

Luke 8:1 – 21

¹ Soon afterwards, he began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. ⁴ When a large crowd was 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 Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. ⁸ 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.' ⁹ His disciples began questioning him as to what this parable meant. 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, so 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 Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. ¹³ 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 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 But 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. ¹⁶ Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. ¹⁷ For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸ So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.' ¹⁹ And his mother and brothers came to him, and they were unable to get to him because of the crowd. ²⁰ And it was reported to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see you.' ²¹ But he answered and said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- Jesus traveled with both male and female disciples (8:2 – 3); but this was radical in Jewish society and provoked much discussion on the level of a scandal.
- This is Jesus' explanation for why some people accept him while others reject. Here is a quick recap of why people have rejected Jesus: dislike of the Gentiles (Lk.4:14 – 30); desire to keep Jesus in one place (4:31 – 44); dislike for the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus welcomes to himself (5:17 – 32); disagreement with Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath and Jewish tradition (6:1 – 11); disagreement with Jesus' interpretation of his miracles (7:18 – 35); disagreement with Jesus about one's own self-concept and sinfulness (7:36 – 50).
- Jesus had used the idiom of the good tree before: ^{6:43} For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. ⁴⁴ For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. ⁴⁵ The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. ⁴⁶ Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and

do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.'

- Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 'Seeing they may not see, hearing they may not understand' in 8:10. In that context, Isaiah was speaking of Israel's resistance to hearing God's word. God would use Israel's own resistance to refine the true Israel down to a 'holy seed' that serves as a new 'stump' for a new tree. Jesus' use of the terms seed, word, soil, and thorns comes from Isaiah 55:10 – 13 as part of God's promise to renew His covenant with the Davidic line of kings.

Questions for v.1 – 10 (read v.1 – 10 first)

1. Describe Jesus' close followers in v.1 – 3. They seem a little rag-tag.
 - a. On whose 'side' did Joanna spend most of her time, in the political sense? Herod's side, and Herod was not Israelite. He was an Edomite. He was also installed by the Romans.
 - b. Would other women have associated with Mary Magdalene? No, they would have regarded her as unclean and dangerous.
 - c. So did these women naturally get along with each other?
 - d. What was Jesus fashioning them into? A new family, centered around him. Thus, Luke 8:19-21.
 - e. If you were experiencing a lot of success and getting a lot of people to be on your side, what would you do? Probably ride the success!
 - f. Look at v.19 – 21. How does Jesus define the community he wants? Around his word.
2. What is Jesus, as the sower, looking for? Good crops. A good response to his word. (Put a bowl of good looking fruit, or figs, or even bread before your students – this is what he wants our lives to be like.)
 - a. Is he being sloppy by scattering seed everywhere? This was standard practice in farming. But it does give us some reassurance that whenever we share in spreading Jesus' word, that we are to spread it as far as we can.
 - b. Why might Jesus have taught this? To challenge the crowd to self-reflect a little. Why would he have wanted to challenge the crowd? To warn them to really listen to his word.
 - c. Which soil do you most identify with? Why? Discuss at length. What are the thorns in your life (v.7)? Moisture (v.6)? Etc.
 - d. Where have we seen these motifs before? In Lk.6:43 – 49
3. What is a seed? Something that appears dead, but has life inside, which will bring forth life and fruit when it's planted in good soil. A seed is abundant life disguised in something that looks small and dead. Life disguised in death. Life emerging out of death.
4. Why would Jesus say 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand'? Does Jesus really want to be understood? Or is he setting people up to fail?
 - a. He actually did want to be understood. He was weaving together motifs from Isaiah, one of the most famous prophets, in a way that was recognizable, familiar, and punchy. He was also expecting people to come up and ask him more about what he was saying; the disciples were the ones who were getting the benefit of that.
5. So clearly we want to be bearing good fruit, good crops. But how do you become 'good soil'? Read the next 11 verses of the text.

Questions for v.11 – 21

1. What 'word' is Jesus talking about in 8:11?
 - a. 'The word of God' which refers to all of the Hebrew Scriptures, properly speaking. God has been sowing and cultivating spiritual life within Israel for a long time, waiting for there to be the possibility for enough Jews to follow Him when he came in Jesus to offer a cleansed human nature. Some Jews have responded (8:1 – 3).
 - b. This is a teaching about receiving the teaching, which is circular, so it points outside of itself. What is the specific 'word' of Jesus that looks like death but actually brings forth 'life' and 'new humanity' and 'new community' (seen in 8:2 – 3 and 19 – 21) if we allow it to plant itself firmly in us?
 - c. In the context of Luke's narrative, this refers most clearly to Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (6:12 – 49), when he descended from the mountaintop to speak to Israel, thereby retelling and redeeming Israel's story of being at Mount Sinai. There, Jesus taught about loving enemies, being radically generous, and healing others in order to manifest the Father's presence among human beings. The thematic similarities between that sermon and this parable are significant:
 - i. The good soil of 8:15 is similar to the good tree of 6:43 – 44; the idea is to bear good fruit
 - ii. Internalizing the word of Jesus into one's heart is present in 8:15 as it is in 6:46 – 49
 - iii. The challenge of overcoming 'worries, riches, and pleasures of this life' is found in 8:14 as it is in 6:35 – 38
 - iv. Jesus refers to 'an honest and good heart' in 8:15 and 'the good treasure of his heart' in 6:45.
 - d. Jesus eventually summarizes his ethics by referring to his death and resurrection, and our dying and rising with him; see Lk.9:23 – 25.

