

The Four Soils

Luke 8:1-15

INTRODUCTION: We come today to the first *parable* told by Jesus in each of the 4 Gospels, the Parable of the Four Soils.

What is a Parable? On the most superficial level, a parable is an earthly illustration with a heavenly meaning.

The Greek word for parable is para-bole, which means "to lay *something alongside of something else*" so that a comparison can be made.

But for Jesus, it was far more than that.

1. Parables communicate to every type of learner.

- a. **Visual Learners** - They receive information primarily by sight. When you talk to them, they are picturing things in their mind. For this reason, they often look up and to the right when you ask them a question. They tend to process things quickly and make quick decisions
- b. **Auditory Learners** - They receive information best by hearing. If you are an auditory learner, you are not taking notes as I speak, you will retain and write down what you wish afterward. Auditory learners make up about 30% of the population.

BTW, I am highly auditory as a learner. I listen at audible books 2x speed and process it fine. I do not process the written word as quickly.

- c. **Kinesthetic Learners** - learn effectively through touch, movement, and space, and learn skills by imitation and practice. Kinesthetic learners make up around 5% of the population.

Parables can communicate on different levels.

To the Visual, it gives them something to look at

To the Auditory, it involves a good story

To the Kinesthetic, it is very tangible

2. **Parables require a measure of mental engagement.** They are very easy to remember, but they are difficult to process. They require a measure of mental digestion.
3. **Parables both reveal and conceal the truth.** In Matthew's account of this same parable... the disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has

been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

So, there is a sense in which Parables is an act of judgment and blessing. To the Pharisees, they were Judgement for their rejection of God's Messiah. For the disciples, they were accessing the deepest mysteries of Heaven.

This first Parable, the four soils, is unique.

- Incidentally, this is the first parable in each of the four gospels. Why is that? Well, it is a robust parable for starters, but it also anticipates one of the primary pushbacks to Christianity.

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago, soon after my conversion, I was burdened to share the Gospel with my *grandfather*. I went to him and made a pretty good case for Christianity. Do you know what he said? He said, "Son, I've seen too many people who live worse than I do who say they are Christians... so I can't believe it is true".

Well, this first parable explains why that is the case. In the first parable he ever gave, Jesus says, 3 out of 4 people who hear the Gospel will seem to convert... but then will fall away, proving they did not have a sincere faith.

- The second reason this parable is unique is that in each of the Gospel accounts, this one has an **answer key** attached to it. Jesus tells us precisely what it means. We don't have to guess or come up with strange interpretations. He tells us in the text.

With that in mind, let's look at it together...

CONTEXT: Chapter 7 concludes at the home of Simon, a Pharisee. This appears to be a good sign that things are changing....This man, Simon, hosting Jesus, reclining at the table with him. NOW this is important... it seems as though Simon and potentially other pharisees are getting it. Suddenly a woman who is described as a SINFUL woman, a Woman of the city, came into the room and began to pour ointment on the feet of Jesus, washing them with her hears and wiping them off with her hair. When Simon saw this he said, "That is not what I signed up for". Jesus said, "Simon, she loves much because she has been forgiven much. NOW - see those two people both encountered Jesus, but they responded very differently.

TEXT: Luke 8:1–15 (ESV)

¹ Soon afterward (that is, after the anointing of the feet of Jesus at Simon's house) he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

Now, take careful note of the women who attended to Jesus. These women held no title. They were not numbered among the 12. However, when Jesus was nailed to the cross... only 1 of the 12 stayed by his side (John), but all of these ladies were there. When the third day arrived... the 12 were nowhere to be found.. but these ladies were faithfully attending to Jesus.

Where would we be without the faithful, godly ladies who serve in the Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God is, by nature, Patriarcl. That is just a reality.

- There were 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob has daughters, but they aren't numbered among the tribes.
- All of the Priests of Israel were men.
- All of the Apostles were men.
- Pastors are to be men.

This is a Patriarchal faith; make no mistake about that. HOWEVER, we wouldn't last a decade if our women decided to strike.

⁴ And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, ⁵ "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it." ⁶ And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture." ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it." ⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So, it was a short sermon. A simple sermon. Took no more than a couple of minutes to deliver. But it is being studied and spoken of 2,100 years later.

⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" ¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

So there is the first interpretive clue - the seed is the WORD. In the first century, agriculture was different.

- Today - we plow the ground, create rows for the seed, sow the seed in a precise way, and then turn the soil over to cover the newly planted seed.
- In Jesus's day, it was different. You would scatter the seed, then plow, which would both break up the soil and bury the seed in one action.

So Jesus compares the preaching of the word to a sower... scattering the seed. He reaches into the seed bag, takes a hand full of seed, and tosses it over his property.

THEN Jesus says, the real difference is not the seed... the seeds are all the same... the difference is the soil. Now, Jesus tells us the soil is the heart of the hearer.

The heart is the fullness of the person. It includes his or her mind, will, and emotion.

So, the word is preached... and people receive it differently.

The first heart he mentions is the....

1. Dull Hearts - Lack Understanding

[12 The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.](#)

In Matthew's account, we see that the seed couldn't penetrate the soil because of a lack of ***understanding***. Literally, Jesus said, "When someone hears the word of the Kingdom and does not understand it - the evil one snatches away what has been sown in his heart."

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when our kids were young. I was determined to teach them the Gospel. I wanted them to be saved. So I drilled it into their minds over and over. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he was buried, and on the third day, he rose again.... God only knows how many times I told them that. Then I would see them at breakfast and say, "How does a person find forgiveness of their sins?" And my kids would say, "they get babaized". What happened? The Evil one snatched the word.

