Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Receptivity to the Gospel, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 8:4-15
Code: 42-103

Let's open our Bibles to the eighth chapter of Luke as we continue in this wonderful, wonderful gospel that gives us the record of the life and teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. We come in the eighth chapter of Luke to a section that begins in verse 4 and runs down to verse 15. It is a familiar parable that our Lord told. It's recorded by Matthew. It's also recorded by Mark. It is the parable of the soils, sometimes called the parable of the sower, but it really isn't, it's the parable of the soils. And to most Bible students, it's very, very familiar. Even most children if they've been in Sunday School at all are familiar with the parable of the soils. It's a simple story and yet it sustains within it far-reaching and profound spiritual truth and the story is really about the condition of the human heart. In very simple and familiar ways, Jesus drew out an analogy that helps us to understand the human heart and the human heart is the issue in the fulfillment of our mandate from God as Christians. We have been called to present the gospel, to proclaim the gospel to every creature, to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. That's why we're here, to evangelize, to tell people of the wonderful story of salvation. That's our part. But we're dealing with different kinds of heart conditions and understanding what those are is critical to understanding the whole enterprise of evangelism.

I suppose we could sort of say the parable answers this question: what kind of response should we expect when we give people the gospel? Whether it's you on a one-to-one basis or me preaching a gospel message, what kind of response should we expect? It's really critical for us to know that so that we don't become discouraged when we don't get the kind of response we think we should get, or so that we don't somehow blame the gospel as if it were inadequate to penetrate the heart. Or so that we don't blame ourselves as if somehow we were more skilled we might have a greater impact. What this parable tells us is that it's not about the skill of the sower, it's not about the seed in that there's some good and some bad, it's about the heart...it's about the soil.

As our Lord traveled from place to place, He preached the gospel. That's what He preached. He preached repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand, the Kingdom of God is a sphere of salvation where you enter by faith in Him. We've gone through all of that. He preached the gospel. Verse 1 says that, He went from one city to another proclaiming and preaching the gospel, euangelizo, preaching the gospel concerning the Kingdom of God. So publicly He proclaimed the gospel, privately He trained His disciples. He was moving in a massive crowd. Within that crowd was a smaller group of believers in Him, the Apostles and other disciples, some of them were women, as we learned last time, and they had come to believe in Jesus Christ, to believe savingly in Jesus Christ. They were the private group. And while He was proclaiming the gospel to the mass, to the huge crowds, to the

congregations and throngs that followed Him everywhere, He was also instructing that small group of disciples. And interestingly enough, He did both with the same message. When He gave a parable to the people who didn't believe, it made no sense. The people who did believe, it made good sense because he explained it to them. Parables then became a way to shut out the truth as well as to let it in.

So what you see in the flow of the ministry of Jesus is His public ministry of preaching and his private ministry of explaining spiritual truth. This is a very important lesson in the parable of the soils, extremely important lesson for the Apostles, the disciples, for us, anybody who is given the responsibility to proclaim the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, it's very important for us to understand this issue of receptivity to the gospel. It's important for us to understand what's going on when people don't respond the way we think they should. It's important for us not to question the skill of the sower or the state of the seed, it's really the condition of the soil. So understanding this parable is essential for us whose lives are committed to testifying to the gospel.

Let's get right at it by beginning in verse 4. "When a great multitude were coming together and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable." I need to stop at this point just a brief moment to give you a little bit of background. As I said, Matthew and Mark both record this, Mark chapter 4 and Matthew chapter 13, and in Matthew chapter 13 you get a little more insight into the actual situation. Matthew 13 verse 1, "On that day Jesus went out of the house." He had been in a house teaching and to that house His mother and brothers had come looking for Him and there was an interesting dialogue about who is His mother and His brother. And He said it's whoever does the will of My Father there at the end of chapter 12. So it was that day when He was teaching in that house and His brothers and His mother came to see Him, He went out of that house and He went down to sit by the Sea of Galilee. Well He might have hoped for a moment of tranquility but that's not how it was. Great multitudes, you couldn't even describe it as a crowd, you have to describe it as crowds, gathered to Him so that He got into a boat and sat down and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. The position of teaching in Judaism was to be seated. The crowd was so huge it kept pushing Him and pushing Him toward the water's edge, He had nowhere to go except to get into a little boat and have the little boat taken off the shore a little ways so that the people couldn't get so close that they would literally smother Him. And in that little distance He would also have His voice bounce off the waters and it would act a little bit like a public address system, and so there He is sitting in a boat probably being held by two of His disciples so it doesn't move around too much. And He goes on to teach the people. It was that situation. Now you can go back to the eighth chapter of Luke. Matthew fills in those little details.

