

## Part 27: Good News for Dirty Hearts

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Today we have a unique privilege together in that Jesus gets to preach our text for us this morning. Every Sunday when someone gets up in this pulpit to preach they do so having spent lots of hours that week studying the text and attempting to interpret exactly what the original author wanted us to discover in it.

Today Jesus gives us a text, and then expositors and explainers explain that text for us. He's going to give us a parable and then he's going to preach to us that very parable. But it's actually the simplicity of this pattern that exposes our need for it today. It's not that Jesus' words are hard to understand, for he shares them very clearly. But as the parable of the sower goes to show, the challenge is not for our ears, but for our hearts.

Our big point this morning will be this: **Jesus helps us hear the word of God, hold the word of God and bear fruit from the word of God.**

We are going to see this in two ways this morning as we continue in the gospel of Luke. First we are going to see in Luke 8:4-10 **Parables and Privileges** (the joy of walking with Jesus) and then in verses 11-15 we are going to see **Dirt and Diagnostics** (how Jesus teaches us to assess our own hearts).

To begin, let's read **Luke 8:4-10**.

Last week we saw the unique men and extraordinary women who were serving Jesus, but this week we see additionally that great and growing crowds were following Jesus. While we've seen this before in Luke, the author wants to show us this is no longer of local interest. It's not only the residents from the town Jesus is currently in who are coming to see him, but people from town to town are coming to see him.

In the midst of all these growing crowds Jesus gives them a parable. Now a parable is a literary type. The boy who cried wolf is a parable. It's not true, but it has true meaning. It's a fictional story which reveals a non-fiction reality. Jesus has already used a handful of parables so far in Luke and he will use increasingly more from this moment on.

But at this moment Luke draws us less to Jesus' parable and more to our relationship to the parable. This is our first point today: **Parables and Privileges**.

Jesus concluded the story with a simple warning, "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear."

I am an absolutely terrible lip reader. It's almost a joke in my house when my wife is trying to communicate to me in that way. It doesn't matter how slow she moves her mouth, or how dramatic her movements are, I have no idea what she is saying.

We can discern the disciples felt the same way about Jesus' parable and warning here. It's not that they didn't understand Jesus' story, it's a rather simple story. But despite the clarity and simplicity of Jesus words, the disciples can't tell what Jesus is actually saying.

You may feel you know this parable, but the disciples had to ask Jesus about it. And in response to their questions, Jesus quotes an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Isaiah. Look again at what he says in **Luke 8:9-10**.

Now the full quote from Isaiah, which some of the other gospel writers quote at length, comes from Isaiah 6 and it recounts Isaiah's zeal to be the Lord's messenger. This is what we read in **Isaiah 6:8-9**.

So what we see in this text, is that right after Isaiah has this profound encounter in the throne room of God, the Lord asks for a messenger and Isaiah is so awestruck by God's glory that he realizes there is nothing more natural to him than to tell others about this God. Those who experience God in full cannot help but be motivated by the joy of sharing this God with others.

But then God says, "All right Isaiah, but here's the deal. You're going to speak to Israel very clearly about me, but those same Israelites are going to hear your words, they are going to see your ministry, they are going to comprehend the words, the syllables, and the message of your ministry but they are not going to understand it. In hearing they will not hear, in seeing they will not see."

The problem we all face is not that God doesn't speak. God speaks very clearly, Paul says in Romans 1, and David in Psalm 19, that the world in which we live in declares aspects and attributes of God all around us. The problem of sin is that we don't listen. We can hear Jesus' words, we can read the Bible, but apart from God's divine assistance we find ourselves frustrated trying to read lips.

But this is why what Jesus does here is simply astounding and we need to make sure we see it. What did Jesus say to his disciples in verse 10? To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but to everyone else it is in parables so that they don't understand it.

This is great. Jesus' disciples, that is here the broad category of those who genuinely follow Jesus, they know the secret to the parables. They hear the same message as others but they understand, they have ears to hear.

But what's the problem here? The disciples at this moment in time don't seem to know the secrets at all. They are not secret knowers but the un-knowers. But all of this changes when Jesus says, what I believe, are the five most important words in this text: "Now the parable is this."

Why is this so astounding? Because here is the new Isaiah. Here is the one who didn't get to visit the throne room of God and see God's glory, but here is the one who lived in the throne room of God and is God's glory. Here is the greater Isaiah sent to fulfill God's mission with joyful acceptance. But despite all those who cannot understand, here is the one who stops with those he loves and explains it to them.

