

Luke 8A

- If you were a Jewish farmer or tradesman following Jesus in the crowds
 - So you see this man of amazing power, you hear his teaching
 - You had seen his miracles
 - You've heard his teaching
 - You see His kindness and genuine concern for people, unlike the other religious leaders who seem to only serve themselves
 - And yet you marvel at the wide variety of reactions to him
 - There are the scoffers, chief among them the Pharisees and scribes
 - You heard the whispers in the crowd, some declaring he was a prophet, some declaring him to be possessed
 - They mocked Him, they say He was not to be believed
 - They accused Him of violating the law and encouraging others to do as well
 - They criticized Him for associating with sinners
 - They dismissed Him entirely
 - Then there are the opportunists
 - They've been attracted by the prospect of quick healing or whatever may come their way
 - But you can tell what they really think...they aren't any more interested in living the life Jesus proclaims than they are following the Pharisees
 - Then there are the ones who truly seem to feel a calling from Jesus
 - They admire Him, call Him a prophet
 - They seek to understand His teaching and follow it

- Finally, there were those who had begun to ask the question of whether this was the son of David, the promised one, the Messiah
- Shouldn't his power and his wisdom be enough to convince anyone of who He was
- How could anyone see such wondrous displays and not come away convinced
- Why so many different reactions? Why do the same events have such different impact on so many people?
- And that question leads us into the events of Luke Chapter 8

[Luke 8:1](#) ¶ 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, [Luke 8:2](#) 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, [Luke 8:3](#) 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.

- Luke steps back for a moment from his story of Jesus' teaching in Galilee
 - He simply make note of the way Jesus was able to live the life of an itinerant preacher – traveling from place to place
 - No livelihood, no attempt to build an earthly fortune
 - Focused entirely on preaching the kingdom of God
- Following Jesus were the 12, of course, then woman Jesus had healed
 - First Mary Magdalene
 - Her name comes from her hometown, Magdala
 - She had seven spirits in her
 - Then there is Joanna, who is so faithful she is with Jesus when he is crucified and buried
 - She is also connected to Herod's household, meaning she had money or at least connections to money

- It also is interesting how high up Jesus' ministry had penetrated so quickly
- Finally, there is Susanna, who must have been prominent in the early church and therefore known to Luke's readers, which might explain why he doesn't give any further details
- And all these women and many others, Luke says, were contributing to Jesus' ministry
- I like the way Luke tried to provide details about Jesus that provide legitimacy to the story of Jesus
 - For those who might wonder how it was that Jesus could travel around without ever holding steady employment, Luke provides the question
 - The answer is Jesus lived like every fulltime minister who has come after him
 - He relied on the support of others who recognized the importance and necessity of His ministry
- In Jesus's case, a significant part of his support came from the kindness of women, especially women who had access to means
 - It's interesting that Luke, more than the other gospel writers, has made a point throughout his gospel of highlighting the role of women in Jesus life, and how Jesus showed them unusual kindness and respect for women for His day
 - And after this short aside, Luke returns to detailing Jesus' teaching

[Luke 8:4](#) ¶ When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable:

[Luke 8:5](#) "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.

[Luke 8:6](#) "Other *seed* fell on rocky *soil*, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

[Luke 8:7](#) "Other *seed* fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out.

[Luke 8:8](#) "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."

- Now Luke returns to describing Jesus' teaching and His effect on the crowds
 - And He tells one of the most famous – if not the most famous – parable of his ministry – the parable of the sower and the seed
 - There are at least as many ways to interrupt this parable incorrectly as there are to interpret it correctly
 - We want to pay close attention to all the details in this parable if we are to understand it correctly
 - Furthermore, we will need to keep in mind the context in which it is found, keeping in mind the teaching we've been following so far
- A Palestinian farmer would typically walk to his field along narrow worn paths, often passing other plots of land before reaching his own
 - As he walked there, he carried his seed in a cloth bag, stitched together by coarse thread
 - Occasionally the bag might leak and allow some of the seed to fall along the path as he walked
 - Or as he was sowing his field, some of the seed would fall out in places that were not tilled and prepared for planting
 - Then as he sowed his seed, the farmer would reach into the bag, grab a handful of seed and then drop it along the prepared rows in the field
 - Of course some of the seed dribbles out of his hand and falls around his feet, etc.
- Jesus uses this familiar picture to capture an important teaching to the crowd
 - We can see easily enough that there are four conditions represented in the parable
 - Each condition has difference and each shares some important details with the others
- Let's begin by looking at what each has in common
 - Each condition has the farmer
 - The farmer, though, is not the point of the parable – did you notice that?