It was when that great multitude came together and those from the various cities were journeying to Him that He spoke by way of a parable. There He is sitting out in the shallows of the Sea of Galilee with this massive crowd on the shore, pushing right down to the water's edge. They are not only people from the local area wherever it was, we can't be certain, in Galilee, one of the towns around

the Sea of Galilee and there were a number of them. But there were also people, it tells us in verse 4, from various cities who were journeying to Him so that He not only had a local group of people who would go back to their homes at night, but He had collected this group of people who were there all the time, hence the need on occasion to have to provide food for them...which led to the two times when He fed the crowd because they were traveling and there was no food for them to eat. So this is a large crowd, drawn by His reputation, His fame which is spreading all the time, His ability to heal diseases, to have power over nature, power over demons and even to raise the dead, believe me that has gone like wildfire through the populous of Israel and they are collecting to hear and to see Him to experience firsthand His miracles and the amazing teaching.

Well on this occasion which was like so many other occasions of this crowd in the ministry of Galilee, He spoke by way of a parable. I want to stop here for just a couple of minutes because I want you to understand several things that are going on. First of all, I want you to understand what a parable is. The word in the Greek is parabole...parabole, and you might not think that you know enough Greek to know what that word means, but if you know English, you will know what a parabole is. Parabole is used in rhetoric to refer to a comparison and a comparison is putting something besides something else to better understand it. If you deal in the science world, you would know what a parabola is. A parabola has to do with certain forms that have parallel elements. The word para means alongside. A parable is putting something alongside something else to better understand it, the placing of one thing alongside another so that a comparison can be made. What Jesus did was put a story alongside a spiritual truth to make it better understood. And by comparison and/or contrast He could give a clearer understanding of that spiritual truth. Rabbis used to love to teach in parables.

Now a parable is not just a simple analogy. A parable tends to be an elongated analogy. A simple analogy would be "he is as strong as a horse," or "he's as quick as a rabbit," or something of that...it's a simple analogy, doesn't need an explanation, everybody knows what that means. But as soon as you lengthen the analogy and you begin to tell a story, on the one hand you immediately obscure the meaning in the story, the story could mean all kinds of things...it demands an explanation. And Jesus spoke in parables that demanded an explanation. Early in His ministry He would speak in simple analogies that everybody would understand. He would speak directly in fulfillment of Old Testament passages, as He did in Luke 4 in the synagogue in Nazareth. Everybody knew He was saying He was the fulfillment of exactly what was written in Isaiah 61. And so there were times when Jesus spoke very clearly in very simple analogies. But as His ministry moved on, He began to speak in more prolonged stories, prolonged illustrations and analogies.

Now parables are very valuable. First of all, they make truth vivid. They make it vivid. So much so as to be almost unforgettable. The parables of Jesus, once you've gone through them, you don't forget them. They make the truth vivid. They also make the truth portable because you can take the parable and tell the story somewhere else and in the telling of the story, of course, the meaning comes to mind. They make truth interesting. They make truth clear. They make truth personally

discernable. It's a great way to teach. And as I said, before this particular day by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus had given many illustrations, many simple analogies and He had also used some parables. Back in chapter 5 verse 36, back in chapter 6 verse 39 it indicates that Jesus had spoken in parables.

But there's something important about this one. This is a major turning point in the ministry of Jesus. When I say major, I mean major...a major turning point. From this time on Jesus did not speak to the crowds except in parables. That's what it says in Matthew 13:34, "From this time on He spoke to them only in parables." Why? Why didn't He speak in simple clear terms? Why didn't He speak using simple and clear analogies? The answer is this, the rest of his ministry, the teaching of Jesus, was hidden from the unbelievers and revealed only to the believers. This then is a judicial act. This is a judgment, a judgment falls at this point on Israel, the major turning point. Those who would not believe could not. Those who were fools who hated knowledge as Proverbs calls them could not understand. Without an explanation, a parable can mean anything or nothing. Without an explanation from the one who gave the parable, there is no way to understand it, it is nothing more than a meaningless story, a riddle. So from here on He spoke only in parables so that His teaching would be hidden from the unbelievers and revealed only to those who believed. This is a monumental turning point. Judgment has fallen on Israel and that judgment is seen in the fact that they can no longer understand their own Messiah. It's very much like when God on the day of Pentecost empowered those gathered in the Upper Room to speak in languages, tongues, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21 says that was a judgment from God because they wouldn't listen when God spoke in their language, God spoke to them in a language they couldn't understand. That was a judgment on them. Very similar to Isaiah's day when God said to Isaiah, "You're going to be My spokesman but here's what I want you to understand..." We'll see more about this later. They're going to hear and not understand. They're going to see and not comprehend because their eyes are blind, their ears are deaf, their hearts are fat and they will not understand.