- e. In the development of the New Testament, this is seen for example in Paul's teaching that we die to our sin and rise into new life with Jesus by the Spirit (Rom.6:1 – 11; 7:1 – 13; 8:1 – 4).
2. What are the four conditions that Jesus describes?
- a. The roadside path (8:12): This soil is near the footpath next to the crops. It represents people who are relationally close to other people who are actually bearing fruit. People who 'hang around' maybe because they 'like Christians' for being 'good people.' They hear Jesus' teaching, but they don't internalize Jesus word fully. So they leave an opening for the devil to subvert what should have been; they eventually turn against Jesus and his teaching for being too demanding, unreasonable, and/or supposedly unfounded.
 - b. The rocky soil (8:13): This represents people who hear, and receive in a shallow way. They have no firm root. They give into temptation, which in this context probably means persecution and social pressure to not follow Jesus.
 - c. The thorny soil (8:14): These are the people who hear but are 'choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life' – they get all stressed out by the possibility that they won't make a lot of money, or keep a lot of money. So they betray the growth Jesus intends.
 - i. Illus: Augustine once said, 'God, make me virtuous, but not yet.' It's as if we say, 'God, make me content, but not yet.'
 - d. The good soil (8:15): These are the people who have heard Jesus, receive his teaching, allow Jesus to transform who they are and how they relate to others. How do we hear the word with 'an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance'? Can the heart receive Jesus' word?
 - i. Have we seen the disciples bear fruit yet? Yes, they were following Jesus, forming a new kind of community, calling others to join.
 - ii. In what areas of your life have you allowed Jesus' word to bear fruit? Or, in what areas are you holding back?
 - iii. Illus: Tom Lin (Urbana 12/27/12 PM message): 'I grew up in the city of Chicago, went to school in New England in the great city of Boston, and spent my post-college years in sunny California. Growing up, I was never taught that I was a missionary. Missionaries were strange people who didn't have anything else to do in life. My parents left poverty in Asia so I wouldn't have to live in poverty. My plan in life was simple, to pursue two things; safety and comfort. When I graduated from high school, I was on my way. I graduated top in my class, and top in my state. I was on the cover of magazines and the ESPN television specials. Parents would say to their kids, 'Why can't you be more like Tom?' Mothers would say to their daughters, 'Why can't you marry someone like Tom?' And as a freshman, my plan for safety and comfort meant focusing on number one: myself. My plan was to secure safe and comfortable relationships and a safe and comfortable multi-million dollar career. So I needed to study all the time to get all A's to be valedictorian to get a career and make my millions. I pursued that plan until one day when it was finally within reach, I felt empty. I was a college senior and found myself in your seats in Urbana 93 and God surprised me with an invitation. He surprised me and convicted me of my selfish sin with a gospel much bigger than myself. I said, 'Whatever role I could have in your global mission, I'll do it.' It meant saying no to safety and comfort and saying yes to the risky and uncomfortable. It meant saying yes to doing uncomfortable things on campus like sharing my faith and leading an evangelistic bible study. God's invitation extends much further than we ever imagined. God eventually invited me to the most unexpected place, unfamiliar place, a place where I didn't know the culture or the language, a place where virtually no Christian students existed. God called my wife and me to serve InterVarsity Link and plant a student movement in Mongolia. Ironically we found ourselves living in poverty and in Asia. Mongolia is a former communist country where in 1989, there was just 1 known Christian. Its first Bible was translated in 2000. It was in extreme poverty, with 33 million herded animals and only 3 million people. And besides all that, it was freezing: negative 40 degrees in the winters. We had just moved from sunny CA and we asked, 'Can we actually survive here, God?' We were ordinary Christians and never imagined going to Mongolia but God's love compelled us to simply obey. If we had limited God's love to familiar places, we would have missed out on a place we came to love.'