- There is no discussion of who the farmer is or how he does his work
 - In fact, if we had to rate the farmer's performance, it's fair to say that the farmer is fairly sloppy with his seed bag
 - He's throwing seed everywhere
 - Jesus says some seed falls on the road, some in rocky soil, some in the thorns
 - Only a portion falls on the good soil
 - It's as if he has an unlimited supply of seed, so there's no need to worry about being precise or stingy with it – just throw it anywhere and everywhere
 - So the farmer is probably not the point of the parable, wouldn't you agree?
 - The best we can learn from watching the farmer is that Jesus expects indiscriminant distribution of the seed
- Which brings us to the seed
 - The seed is also the same for each condition
 - We're not talking about good seed vs bad seed here
 - All seed has the same potential to bring growth and fruit
 - So if the farmer is the same and the seed is the same, what's the difference here
 - Well there are two differences across the four conditions
 - First, there is a difference in the soil
 - In the first condition, we have no soil at all really
 - We have a worn path

- If you have ever gone camping or walking a trail in the wilderness, you know what a worn path is like
- It's dense, hard pack earth that can't be penetrated easily – certainly not by a seed falling to the ground
- And anything that does fall is easily seen – so birds quickly drop down and remove it altogether
- It never has the chance to germinate, much less grow
- Now in the second condition the soil is looser, more ready to accept a seed
 - But in the Palestinian region where this scene is set, there are many areas much like the ground here in South Texas
 - The earth is actually only a thin layer covering dense limestone rock
 - The ground is rocky not because it has rocks in it, but because the ground has no depth to the soil
 - Seeds that fall such soil actually sprout up more quickly than seed planted in deep soil, because it's closer to the elements it needs
 - It's closer to water and as it sprouts, it breaks free more quickly and receives sunlight sooner
 - This has the effect of causing quick growth at first
 - But as the root tries to establish itself, the rocky layer under the thin soil stops the growth short
- The third soil is actually just fine for causing growth
 - It's deep and rich enough, so growth takes place
 - But now the problem is that the soil is contaminated with unhealthy plants as well, plants that choke off the growth of the seed
 - Since it's choked from maturing, it never reaches the place where it can produce fruit

- Finally, there's the fourth condition where the soil is best, because it's been prepared specifically for the seed
 - The soil is soft and deep
 - And the contaminants have been removed
 - And growth produces fruit
- Now as Jesus presents the parable, He first lays out the parable then provides the interpretation, and so we'll move to the interpretation next as well
 - But first, what are we to make of his next comment regarding the reason He taught in parables

[Luke 8:9](#) ¶ His disciples *began* questioning Him as to what this parable meant.

[Luke 8:10](#) 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.

- It must have been that this parable so caught the disciples off guard that they finally decided to ask the question that they had no doubt been thinking for some time
 - Why was Jesus teaching in riddles? Wasn't He trying to teach people?
 - Didn't He want people to know what He was saying?
- To that Jesus responds, that the disciples were to know the meaning of Jesus teaching, but not everyone
 - For them, the truth will come in parables – it will be inaccessible
 - It will interest them, it will catch their attention and puzzle them
 - They may even make some sense of it
 - But in the end, the true meaning will escape them
 - Only for those whom it is intended will the truth be known
- Understanding this principle is important because it fits into the rest of this chapter and in fact the whole of the gospel

- The first thing we have to conclude is that Jesus understood that not all people were intended to understand the Gospel
 - Some interpreters have seen these verses and explained them this way
 - Jesus is telling his disciples that there are those who are willing to understand the truth and those who weren't
 - To those who weren't willing to understand the truth, the meaning of the parables would escape them and they would be left without the knowledge of the truth
- Adding support to that view is this verse in Matthew

[Matt. 13:15](#) FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,
AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES,
OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,
HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'

- But this interpretation ignores the overall text
 - Jesus is speaking in riddles – his parables are hard to understand regardless of the state of your heart – they are not designed for everyone to follow
 - Even the disciples had to ask for an interpretation – and Jesus said to them that they had been granted the right to understand the truth
 - So clearly, the rest had no chance to understand
 - In fact, He says it has not been granted to the others to know the truth
 - Something or someone is standing in the way of the others understanding the truth
 - Jesus is purposely speaking in a veiled way – in a way that kept the real truth – the depth of His teaching – intentionally hidden
- So while the hearers are guilty for their lack of understanding, Jesus is teaching in such a way to affirm their situation and prevent it from changing

- This has happened before in scripture
- In Isaiah..

