one else with a mind like he had by Gods' gifting, but he loved to tell the story of the verse God used to quicken him from the dead and make him a christian.

The most obscure verse in the whole Bible. Eccl. 3:11 *If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.*

R. C. tells of the night he spent thinking about that verse all night long,

but what had happened was God had quickened him from death to life and because of that obscure verse he became a believer.

*11 “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. Any word from this book. God can use the most bizarre words from this book to call someone from death to life.*

This morning I have, again, spoken clearly and simplistically the gospel message of salvation. But my core belief is that isn't what's necessary for salvation. When it's God's time and God's pleasure to quicken His people from death to life, it doesn't have to be the low hanging fruit that does it.

That's why we start at the front of a book and preach to the end of the book, and then pick another book to do the same thing. I believe with all my heart what Isaiah 55: says.

*8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways My ways,”  
declares the LORD.*

*9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so My ways are higher than your ways  
and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

*10 For just as rain and snow fall from heaven  
and do not return without watering the earth,  
making it bud and sprout,*

*and providing seed to sow and food to eat,*

*11 so My word that proceeds from My mouth  
will not return to Me empty,*

*but it will accomplish what I please,  
and it will prosper where I send it.*

You don't have to preach the simple gospel week in and week out. In fact people get tired of that. God says He takes His words from this

book and accomplishes what He desires from any of them. I believe it.

*11 "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. The seed has the power to quicken life from the dead. But not everyone who hears the word of God believes unto eternal life.*

In fact in our day it seems like no one does. The word seems ineffectual. It seems to us that in our time, the word has become ubiquitous. It's everywhere and there is no cost. That same Bible placed many years ago in our dorm rooms at work by the Gideons, a perfectly good translation, it's a NKJ version, is still laying in the same place in the common room.

In fact there's getting to be a pile of them. So there's no shortage of seed. I do believe you could walk into Whitney's Book store and ask for a free Bible and he'd be happy to give you one. He probably has a pile of them that he's hoping to not have to put in the dumpster out back.

No shortage of seed. But if Jesus were around, I might have to ask Him, are the fields still ripe unto harvest? Or are we in a time of almost universal blindness and deafness as a result of judgement.

The seed is everywhere and it's free, but this nation doesn't want anything to do with it. We move it out of the drawer in our rooms to the common room because we don't even want it in the same room with us.

We have become just about as closed to the seed of the Word of God as that Muslim brotherhood I mentioned earlier, just not as violent. Yet.

Why? Why isn't the seed producing it's fruit of life? Jesus is going to tell us why. So much of what we are seeing today is explained perfectly in this simple parable. Most of the crowd there that day thought this story about a sower and seed was retarded. But for those of us who God has granted "ears to hear", this explains everything.

Now I want to take enough time here to combine the original story that went out to the mass group with the explanation of the portions to the disciples. So I want to look at the earlier parts that the masses heard and then look at the corresponding explanation, together.

*5“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up. And the corresponding explanation by Jesus is;*

*12“And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they **may not** believe and be saved.*

They would have understood this imagery perfectly. In fact it would have been played out over and over in their sight and been very common.

In that ancient period, the farmer who would work to bring a crop from a field he owned, would sow seed. He would have a seed bag, and even then, you could purchase seed. Someone else would make a living separating out seed from grain and filling bins with it, and then selling it for a living. There are records of what seed would cost.

So we have a farmer and he has a seed bag full of good seed and the way you plant a field is that you broadcast the seed. You take a handful and you learn the dexterity of waving your hand in a circular arc from left to right, (or maybe from right to left if you're a lefty) and you release the seed evenly in that arc and it flies out a few feet to where it lands.

Your field is bordered by a pathway that is set aside for human traffic. People have to get from place to place, and they are decent folk and don't walk through your crops, they walk along a road that borders your crop.

And that road, from constant traffic becomes almost like pavement.