And why? God was judging them for their rebellion and their apostasy and their unbelief and their idolatry. You go preach but know this, the vast majority won't understand. God Himself confirms them judicially in their self-imposed blindness.

So the teaching of Jesus in parables then on the one hand obscures and on the other hand reveals. Veiling the truth was an act of divine judgment fixing in darkness those who had rejected Him. They loved darkness so they could have more of it. Only His disciples knew the meaning of these parables because only to them were they explained. The natural man, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:14, understands not the things of God, to him they are foolishness because they are spiritually discerned. And so, what we're going to see here is this amazing splitting of the crowd in an act of judgment by which Jesus speaks in ways in which only believers can understand because only to them are explanations given. And the others are simply confounded in a deeper darkness.

With that background then, let's go to the story itself. It is such a simple one with such an economy of words and yet so profound as it unfolds. It will take us a couple of weeks to get through the passage. We'll start in verse 5, Jesus says something that obviously was very familiar, so familiar while they were there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they might have looked off in the distance and seen this very thing going on because this is how life went day in and day out in the Galilee which was an agricultural environment. "A sower went out to sow his seed," that's pretty simple. "And he sowed. Some fell beside the...as he sowed, some fell beside the road and it was trampled underfoot and the birds of the air ate it up. And other seed fell on rocky soil and as soon as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture. And other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. And other seed fell into the good soil and grew up and produced a crop a hundred times as great." We'll stop at that point.

Nobody would be mystified by that story. It only needs an explanation to us who live in a pavement world. They understood this clearly. No, this was life for them every day, they were all in some way involved in an agricultural life. A sower went out to sow, and they used what was called a broadcasting method. Broadcasting didn't originate with technology, or radio. Broadcasting meant to throw things in a broad swat and media radio picked that up and broadcasted electronically. But what would happen is the field would be plowed with deep furrows and up and down the rows the farmer would go and he would have a bag over his shoulder full of seed and he would broadcast the seed, throwing it everywhere. And as the seed was being thrown, very typically, it would fall to the ground and find different soils. There are four different ones mentioned by our Lord. The first is roadside soil, "As he sowed some fell beside the road," or some fell on the road. I will explain that to you.

In Israel we're not talking here about a thoroughfare or highway, in Israel the fields basically were divided into long narrow strips for cultivation. And between those long narrow strips of field there were beaten paths about three feet wide, so that people could move around the countryside and go between the field going from place to place. Even the farmer with his responsibilities would need paths to walk on to move within the various fields in his own area. No fences existed, no walls existed. The only thing that separated the fields were these beaten paths. In Matthew chapter 12, for example, you have an illustration of Jesus and the Apostles who were walking through a field one day, remember, and plucking corn and eating it. And the Pharisees got all upset about that. But that was that kind of situation that was going on every day, people traversing through the fields to get from place to place along the paths that ran around the edges of the fields. Now that would be in every sense a path unplowed, dry in their semi-arid climate of Israel, hard-beaten down, baked by the sun. It would virtually be like concrete. When the sower threw the seed, he couldn't always throw it in exactly the way he wanted to because there would be a breeze blowing or because he just didn't have quite the dexterity to make sure it didn't drift beyond his desired arc, but some of it would fall upon the hard ground. It had no hope of getting into the soil You know, seed basically has an end that has a point on it and that's there in order that the seed can work its way down into the soil and die and then bring forth life. There would be no possible way for that little seed to penetrate that hard

ground, it would just lie there. And Jesus said when that happens it's trampled underfoot because that's a thoroughfare, that's where people walk and they would just crush it under their feet and what wasn't crushed the birds of the air ate it up, or even the remnants of what was crushed the birds would come and eat. You can be sure that flapping not far behind any sower would be a little bevy of birds who wanted to swoop down as soon as they could and gather up all the seed available to them.