[Is. 6:8](#) Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

[Is. 6:9](#) He said, “Go, and tell this people:

‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.’

[Is. 6:10](#) “Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull,
And their eyes dim,
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And return and be healed.”

- Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and declares that they can’t see Him for who he is because of their nature will not permit it

[John 8:42](#) Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

[John 8:43](#) “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word.

[John 8:44](#) “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

[John 8:45](#) “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.

[John 8:46](#) “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?

[John 8:47](#) “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.”

- The problem part the listener’s disinterest in the truth and their own stubbornness
 - God does not reveal a great truth to those who show contempt for the simplest of revelation
 - Christians often get caught in this trap they set for themselves

- If we're not willing to devote ourselves to the hard work of hearing and learning God's word, then we shouldn't be surprised when He withholds understanding from us on more difficult issues in scripture
- And this fact leads us to the other reason they don't understand
 - All men are born into the nature of Adam, the fallen nature we inherited from Adam
 - And that fallen nature leaves us incapable of hearing God's truth and responding to the truth
 - Having ears to hear requires that God first act to open the hearer's ears to pay attention to the message
 - And so for the Apostles, it had been granted for them to understand these mysteries,

[Matt. 13:16](#) "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. but to those

- But for the rest of the crowd, it had not been granted
 - And unless it is granted, they cannot understand it
- Understanding the word of God is a supernatural experience
 - We are taught what the word means even as we read it or hear it by the power of the holy spirit Himself
 - Oh the ordinary person can make out the English in the sentence easily enough
 - They can read it and come away with some kind of understanding perhaps
 - But the depths of it, the purpose of it, the conviction of it, - those will be missing
 - And once understanding is granted, it immediately
- And so we come to the interpretation for those who can hear

[Luke 8:11](#) ¶ "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.

[Luke 8:12](#) "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.

[Luke 8:13](#) “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.

[Luke 8:14](#) “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.

[Luke 8:15](#) “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.

[Luke 8:16](#) ¶ “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.

[Luke 8:17](#) “For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor *anything* secret that will not be known and come to light.

[Luke 8:18](#) “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.”

- Having applied ourselves to properly dissecting the detail, we are in a position to appreciate the full meaning of the text
- Jesus Himself gives us the big picture for this parable
 - First, Jesus says that the seed is the Word of God
 - The thing distributed so liberally and casually and even recklessly is the Word of God
 - So immediately we are faced with a parable about how the Word of God is spread and what impact it has on those who hear it
 - This is a timely message for the disciples and the crowd overall
 - Why is it that people react so differently to the Word of God
 - In Jesus Day, His words were the words of God, so in his day the issue was how the crowds and religious leaders reacted to Him personally
 - In our day, the Bible is the Word of God, so for us the parable explains how people react to Jesus in the form of the scriptures
 - But in either case the truth of the parable applies
 - Then Jesus explains the four conditions

- The hard-packed soil is a picture of a heart so closed and hardened that nothing will penetrate – not even the Word of that heart's creator
- And when the Word arrives, it lies there without a place to root so the devil makes sure it doesn't stick around very long
- This is a hopeless unsaved sinner who will have nothing to do with God nor His word and who simply cannot be impressed with the gospel message
 - I wonder if this isn't the kind of person Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples not to throw pearl before swine
- Then we have the second condition
 - Jesus says the rocky soil is where we find people who give an initial reaction of faith
 - There is a quick bloom and the appearance of a good start, but at the first sign of testing they fall away
 - In the case of the plant, a thin rocky soil has little chance of providing enough nourishment to keep a plant alive at the first drought when the top soil dries up
 - In the case of the person, we're talking about trials – suffering that comes upon a believer because of their faith
- This is essential proof of faith
 - James says

[James 1:2](#) ¶ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [James 1:4](#) And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

[2Cor. 13:5](#) ¶ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

- And remember Jesus' words to the hypocrites who have been following him and accusing him

[Luke 6:46](#) ¶ “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

[Luke 6:47](#) “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like:

[Luke 6:48](#) 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.

[Luke 6:49](#) “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.”