3. How does it feel to participate in the work of the sower? The disciples will eventually be the ones scattering the word. People will respond in various ways. How does this parable help interpret the reactions of other people?
 - a. Ultimately, their choices are their choices, but...
 - b. We can forewarn them that the work of internalizing Jesus' word (digging a foundation on the rock) takes some hard internal work: reflection, prayer for help to overcome fears, hard choices.
 - c. Illus: When a college student I knew started being interested in spiritual things, I invited him to read a book by C.S. Lewis with me. He was reluctant at first, because of the time commitment (which wasn't a lot, in my opinion). Rather than brush aside my own suggestion, I asked him, 'I know you're worried about time, and even what opening yourself up to deeper things might mean for you in the future. But do you think that the pursuit of spiritual truth requires us to make space in our lives for it? This is, in my opinion, and even in the opinion of other people who are not Christians, the most important decision that you could make. If you wind up feeling like making a ton of money is not ultimately worth giving your whole life to, I think it would be better for you to explore that now, and even begin taking a small step in that direction. Otherwise, how else would you figure it out?'
4. This leads nicely to v.16 – 18. What is currently 'hidden'? And what shall become evident? The full meaning of Jesus' parables, the full teaching of Jesus, and the full power of God bringing Jesus' parables and teaching into effect.
 - a. What is already becoming evident is that Jesus is forming a new community, a new Israel, a new humanity (8:1 – 3, 19 – 21). It will become much more evident later.
 - b. Is it fair that people who have much will be given more, and people who have little will have that little bit taken away? Jesus is talking about having understanding. People who didn't bother to stay with Jesus wouldn't get their question answered. In fact, they would probably forget what little they heard. If you heard a confusing lecture, and went up to get clarification afterwards from your professor, you would be better off than other people who didn't. You'd remember but they'd probably forget.
 - c. Drop this tidbit for your audience: In the next few sessions, we're going to see three scenes, Jesus saving the disciples from drowning, Jesus saving a demon-possessed man from the tombs, and Jesus saving a girl from death. Watch for the clues! And watch for how this theme of life emerging out of death keeps developing.
 - d. Application: In what areas of your life would you like Jesus to grow more abundant fruit?
5. (Optional) Tie the motifs and themes from Jesus' parable to Isaiah's prophecy of restoration.

Jesus' Parable of the Soils	Jesus' Explanation	Isaiah's Vision of Restoration Available to All
Lk.8:5 A farmer went out to sow his seed .	11 This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.	Isa.55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
As he was scattering the seed , some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.	12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.	2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.
6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture .	13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.	4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. 5 Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.
7 Other seed fell among thorns , which grew up with it and choked the plants.	14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and	6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

<p>8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."</p> <p>9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 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.' [Isa.6:9]"</p>	<p>pleasures, and they do not mature.</p> <p>15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.</p>	<p>8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.</p> <p>9 As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.</p> <p>10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,</p> <p>11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.</p> <p>12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.</p> <p>13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."</p>
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- a. What is Jesus doing with Isaiah's prophecy? Layering his own story on Isaiah 55. This is like the following examples from contemporary art/music/theatre. Pick the one most familiar to your audience.
- i. During World War II, Winston Churchill referred to the battle of Thermopylae because of the historic parallels. Xerxes of Persia was campaigning against Greece. He had a massive army and navy, and the Greek city-states were not yet organized together. Thermopylae was the path into Greece, and 300 Spartan warriors took a heroic last stand and lost. But that battle needed to happen for the Greek city-states to rally together at the battle of Salamis and repel Persia. Churchill's reference to Thermopylae evoked heroism and courage in British soldiers because every British school boy had been educated in Greek history and made the parallel.
 - ii. When the west coast rapper Notorious B.I.G. was killed, his friend, producer, and fellow rapper Puff Daddy wrote a song called I'll Be Missing You. He took an older song by The Police called Every Breath You Take and put his own layer on it. Puff Daddy's song was not about a stalker stalking his prey; obviously that's how the two songs were different. But by keeping the beat and melody of the earlier song, he captured the connotations already associated with Every Breath You Take, which were emotions of always thinking about someone, anticipating a future meeting. Puff Daddy reworked that theme so that his song communicated a new message: I'm always thinking about my slain friend, anticipating a future meeting.
 - iii. Similarly, in the musical version of Les Miserables, a melody from one song is re-used in another with a corresponding theme. For instance, after Jean Valjean experiences mercy at the hands of the bishop, he sings about the wonder and mystery of this forgiveness and the transforming effect this has on him in Valjean Forgiven. Later, when Inspector Javert experiences mercy at the hands of Jean Valjean, he sings in Javert's Suicide about the mystery of this forgiveness and the transforming effect this has on him using the same melody. Although there is a difference in the way the two men receive their respective pardons, since mercy gave Jean Valjean hope and new life, whereas it extinguished Javert's zeal for law and in fact Javert's own life, the fact that the same melody is used in both songs serves to underscore the dramatic transformation both men must experience when they are pardoned.
- b. What is Isaiah's prophecy about? Restoration from exile. It follows Isaiah 53, the song of the suffering servant, where the servant atones for the sins of the people. That's what enables God to say, "Come!" (55:1), an everlasting covenant is being established around the Davidic king (55:3),

so all nations can benefit (55:5). God's word going forth is like rain and snow from heaven; yielding seed and bread and bringing forth life.

- c. How does Jesus draw us to participate in Isaiah 55? He narrows the choices down to 4 soils, with only one of them being attractive.