I recently had an experience of that. I tried to seed a certain area of my lawn and I was defeated and have been defeated repeatedly by the birds. They come and the soil is ready and before it can even work its way into the soil, they're...they think it's the bird millennium, they are literally being fed on a wide scale. It's a losing battle at this point, I've got to figure out another plan. But that's the way it would have been in that environment and the seed would have been readily accessible to the birds because it's lying on the top of the soil. I was either trampled or it was taken away by the birds.

The second soil that the Lord describes is in verse 6, "Other seed fell on rocky soil, as soon as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture." Rocky soil doesn't mean soil full of rocks. No self-respecting farmer would allow for that. When they plowed, they plowed up the rocks and then they removed the rocks and carried them away because they would retard the freedom of the roots and the plant to develop. But what it's talking about here is rock bed. Israel is a tremendously rocky area, and not just with pebbles and stones, there are many of those, of course, but under the soil, down under the soil is rock bed. In many cases a very, very firm and far-reaching limestone rock bed that it would be below the surface and yet not too far below but far enough below to have escaped the plow. And so, in those situations the seed goes in. As soon as it grew up it withered away because it had no moisture, the roots can't get down, they can't get down into the water that's down in the soil and so immediately they draw whatever nutrients, whatever warmth, whatever water is out of the surface soil and the plant goes up because it can't go down, and it looks like it's really going to bloom and it's really going to flourish but as soon as the sun comes out and warms it even more and the water is gone, the roots can't go any deeper and it withers and dies. This too would be the bane of a farmer who had done everything he could to plow his field and didn't know that that was down below and lost his crop. It sprang up because it had no depth, it could not meet moisture. Rapid growth might have looked like a good sign...Wow, it's popping up very rapidly. But a farmer would know it's not a good sign, that means it's not developing a root system and that means it's not able to go down into the ground. No moisture means death. The sun literally dries the surface and the life is gone.

The third kind of soil in verse 7, "Other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out." The word "thorns" is an interesting word, akanthon in the Greek, and I'm giving you these Greek words because they have an English equivalent. Akanthon is a general word for weeds, thorns, thistles, that category of useless harmful plants, particularly harmful in cultivated crop land. There's an English word, same word is translated...transliterated into English, akanthon in English becomes acantha is an English word, look it up in the dictionary, it means thorns, or prickles, or some spiny kind of protrusion. And that's the word, by the way, used for the crown of thorns that was

placed upon Jesus' head. He was crowned with weeds, crowned with thorns.

So down in the soil, this particular patch of soil, are the roots of weeds, you know, where they tell you all the time, when you're pulling those weeds, get the root, right? Cause if you break it off at the top, what happens? It comes back stronger and when you broke it off it scatters its little seeds everywhere and the next time you go back you've got ten weeds. That's what happened here, apparently the farmer did the best that he could to plow it up but somehow the roots of those thorns and thistles and prickly things and weeds were still in the soil and we all know weeds grow better and faster than anything else grows. It's a deceptive kind of soil, it really looks good on the surface, it has depth, but there's tragic reality, there is other life there, noxious weeds alive already in that soil and growing and growing faster and stronger to suck the water, drain out the nutrients, grow up and block the sunlight and kill the good plant. And so it says, Jesus said, it choked it out, weeds win in that environment, squeezing out the good plant.

And then finally in verse 8, "The other seed fell into the good soil and grew up and produced a crop a hundred times as great." Of course this is what the farmer wanted all along, it didn't want wasted seed on hard pan, he didn't want seed to fall into soil that had no depth because of a rock bed. He didn't want seed to fall into soil where it would be choked out by the remnants of weeds that were there. This is what he wanted. And when the seed hits this good soil, it produces an amazing, amazing crop. This good soil means it doesn't have any of the prior conditions. It's not hard, it's soft. It's not shallow, it's deep. It doesn't contain weeds, it's clean. This is in every sense the prepared soil and it produces really an amazing crop. Matthew 13:8 and Mark 4:8 which record the same parable, say that Jesus said it sometimes bring forth thirtyfold, sometimes it brings forth sixtyfold, and sometimes a hundredfold. Luke only mentions the hundredfold. The farmers in Israel would say at that time that if you had a tenfold crop that was a great crop. If you had a seven-point-fivefold crop that was an average crop. But a hundredfold was staggering...staggering. Jesus wants to stagger the people. He wants to talk about a seed that falls in, that produces an unimaginable fruitfulness.