This is the privilege of walking with Jesus. We cannot know the secrets of God apart from knowing Jesus. Jesus doesn't give us a holy packet of knowledge he gives us wholly himself. We are about to look at a parable about the word of God and it's reception but let us not skip past the one here who goes to great lengths to make sure the word is not only received but understood.

The kingdom of God is a mystery. How the least is the greatest, how weakness is power, how death is life, how repentance is purity, how holiness meets love, all of this is a mystery. The word our translators give as "secret" (vs. 10) is in Greek, "*mysteria*." But with Jesus the mystery is given to us.

When Paul defines his ministry in Colossians 1 he says he has come to declare the mystery revealed to all the saints of "Christ in you," and the hope that all might be "mature in Christ." The mystery of God is revealed in Christ.

You see when we think about what it takes to make sense of this world we often think in terms of knowledge and information. But the Bible presents the chief source of knowledge as a knowledge of God. We saw this when we went through the book of Proverbs. When God speaks of wisdom he doesn't describe wisdom as a packet of understanding, or even as piece of food which satisfies us. Biblical wisdom is portrayed as a beautiful woman, an intimate lover, and a deep friend.

To know the secrets of the kingdom of God is not to know a thing it is to know a person. The person is the one who comes to those who can't see and says: Let me tell it to you. Which is why right after Jesus says, "Let those who hear, hear" he gives a parable not about the ear, which is what we would expect, but about the heart.

The privilege of walking with Jesus is knowing the one who helps us hear with our ears what must be known by our hearts.

This is where Jesus now turns and preaches his own parable to us and this is our second point this morning: **Dirt and Diagnostics**. To help his disciples hear, Jesus is going to teach his disciples to diagnose their own hearts and their own expectations.

So here is Jesus' mystery revealing explanation of his parable: **Luke 8:11-15**.

While we might have heard this parable titled "the parable of the sower," but as we read it we discover it's actually a parable of the soil. The sower and the seed matter, but this is about the nature of the soil—the heart of the recipient of the seed—more than anything else.

To the modern, Farmer's Market going, reader it might look to us that this sower is a pretty terrible sower. He seems to be throwing seed in places common sense would call us not to. But this was the common practice of the day. People would sow first, and plow after the seeds were down. So a sower would go to an open plot of land, throw his seed out everywhere, and then they would plow it. The plowing would then reveal places where there were game or human paths that didn't break up as nicely, or shallow soil with much rock underneath it.

This is an important context for this message because Jesus is addressing crowds who at this time are untilled. Of the many who followed Jesus, there were many, many hearts. The quality of those hearts, the utility of the ears which heard, would be revealed over time as the message of the gospel interacted with the realities of their hearts.

In one sense this parable explains why in a room even of this size many may hear the same gospel message and there may be many varied responses. It is not because the power of the gospel is any more or any less, it is because each of us sit with a unique ecosystem of our hearts and Jesus wants you to soberly assess which heart you might have presently.

Though the word of God has been spread broadly wherever the gospel is preached, there are threats to that word. The Bible often describes three primary threats: the world, the flesh and the devil. That is our external circumstances, our internal sins and desires, and the devil who wages war against us.

Jesus' teaching here highlights all three of these beginning with the first soil.

As we look at these soils we are first confronted by the ***Soil of Unbelief***.

Jesus speaks of this soil as hard and afflicted. It is hardened by its own sin, but more than that the Devil steals away the message of the gospel.

If you've hiked in Montana at all you've learned that if you see a baby cub, you can expect that somewhere near to you is a momma bear. Christians ought not to forget that where the gospel is proclaimed, somewhere near there is the devil wishing to rob what the Lord has sown.

The devil knows he need not do anything to you except remove the gospel from you. He wants to snatch away any attention you might give to the seed because the seed, the message that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God, is the power of God.

Now my guess is that most of us in here do not diagnose ourselves in this category. In fact if you claim to believe the gospel at all, the Holy Spirit would want you to be assured that this outright rejection of the gospel does not define you.

Look at what Peter says in **1 Peter 1:22-25**. To be a Christian is to not be a hardened unbeliever. We ought to be careful of places where unbelief creeps back into our lives (and we will talk more about that in regards to our next soil) but for the point of application here I want us to know two things.

First, be aware that the devil is not a figment of our imagination. He is real, and he is really against you. Peter later calls believers to be "sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Secondly, notice competing desires of the Lord and of the Devil. Jesus would have you to hear and to believe and to be saved, but the will of Satan is to keep you from hearing, believing and being saved. How clear the path of salvation is: believe! But how desperate the work of the devil to keep the power of the seed from cracking the surface of your heart.