I cannot stress to you how important it is that you UNDERSTAND the Gospel. You cannot be saved without a clear understanding of what God has done on your behalf.

How do you know if one understands the Gospel sufficiently enough to be saved?

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose someone woke you up in the middle of the night from a deep sleep and said, tell me now how to become a Christian! What would you say? I don't mean, which form of presentation would you give...but rather, what are the essential elements of the Gospel? If your mind is racing even now to an adequate answer... you would do well to be concerned about the validity of your conversion.

Paul makes it clear - to be converted, one must understand that Christ died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day... this is the Gospel.

You are a sinner... Jesus is the Savior.... He did the work; He paid for your sin debt to a Holy God.

The Gospel is not turn over a new leaf, stop you bad habits, the Gospel is not a few words you say for fire insurance, it is not a 12 step program, it is not joining the church or being baptized. The Gospel IS what Jesus has done for sinners to be saved. Period.

Dull hearts... the next group is the...

2. Shallow Hearts - Lack Perseverance

¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

This is the person who comes forward as soon as we play the first verse of the invitation. They are weeping. They are all about getting saved.

BUT THEN, when they see that the world is no friend to the follower of Christ....When they see that the Devil is now twice an enemy as he was before... when they realize that the flesh nature doesn't go away.... When they learn that ALL who live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution... they are out.

ILLUSTRATION: I have known people, and you have known people who are quick to JOIN, but they never quite finish. They jump into things quickly, without counting the costs. Then when the bills come due, they are out. That is a dangerous way to live. But it's a worse way to die.

NOW - don't bend your theology to accommodate a shallow-hearted person.

ILLUSTRATION: We have all been to the funerals where the minister says, "Well, old Joe was a sorry excuse for a human being... he beat his wife, stayed drunk half the time, never did anything good for anybody... but thank God he raised his hand in VBS when he was a toddler, so we know he is in Heaven. LISTEN: NOT ON YOUR LIFE.

Why? Because when the seed of the word penetrates a man's heart, he changes. Well, I thought you, Baptists believed that once saved, always saved... we do, but many people are deceived into thinking they are saved, who are lost as a goose.

LISTEN: Don't be shocked when some people fall away.

1 John 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Dull hearts...Shallow hearts...

3. Distracted Hearts - Lack Focus

¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Notice that this soil has a couple of things choking the word:

a. Cares of this Life

Those are not necessarily bad things, but neither are the ULTIMATE things.

The kids have to get to school, they have to be fed, and they have to have warm clothes in the winter. So parents must earn money for all these things. Now - you have to get the kids to school and get yourself to work. Not to mention the unrealistic pressures your employer places on you... you'll never get it all done... and what was that Pastor Zach said? Behold the face of God before you behold the face of any man.... Who has time for all of that?

And then, just when you think you have carved out a few moments to think seriously about Eternity....the next thorn arises....

b. Pleasures of this Life

Again, these are not necessarily illicit pleasures. They could be, but they don't have to be. I have found here in FL that our attendance always suffers when the weather is nice. Why? Because the kids want to go to the beach... and we can listen to the sermon online... I'm sure we will get around to it and take it very seriously when we do.

ILLUSTRATION: We have this idea that if God will take care of all these other things in my life... give me plenty of money, plenty of sleep, plenty of leisure... then I will seek you with all my heart. God says, "you have it in reverse... seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness... THEN, these other things will be added to you.

BEWARE: When you begin to easily brush off the church in favor of more entertaining opportunities.

Well, the fourth soil represents the genuine believer...

4. Good Hearts - Understand, Persevere, and Prioritize the Word

15. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

So they HEAR THE WORD....All four heard it btw. But notice how this one hears it differently...

They HOLD IT FAST. They receive the Word as a treasure hidden in a field, for which a man would lose all he has to own. They do this with integrity and sincerity... and over time... they bear the fruit of repentance.

BTW, people can tell if you are bearing the fruit of your confession of faith. They can tell... how?

Luke 8:16–18 (ESV)

16. "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. 17. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

When God lights the lamp... he lets others see the light through you... simple as that.

What is the conclusion? What should we do differently as a result of hearing this parable?

18. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

CONCLUSION: Oh friend, please see the seriousness of the business we do hear each week. Souls hang in the balance. There is little if anything, you can do to how another one hears... but you can TAKE CARE THEN HOW YOU HEAR!!!

THREE THINGS WE CAN TAKE AWAY FROM THIS PARABLE:

1. **We can avoid being jaded when people abandon the faith** - learn to appeal to them as you would a lost man or woman. Don't preach them into heaven... let them feel their lostness.
2. **We can examine ourselves** - are we in danger of becoming shallow or rocky soil? Are the weeds of life beginning to make us unfruitful?
3. **We can discern the time of our conversion** - Here is something I have found in the South. There is an unusual number of false converts. Due to an emphasis on evangelism that neglected discipleship, 90% have prayed a sinners prayer at some point. BUT ALSO, here is what I see. A lot of people misidentify WHEN they were converted.

This is what happened to me. I made a standard profession of faith when I was around 12 years of age. I was baptized. I considered myself a Christian. But my Christianity was more or less just a ritual we did on Sundays... it had very little bearing on my life.

Then at the age of 18, I heard the Gospel as if I had never heard it before. The seed took root. Then it sprouted, and the next thing you know, my entire life was changed. Jesus became the center of my universe. A treasure hidden in a field. I began to study the Bible, pray, and witness to others.

NOW if you asked me when I was saved I would have said at 12.

HOWEVER, Several years later I was preaching this very parable and it occurred to me that I had misidentified my conversion date. The fruit marked the faith.