

## SEED & SOWER

Bought your seeds yet? Today's seeds are grown in the best possible conditions to get the best possible yields. How different it was in Jesus' day, more like early pioneers, who simply saved seed from last year's crop, perhaps to plant or to spread it on the ground and plow it in.

Jesus told a famous parable about this familiar aspect of daily life, in Luke 8:4-10. So far, Luke's narrative has focused on Jesus fulfilling prophecies about the Christ. He weaves together His miracles by divine ability with His teaching by divine authority, to demonstrate who He is.

**THE PARABLE** - Luke says that a great crowd was gathering, as people from town after town came to hear Jesus. They came not just to see a famous preacher, but to hear what He said. Jesus often spoke in a parable, an earthly story pointing to heavenly truth. Jesus used parables some 29 times in Luke, including this one which illustrates all of His teaching:

*"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. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold."*

**BACKGROUND** - Soils outside any Galilean village contain wide variation. Around the sea of Galilee, many soils were black and rich, while other regions had redder soils with more clay. The historian Josephus says, "the land everywhere is so rich in soil and pasturage, and produces such variety, that even the most indolent are tempted to devote themselves to agriculture."

The Roman writer Varro records 10-15-fold yields as common throughout the Roman empire. But in the promised land, for example near Gadara by the sea of Galilee, yields could be 100-fold. It's an echo of God's ancient 100-fold blessing to Isaac in Genesis 26:12-14. Most people in Jesus' day had a close connection with agriculture, and would readily hear His analogies.

**THE PURPOSE** - Parables required people to think carefully about what Jesus was saying, and to respond appropriately, notes theologian RC Sproul. A parable presents observable everyday life to teach a spiritual lesson. It's about hearing and heeding the Word of God. Verse 8 says that as Jesus said these things, He called out, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

This was a command from the Son of Man, which would result in "the seed of the word powerfully springing to life," says RK Hughes. So what did the parable mean? The disciples didn't know either, and they asked Jesus what it meant. In verse 10 Jesus says, "*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.*"

These kingdom truths were beyond human insight and wisdom, relates Sproul, "which God makes known to hearers as He wills." Heretics misuse the idea of secrets, like the Gnostics which Peter's letters speak about, who claimed to have God's special knowledge.

**GOD'S HEARERS** - Unbelievers hear and do not understand or heed, but believers understand, because of God's sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds and wills. "Parables reveal truth to those who have ears to hear, and conceal truth to those who do not, the impenitent and unbelieving," explains Sproul.

As also noted in Mark 4:12 and Matthew 13:13, here in Luke 8 Jesus alludes to Isaiah 6:9-10, "*Go and say to this people, 'keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.*" Not everyone will hear and heed God's word, spoken or written.

**YOUR HEARING** - Isaiah was prophesying about disobedient people who had been given the treasure of God's prophetic word, yet disregarded it. God's Word was so familiar to them, yet they ignored it, and were unable to understand it, to their own judgment. Is this you?

Jesus also quoted Isaiah when He declared, "*the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, to proclaim good news, liberty to captives and recovery of sight, the year of the Lord's favor.*" Next time, in verses 11-15, Jesus explains the parable to His disciples. And for us. If you have ears to hear! ☐