Now as the story is told, several things become clear. One, nothing is said about the sower and his skill and the sower is the same in every case. There's only one sower here. And nothing is really said to distinguish the seed. It's not the problem that there was a different sower in each case, or that there was a different seed, it becomes very clear that the sower is not really the issue, the seed is not the issue, the issue is what? The soil. Nobody would misunderstand this story. I mean, it's a very simple story. But having told the story doesn't mean you understand what it refers to. Just on the surface it could be about anything. It could be applied in a hundred ways. So it has to be explained.

The middle of verse 8, "As He said these things, He would call out." It's an interesting way that that's phrased in the original. "As He said these things, He would call out." During the telling of the story, He would say, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And what He is saying is as He goes along is, "For those of you who know what I'm talking about, listen to what I say." And he distinguishes the

crowd between those who have ears to hear, and those who don't.

It's as if He was saying, "I know you're not going to all get this but those who are, listen." This was apparently a typical way of Jesus' teaching. He would go through the parable, periodically He would say, "Are you getting this? Those of you who know what I'm talking about are you understanding this? Those of you who understand, listen to Me." That little phrase, "He who has ears to hear, let him listen," Jesus used on many occasions, I won't go through all of them. But you can check Matthew 13, it's used in verse 9 and verse 43. You can check Mark 4, it's used in verse 23. You can check later in Luke, Luke 14 verse 35. Jesus was saying, "If you can understand, then listen to Me. If you can understand, then listen." Sort of saying, "How many of you want to know more about this? How many of you care to know the meaning of this?" And you'll see that in verse 9 only the disciples responded and his disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable might be. And there you have the clear indication of who had the ears to hear. It was those who followed Jesus, those who believed in Jesus. They were the ones who could understand. They had the ears to hear. And so they come back and they say, "What does it mean? We want to know. We believe that You are the voice of God. We believe that You are the prophet of God. We believe that God has sent You to teach us His truth. We believe in You. We want to know."

So they were the ones asking the question...what does it mean? What does it mean? His response in verse 10 is so important. 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 in seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand." Isn't that interesting? To you it has been granted to know. What a privilege, just an overwhelming statement by Jesus. To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

When we talk about mysteries, musterion here, we're not talking about some esoteric, incomprehensible divine idea. We're not talking about being able to look into all the deep things of God and sort them out rationally. What the word "mysteries" means is spiritual truth hidden in the Old Testament revealed in the New, okay? Things hidden in the Old Testament revealed in the New. That's what it means. It's referring to those things that the Old Testament people didn't know that the New Testament reveals...the mystery of the incarnation, the mystery of Christ in you the hope of glory, the mystery of the church, the mystery of the Rapture, the mystery of the resurrection. Truths hidden in the Old revealed in the New and He says it's given to you, it's granted to you by God to know these things. Wow. To know the things which have been hidden from all generations past. Paul even said in Ephesians 3 that he was an apostle, that God had sent him to explain the mysteries, what was hidden in the past and is now revealed. It's not a mysterious idea, it's something that was hidden and is now revealed so that it's not mysterious. So He said you have been granted the privilege to know that. But to the rest, I speak in parables, unexplained ones, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. That's the judgment of it.

To further expand on this statement by Jesus, turn back to Matthew 13 and we'll pick it up at verse 10. The same exact parable, same event, verse 11, we'll actually start in verse 11, the disciples talk to Him in verse 10 and ask Him why He's speaking in parables. Verse 11, "He answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven but to them it has not been granted.'" You are select, you are elect, you are chosen, you are blessed, you are privileged. I mean, it's just a staggering thing, isn't it, that we are not anymore worthy than anybody else but to us God has chosen to reveal His great truth. In verse 12, "For whoever has, to him shall more be given and he shall have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." Jesus says sad day today in Israel, splitting the people here. I'm separating those who know the truth from those who don't. Those who know the truth are those who believe in Me. Those who don't believe in Me don't know the truth. I'm going to start explaining parables to only those who believe so that they are parables of revelation to them. But to those who don't believe, I will not explain and they become parables of concealment. And so He says, "Whoever has, you already know the truth. I'm going to give you more truth. You're going to have an abundance of truth." And I know we feel that way, don't we, who know the Word of God?

You know, as I said a few weeks ago, I'm not running out of truth to teach, I am running out of time to teach it. The truth is just replete, it's just boundless. And we have been given this truth, more of it and more of it and more of it in abundance and abundance and abundance. But to those who don't have the truth to believe, even what they have will be taken away from them. The little smattering of understanding they have will be obliterated. Those who reject Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God, the gospel of salvation are never going to know divine truth. That's why you can't expect the people outside the Kingdom of God to know the truth of God. Spiritual blindness is compounded deeper by rejection and even deeper by divine judgment.