We're rural folk. We know what dirt roads are. In Los Angeles I might need to explain further. We're accustomed to dirt roads. Hard as a rock.

So if I'm trying to get the most bang for my buck, I want my yeild to be as large as possible, I'm going to sow my seed just as close to the hard pan road as I think it's possible to do. Even if it costs me a small percent that go too far and actually land on the hard pan.

What happens to those seeds? *and as he sowed, some fell beside the road; and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the air ate it up.*

Very common. The sower doesn't have time or inclination to go out on the road and try to pick up individual seeds that went too far. It gets trampled down by travelers. Some of them probably coming to see and hear Jesus did exactly that on their way. And the birds think it's yummy too.

Either way it's lost as far as any crop yeild. Now how does that fit into a deeper meaning. Those of us who do have ears to hear want to know what that means. We have the picture in our minds. What is the parallel, Jesus.

*12“And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

How do you explain our post-modern or post - post-modern culture that believes in spite of all the evidence of creation, which they through science have more of than any generation ever before them, that this is all an accident.

We are nothing more than a rock flying through space which by chance over billions and billions of years has produced life and intelligence. No God did this. No intelligent design in spite of astonishing knowledge

through modern science. Nope.

This is all just an accident, and there are no rules, no morals, no right, no wrong, no accounting, no judgement. Just grab all you can grab, because it's soon over.

Kill if you need to. Don't let some other tiny life set any limits on you. Steal if you need to, after all, you've been oppressed by other dwellers more powerful than you. Take back what's yours. Lie if you need to. Who says something is right and something is wrong. Get all you can get because life is short and then you die.

That's just a tiny smattering of Satan's lies that are driving our current generation. The words of this book have become as something ridiculous. The words of this book will oppress you. Hold you back. Limit you. It's all about a God who spoils everybody's fun. Someone should outlaw this book! And so it goes. Satan did that. And more. So much more.

The good news of the kingdom is falling on hardpan soil. There used to be a field, but now it's a parking lot. Concrete as far as the eye can see.

In the parable we have seed. This book. It never changes. It always has within it, forever and ever, the possibility of life. But the soil is the determiner. The seed is always the same.

The sower doesn't really matter. A little four year old could have a tiny seed bag like dad and follow along and throw seed all over the place. The dexterity of the sower doesn't matter. Style doesn't matter. Designer seed bags don't help. The seed is a constant. The sower doesn't add or subtract anything . . . assuming he's not home watching TV. I mean he does have to actually sow the seed.

The determining factor is the soil. In this first part of Jesus explanation,

the seed never has a chance because the soil is a parking lot.

So back to our earlier thoughts about God being the one who grants ears to hear to some, and deafness, blindness to others, if we do some parable pushing in our thoughts about Jesus teaching.

Good soil always produces fruit when good seed lands on it. That can only mean that God is ultimately in charge of soil. If there's good soil, God has granted that condition. If there's pavement, God has granted that condition too.

We'll finish Jesus explanation of the parable next week, we're out of time, but I want to leave you with this one possibility to make your brains hurt a little bit. I'll do it in question form.

What we're seeing in our current culture, our current generation, if you fit it into this parable of Jesus, is that the hard pan seems to be vast. Not just a pathway that is hardened. Our culture seems like the parking lots at Disneyland. Vast pavement as far as the eye can see. No good soil for a crop, anywhere.

Is that because of judgement to this nation we live in. We identified who, at the end of the day, is in charge of the good soil. It's the same person who grants blindness and deafness to many and ears to hear to some.

The soil is ultimately under His control. Therefore, I believe the hardness of heart, the vast pavement as far as the eye can see, *is*, like it was in Jesus day, *the judgement of God on a nation*.

Come back next week, because the rest of the parable explains 2000 years of difficult church history that is challenging to our faith.

Simple words. Massive breadth of meaning. *If* you have ears to hear. I

pray that you do.