Luke 8:7–18 — The Parable of the Sower

Four Grounds, One Good Heart, and the Light of Testimony

Scripture Reading: Luke 8:7–18

“And other fell in the midst of the thorns, and the thorns having sprung up with it, choked it. And other fell into the good ground, and having sprung up, bore fruit a hundredfold. As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

And his disciples asked him, saying, What may this parable be? And he said, To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

But the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. But those by the wayside are those who hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved.

But those upon the rock, those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no root, who believe for a time, and in time of trial fall away.

But that that fell where the thorns were, these are they who, having heard, go away and are choked under cares, and riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

But that in the good ground, these are those who, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

And no one, having lighted a lamp, covers it with a vessel, and puts it under the couch, but sets it on a lampstand, that they who enter in may

> *see the light. For there is nothing hid which shall not become manifest, nor secret which shall not be known and come to light.*
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> *Take heed therefore how ye hear. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, even what he seemeth to have shall be taken from him."*

Three Bad Grounds: The Devil, the Flesh, and the World

The parable presents four kinds of ground, and only one produces fruit. The other three are instructive in their own way, because each represents a distinct enemy of the word of God. The wayside ground, where the devil comes immediately to snatch away the word, corresponds to the devil's direct opposition. The rocky ground, where the word is received with joy but there is no root, corresponds to the flesh — a purely fleshly activity that has the appearance of reception without the substance. And the thorny ground, where cares and riches and pleasures choke the word, corresponds to the world.

There is a striking order in these three: the devil, the flesh, and the world — and none of them produces fruit for God. What is equally striking is that the three are presented not merely as enemies in theory but as the actual condition of the ground when the word arrives. The thorns were already there. The rock was already shallow. The path was already hard. The seed did not make them that way.

The Rocky Ground: Intellectual Assent Is Not Faith

The rocky ground is especially worth examining. These are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Joy, at first, seems like a promising sign. But what is missing is the plowing up of the conscience. The Lord's own method, as we see at the well in Sychar with the woman of Samaria, was to enter the soul by way of the conscience — not to make an immediate appeal to the emotions. Truth

enters souls through the conscience, and if truth does not come in that way, it sits in the mind without taking root.

This is the difference between intellectual assent and faith. In John 2:23–25, many believed on the Lord when they saw the miracles he did. But the Lord did not commit himself to them, because he knew what was in man. Faith founded on miracles is intellectual assent: it is the conclusion the mind draws from what the eyes have seen. It is not the divine implantation that constitutes saving faith. The apostle writes in Ephesians 2 that faith is the gift of God, not something that arises from within the fallen nature.

Simon the Magician in Acts 8 is a further illustration. He believed, was baptized, continued with Philip, and marveled at the signs. Yet Peter said to him: “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.” The outward activity was extensive. The inward reality was absent.

Good Ground: Honest Heart, Patient Fruit

What makes the good ground good? That is a question of the first importance, and a question that presses hard on the doctrine of free will. There is none good, no, not one. If a person reasons that he differentiated himself from his neighbor by the exercise of his own will — if the ground made itself good — then something in the man is given the credit that belongs to God. But the scripture is clear: the Spirit does that preparatory work in the soul. Good ground is what God makes.

The description of the good ground in verse 15 is unique to Luke’s gospel. Three things appear here that are not found in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark: the phrase “in an honest and good heart,” the word “keep,” and the words “with patience.” Luke presents things in a moral order and makes frequent reference to the soul and spirit of man, and so it is fitting that here alone we find these moral characterizations of the good ground.

The phrase “having heard the word, keep it” also speaks directly to what has been called the lordship and non-lordship salvation controversy. There is a school of thought that holds that one may accept Christ as Saviour at one point and later, perhaps years afterward, accept him as Lord. But the good ground does not hear and then keep it a decade later. These things are morally connected together in the text, and especially so in Luke, which presents everything from a moral viewpoint. Having heard the word — keep it. There is no gap suggested here.

The fruit is brought forth with patience — not in a rush, not necessarily in a great display, but steadily. The Lord himself went from city to city, from village to village, speaking to human ears that had to listen and to minds that had to understand, rather than simply imposing truth by divine power. He was looking for the fruit. The hundredfold in verse 8 is expressive of the fullness and completeness of what the Lord’s own work produces when it is truly his work. If the harvest falls short of that, the shortfall is on our side.

Cares, Riches, and Pleasures: The Thorny Ground

Among the three things that choke the word in the thorny ground — cares, riches, and pleasures — riches occupy a central place practically, because they are often the doorway into all three kinds of trouble. The man in Luke 12 who intended to tear down his barns and build greater ones illustrates this: his cares arose from his wealth. He had no treasure in heaven, and his pleasures were entirely fixed on this life. By contrast, contentment is the door that opens into communion with God and into thankfulness.

Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. That was a moral choice possible only because his heart was fixed on what was lasting. Cares can overwhelm even a sincere soul when that soul is not in communion with God. It is not that responsibilities are wrong; it is that when they become cares in the soul’s experience, the reception

of God’s word is being crowded out.

The Lamp and the Light

Having described the good ground, the Lord moves immediately to testimony. Fruit-bearing and light-shining are the two sides of what good ground produces. A lamp is not lit in order to be covered with a vessel or put under a couch. A vessel carries things — it speaks of busyness and active occupation. A couch is for lying down and resting. Both can be used to extinguish testimony. But the lamp is set on a lampstand so that those who enter in may see the light.

And then the Lord adds the solemn principle: there is nothing hidden that shall not become manifest, nor secret that shall not be known and come to light. This is not primarily a warning about judgment, though it bears on that subject too (see Luke 12:2–3 and 1 Corinthians 4:5). In its immediate context, it is a statement about the nature of light itself. God is light. What is in the dark will not remain there.

For those whose sins have been brought into the light before God and forgiven, this principle is a liberty rather than a threat. Satan’s tactic is to whisper that hidden things will one day come out — but once God has already brought them into the light and forgiven them, that tactic has no force. The well-known gospel preacher who stood before his congregation, was handed a note listing his own sins, and proceeded to preach the gospel on that very basis — confessing himself to be exactly the kind of person who needed a Saviour — illustrates this well.

Take Heed How Ye Hear

Verse 18 closes this section with a word of great weight: “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” Not merely what ye hear, but how — the moral state of soul in which the hearing takes place. To hear the rod is not to feel the rod but to gain the lesson from it; that distinction captures something of what this verse means.

Whosoever hath, to him shall be given. Whosoever hath not, even what he seemeth to have shall be taken from him.

This verse connects naturally with the fig tree and with profession. That which a man seems to have — a profession not matched by reality — shall be taken away. The mysteries of the kingdom of God are given to those who are his; to the rest, things remain in parables, that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. The introduction of this parabolic form of ministry was itself a sign of a new order of things coming in — Israel being governmentally set aside, and the word going out in a new way, to find whatever good ground God had prepared.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. He came to find the good ground, and he found it.