Verse 13, Jesus says explicitly, "I speak to them in parables because while seeing they do not see and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." I speak this way to conceal it. I don't want to cast my pearls before swine. I don't want to give spiritual truth to people who have no ability to grasp it. Rather I will put them in a deeper darkness as an act of judgment. And it's just like verse 14 says, "It's just like in the days of Isaiah." You remember that Isaiah was called to minister, as I mentioned earlier, and He says in verse 14, "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled which says you will keep on hearing but will not understand, you will keep on seeing, will not perceive, for the heart of this people has become dull, their ears...with their ears they scarcely hear and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and return and I should heal them." God says I don't want to heal them, I don't want them to return so I'm judicially confirming them in deafness and blindness and lack of understanding. What a serious judgment...what a serious judgment. You will not believe so you cannot believe. They're hardening their own hearts and then God hardened their hearts. But verse 16, "But blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear."

Can we even put any conceivable value on such a privilege? I keep thinking back to 2:14 of 1 Corinthians. "The natural man understandeth not the things of God but you have the mind of Christ." It's just absolutely staggering to know that we have been given the mind of Christ. What does that mean? We know how Christ who is God thinks. We have insight into the mind of Christ. We know how He thinks, it's revealed in Scripture. And then according to 1 John 2:20 and 27, "We've been given the anointing from God, the Holy Spirit, who teaches us all things so that we don't need a human teacher, but the anointing from God teaches us all things." So here we have the mind of Christ and the Word of God and we have the Spirit of God living within us who is our teacher who gives us insight into the meaning of this, the mind of Christ. You talk about a blessing, there isn't anything more blessed than to know the truth about everything God has revealed. In fact, Jesus said to the disciples in verse 17 of Matthew 13, "For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desire to see what you see and didn't see it, and hear what you hear and didn't hear it." And what He means there is the Old Testament prophets, the godly of the Old Testament didn't know what you know, didn't hear what you hear, didn't see what you see cause it hadn't happened, it hadn't been revealed, it was mystery to them. Talk about privilege, you're more privileged than all the prophets of the Old Testament, according to 1 Peter 1:10 and 11, they had to look into what they wrote to try to discern what it meant. According to Hebrews chapter 11, the end of the chapter, as great as they were in living the life of faith, the perfections of God's redemptive purpose they didn't know. They were never perfected, the writer says, without us. So talk about privilege, you who live in the New Testament age, you who live now from the apostles on are the most privileged people in the history of the world, you who believe in Me, Jesus says, to you is given the truth, you have the mind of Christ.

Go over to verse 51 of Matthew 13 for a minute, verse 51. Jesus went through a number of parables including the parable of the soils, but in verse 51, after all these parables and all His explanations He said to the disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" They said, "Yes." Wow. How wonderful is that? And I can tell you this morning, I understand these parables, too. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you've gone through and read the explanation our Lord gives, you understand them as well. But in that day when Jesus gave these parables, He didn't give any explanation to the unbelievers in Israel because this was a judicial act in which He was hiding the truth from those who are obstinate and stiff necked. The same thing exactly that He did in Isaiah's day when He said to Isaiah, "You go preach, but I'm going to tell you this, nobody is going to listen to what you say. Their ears will be deaf, their eyes will be blind, their hearts will be like stone, they will not hear." And then Isaiah said, "How long do I do that?" He said, "Just keep doing it until nobody is left in the land, they'll all be taken into captivity and know this, there will be a tenth...there will be a tenth." There will be a remnant who will hear and they will believe. In the equation of the parable of the soils, there's a fourth, one out of four soils. I don't think you can count on that in every situation, one out of four, but it's always the minority. But what a privilege, we know the truth.

Let's go back to Luke 8. So Jesus says to those of you who come to Me to ask the explanation, those disciples, followers, believers, to you it's been granted the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. I just cannot get over what a privilege that is. That's why I can't understand why people don't pour their life into the understanding of Scripture. What a privilege. And you will understand this.