- A test is designed to reveal the truth, and the testing of faith through trial reveals the truth about someone’s faith
- This second condition, therefore, is a classic case of false confession
 - These are the folks who look like Christians but aren’t
 - They initially respond in some superficial way to the message of the gospel
 - They make a confession, they start going to church
 - They begin attending a home group or Bible study
 - But then something shakes the foundations of their world
 - Perhaps a divorce, they lose their job, a death in the family
 - The kinds of things that drive a true Christian to the cross seeking the comfort and strength of Jesus will cause these fake Christians to dry up and fall away Jesus says
- Let’s not be naïve
 - Our Lord is teaching that the Word spread indiscriminately as it should be will be heard by unbelievers who never buy it and certainly don’t try to fake it – that’s condition 1
 - They have a hard heart and they’re proud of it
 - But sometimes it will lead to unbelievers who think they understand what it means to be Christian
 - So they put aside the dead works they were doing before they heard about Christ, and begin to do the works of Christianity

- But it's still works – and they go along playing according to the new rules they've been given until one day perhaps it loses its appeal – then they're gone
- And not like Peter who ran out on Christ during His crucifixion
- But someone who turns and never looks back
- These are the people who proudly say "I used to be a Christian once"
- Putting condition 3 aside for the moment, let's address condition 4
 - Clearly this is the mature and fruitful Christian
 - They hear the word, their hearts (the ground) made ready for it by the HS
 - The word germinates, causes new life and then results in a slow maturing process
 - Eventually, the maturity of the new plant allows it to produce spiritual fruit – and fruit many times itself
 - It begins as a single seed, but the mature plant produces many times that
 - Likewise, a Christian that matures in his or her faith has the potential to add to the kingdom of God many times over
- So if Condition 1 & 2 demonstrate the two kinds of unbelievers, and condition 4 is certainly one kind of believer, then what are we to think of condition 3?
 - Well, the first thing to notice is that this is the first of the three conditions where the soil is good enough to produce a quality plant that survives the trials
 - The soil is no longer the principle problem
- The soil is so good, in fact, that it also capable of supporting all manner of unhealthy and harmful growth as well
 - So we're not focused on the difficulty in starting or sustaining the life of the plant here
 - Now the focus is on the kind of life the plant lives

- Rather than maturing to the point of producing fruit as in the fourth condition, this plant never reaches maturity
 - It's choked off by the cares and riches of this world so it produces no fruit
- Let's be sure to note that the cares of this world are not killing the plant, it still lives
 - But with no fruit – it's just a useless plant
 - So here's a Christian albeit a useless one
 - It produces no fruit, it does no measurable good in the kingdom for it never reproduces
 - And why?
 - Because the ability to produce anything is stopped by the cares of this world
 - The riches, the pleasures the distractions – the things that take our attention and energy away from the production of fruit
- Can you guess which condition best describes the Christian church today?
 - Well, for the most part it's not Condition 1 thankfully – for that's no church at all
 - For many churches, it's probably the second condition that best describes them
 - Churches that have many unbelievers in the pews, acting out a Christian lifestyle hoping it will get them what they want
 - But if any trial ever comes along, they will quickly walk away from this new found faith
 - And in every healthy church you can probably find a few that represent the fourth condition
 - These are the people who by their maturity and love in the faith reproduce many in the faith
- But what about condition 3

- Wouldn't you agree that this is the typical Christian experience, especially in a rich country like ours
 - I mean, what exactly would a Condition 3 Christian look like?
 - Do you think you could pick them out in a line up?
 - What does being absorbed in the cares of this world look like?
 - What does pursuing the riches of this world look like?
 - In fact, where do we think the thorns and weeds come from except the enemy himself?
- I think it's entirely fair to say that far too many Christians today are a perfect reflection of condition 3 and don't care one bit
 - The shame of it is that by the time they realize what they were sacrificing in eternity for their willingness to forgo bearing fruit here it will be too late to go back and fix that terrible mistake
 - Christ is telling this parable because the crowd around him is a mixture of all these soils and only a fraction of his followers will ever bear fruit
 - And just as the unbeliever has two conditions – one that looks like an unbeliever and one that doesn't
 - So does the believer have two conditions in this parable – one that looks like a believer and one that doesn't
 - Can the world tell we are believers? Many days I have to wonder, because so few Christians I know are willing to turn their back on the cares and pursuits of this world and actually pursue spiritual maturity and the reproduction of their faith
- And when one day we all meet our Lord face to face, it won't be our bank accounts or our houses or our awards or our photo albums that impress him
 - It will be our spiritual fruit