And then comes the explanation, verse 11, and we'll just start into this. Now the parable is this, the seed is the Word of God. By the way, no definition of the sower. Why? Because the sower is anybody who sows...anybody. I know when Jesus taught the parable of the wheat and the tares, He said, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man," but that's a different parable. The one thing you never want to do in interpreting parables is mix them, that's not a legitimate way to interpret. It is true that ultimately Christ is the true sower because the message is Christ and the power is Christ. We are actually, according to 2 Corinthians 5:20, begging people to be reconciled to God under the power of Christ. So Christ is really the divine seed sower, but for this parable, anybody who sows, anybody who proclaims is the sower. The seed, He says, is the Word of God. Seed being the Word of God simply means the gospel, the gospel, the Word from God about salvation, about how to enter the Kingdom, the Word from God about forgiveness and reconciliation and justification, sanctification, glorification. That is the seed. People sometimes will say, "If I go out to evangelize, what should I say?" The gospel. "Well, I'm not...I'm not sure I'm really good at presenting it." Are you a Christian? "Yes." You have confirmation that you're really a true Christian? "Yes." Then you knew enough to get saved, so you know enough to tell somebody else how to get saved. It's not any more complicated than that.

First Peter 1:23, "You've been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable." You weren't born again because of some perishable seed, some synthetic seed developed by some marketing strategy, or some methodology, or some scheme, or some plan. You were born again not by something human that was devised, but an imperishable, that is an eternal seed, that is the living and abiding Word of God. You were saved because the Word of God did its work in your life. The Word of God penetrated and saved you and that's exactly what you need to be responsible to do. You are a sower, you have been given a great commission along with all other believers. You go out and you give the gospel. It's not about your cleverness, it's not about the skill of the sower, not at all. Just give them the truth about the gospel and that's the seed....that's the seed. People think that somehow seed doesn't work or it's offensive. Look, if you're trying to get everybody that you present the gospel to saved, you better go back and study this parable again. It's not going to happen. So know this, that there's no artificial way to overcome the fact that it's going to be a few...it's going to be a minority. There's no artificial way for you to create a synthetic seed that's going to make everybody embrace it. That will be false conversion. The seed is the gospel, the seed is the Word of God, that's the seed and that's what you give, that's what you proclaim, whether you're preaching like I do, or whether you're witnessing one on one, seed is the Word of God, not your thoughts, ideas, insights...the Word of God. We are utterly dependent on divine truth revealed in Scripture.

Now when we present the truth, we're going to get some responses and they're going to vary, as we've already learned from the story. Let's just look initially at why there is this variation. Look at verse 12 and you will see in the middle of the verse the phrase, "The devil comes and takes away the Word from their heart." Now the word "heart" is the key to interpreting the parable. The word "heart" is the soil, right? That's where you planted the seed. It's in the heart. Down to verse 15, "The good soil are the ones who heard the Word in an honest and good heart." So you see, the parable is about heart condition, it's not about the skill of the sower, it's not about the seed, the seed is fixed eternally. It is the Word of God that is the only seed, the sower is anybody who presents the gospel in its simple and magnificent truth. The issue about response has not to do with the seed, you can't fix the seed to make it more palatable. It has not to do with some methodology on the part of the sower. It's all about the condition of the heart. The basic truth of the parable is the result of the hearing of the gospel always depends on the condition of the heart. It's so important to know that. I don't know how many people in the world today in evangelicalism think that people's response to the gospel depends on the skill of the sower, or it depends on the nature of the seed, and so they want to work on the methodology of the sower, or they want to work on a more palatable seed. The issue is the heart. That's what Jesus is saying. The character of the heart of the hearer determines the response.

So don't beat yourself up if you don't seem to be effective. First of all, throw some more seed, you're more likely to hit some good soil, but in the end, it's the heart. Well the first one we'll look at just this morning briefly, the roadside hearer, verse 12, "Those beside the road are those who have heard, then the devil comes along and takes away the Word from their heart so that they may not believe and be saved." The idea of sowing is then this, it's to bring the gospel to people so they can believe and be saved. Got that? Pretty simple, we're sowing the gospel message so people can believe and be saved. But some of the people we're going to deal with are like concrete, that's what Jesus says. They're like those roadside hearers, hard, beaten down. The seed has no possibility to penetrate their hard hearts. The Old Testament would call them the hard hearted and the stiff necked. They are resolute and rigid in their indifference, disinterest and love of sin. This is the condition of the heart which corresponds of that footpath around the field. The heart of this kind of person is a thoroughfare, crossed by the mixed multitude of iniquities that traverse it day after day after day after day. And it's not fenced so it lies exposed to all the evil stompings of everything that comes along. It's never broken up. It's never plowed by conviction. It's never plowed by self-searching, self-examination, contrition, honest assessment of guilt, repentance. The heart is callous. It's callous to the sweet reasonings of grace and it's callous to the fearful terrors of judgment.

Nothing wrong with the seed, nothing wrong with the sower, something terribly wrong with his hard impenitent heart. You've talked to people like that and so have I. This is the fool of Proverbs. This is the fool who hates knowledge, the fool who hates wisdom, the fool that says in his heart there is no God. This is the person whose mind is shut. And you know, the interesting thing here in this context is we're not talking about some atheist, we're not talking about some pagan here. Jesus is talking

about Jewish people, not just Jewish people but Jewish leaders, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, priests whose mind was shut to the truth of God, to the message of God, to the Son of God and to the Kingdom of God. They were so hard-hearted that the more they heard Jesus, the more they wanted to kill Him. And eventually they did. Jesus even told the story in the twenty-first chapter of Matthew, told it to them in front of all the people in the temple about a man who had a vineyard, you remember, and he wanted to make an accounting, and so he sent his servants and they killed all the servants. And then he sent his son and they killed the son. And he said that's you...you killed all the prophets and now you kill the Son. This is how hard their hearts were. Religious people can have very hard hearts. Jesus later on in the gospel of Luke, it's recorded in the nineteenth chapter, was looking over the city of Jerusalem one day and weeping, Luke19:41, "He approached the city and He saw the city and He wept over it." And He said, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, if you only knew the things that were brought to you to make your peace with God, but now they've been hidden from your eyes." If you don't listen when you can listen, you'll never be able to listen. So there was judgment pronounced on Israel, the people of God's covenant. They were devoted to Satan who was their father, who came along in the imagery and snatched the Word. If it wasn't smashed under the pedestrian activity of their sin, it was snatched away by their father, the devil. John 8:44 Jesus said, "You're of your father, the devil." Matthew points that out in his account of this parable how Satan comes and snatches the Word.

How does he snatch it? Through false teachers that come and attack the gospel. He snatches it through the fear of man, an embarrassment about being identified with Jesus Christ or fear of being unsynagogued or cut off from your friends. He snatches it through pride. You think you know everything and you're not willing to confess that you don't and be broken before God. He snatches it through doubt, through prejudice, through stubbornness, mostly through the continual love of sin which he panders to through his wretched world system. It's either crushed under the continual pedestrian activity of wickedness or snatched away by Satan. That's such a sad thing.

So, you look at your own heart this morning, right? Is this you, are you that hard baked dry road on the edge of the field? Hardened by sin so constantly engaged in that they have literally made your heart into solid rock and the truth can never get in? You literally lie in the lap of the evil one who snatches away the truth from the surface of your hard heart. How sad.

That's the way people are, many people like that. If that happens to be your situation, you say, "What can I do if I really recognize my heart?" You say, "How do you recognize a hard heart?" Well if you're looking right now at your watch and wondering how fast you can get out of here and get to your next activity, that's a good indication, if you know you're not a Christian and this is just taking up your time, messing with your Sunday, that's a hard heart. If you're not willing to be honest about your hard condition and the resistance of the gospel which has gone on for a long time, the thing you need to do is fall on your knees before God and plead with God to plow that ground because I...you know, I can throw the seed but I can't plow the heart, that's the work of God. Only God can grant repentance, and

you need to cry out with a broken and a contrite heart and ask God to break up the hard ground of your heart. That's where you are and you sense that, and you can sense it by your own indifference to what I'm saying right now as I speak, then you need to cry out to God to plow your heart and break it up, lest you catapult into eternal punishment with that same hard heart.

Well, we'll look at the other three next time. Let's pray.

The message of our Lord is clear to us because he explained it. Even people today who don't believe have an advantage over Israel. He didn't explain it to the Jews that day, but He has explained it so that all can read it today. And this is a benediction even to an unbeliever to know the meaning of this parable. Even as I speak to the hard hearted, they can't escape the meaning of this the way the hard hearted in the day of Jesus could escape it because He didn't explain it. And so, O God, I pray that in the understanding of this that You would cause the hard-hearted sinner to cry out that You would come and plow up the soil and make it soft to receive the truth of the gospel. Help us again to be refreshed in the opportunity that is ours to sow the seed and to pray that You would prepare t he soil. Continue to instruct us in Your truth which is a privilege beyond expression. It is granted to us to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, how astounding is that? We thank You for it. We are therefore responsible to teach it to others to pass it on for Your glory. Amen.

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