If you are here today and are consciously this soil, I want you to know two things. First, I'm so glad you're hear and I'd love to talk more with you about the gospel. Second, your rejection of the gospel is not a sign of your intellectual achievement or independent strength. It is a sign of your affliction and slavery. You are robbed of that which can truly save.

But there is hope even for you. Consider the hope Paul gives you in **2 Corinthians 4:4-6**. He says earlier in **2 Corinthians 3:16**.

If this is you, if the devil has snatched what the Lord has sown, turn to Jesus. We might place scarecrows in fields to protect the crop, but God has hung salvation on a cross to save the lost, turn to him.

Secondly we see not the soil of unbelief, but the ***Soil of Un-believing***. I made up a word here because if we look at our text it's not that this heart fails to believe, but it is that at some point it chooses to unbelieve and throw away what it once confessed to be true. Read with me **Luke 8:13**.

I have a little planter box in my front yard and before I had a chance to reseed it, some of the seeds from last year's flowers began to grow, and they grew fast. Coming out of our rainy spring, the first week of sun caused the flowers to bloom and grow at a fantastic speed. But after a few weeks, the same sun which caused them to grow began to wilt them. The same sun which for a moment nourished them, scorched them.

Why? Because they grew no roots.

How many of us receive the good news of salvation by grace alone with exceeding joy! The sun of mercy causes us to spring out of the ground. But what happens when we fail to allow the sun which grows us to also be the sun which drives our roots deeper? It destroys us.

How many times have I seen someone come to faith in a ball of zeal, but then a little while down the road they failed to believe that the gospel which saves them is the same gospel which sustains them? They wanted the relief of salvation for life, but didn't believe that new life was for their good. They wanted freedom from guilt, but they didn't want growth in holiness. They wanted eternal life, but they didn't want life lived for the glory of God.

A life of growing in the gospel is a life of living under what is at times a hot sun. But do not disbelieve the power of this seed to grow roots deep enough to sustain you. My prayer is that there are many people in this room who are right now believing with joy! But my hope is that when happiness is partnered with heat that you do not fall away, that you continue to hope that the seed won't fail and that the root will drive itself deep into the streams of life.

Consider the words of the author of Hebrews to any who might feel the weight of trial in this world: **Hebrews 3:12-14**. Our world calls us to un-believe, but the gospel draws us deeper.

The third soil is what I call the soil ***Soil of Broad Belief***. Read with me **Luke 8:14**.

So here we see hearts which readily accept the gospel, but hearts which readily also accept everything else which may grow alongside of it.

In trying to care for the acceptance of God, we also care for the acceptance and anxieties of the world. In totally believing in the riches of the kingdom, we also would like to enjoy the riches of the world. And in believing that God has pleasures, we believe also in the pleasures of this life. But such a faith which refuses to prioritize above all things the Kingdom of God is choked out in the end.

If we are honest, how many of us confess satisfaction in the gospel while actively seeking care, riches and pleasure by the world's standards over and above the standards of the gospel. The Lord made the world and everything in it. Comfort, riches and pleasures belong to the Lord, but when we do not realize the Lord is greater than his gifts we are choked out and do not mature.

I realize this with my children. Often times they get overly worked up about a lost or broken toy and I begin to tell them that no toy should have this much control over their heart. It's alright to be sad and to

cry, but it shouldn't have mastery over us. If it does, it is to our benefit to get rid of it. But as I say that it's easy for me to look at the weeds in my own life and preach that truth to myself.

Christians ought to enjoy the world, but we ought to enjoy God more. Every farm has weeds, but when you look out at your field what do you see? Towering above the weeds of this life, is there the joy of gospel fruit and satisfaction?

Then, lastly we get a glimpse into the final soil: ***Soil of Honest Belief***.

Read with me **Luke 8:15**.

So here is the good soil, soil which bears fruit, soil which reaches maturity, soil which endures to the end. This is the soil who believes and is saved.

This is the soil who unlike the previous one is of an honest heart. This was a common Greek phrase during the day which communicated a sort of single mindedness. To be honest was to be convinced of something.

But this is the beauty of Jesus' parable. What was convinced was not the mind, but the heart.

The gospel is intellectually consistent. The gospel makes the most sense of the suffering and the longing for joy we have in our world. The gospel makes the most sense of pictures of cosmic vastness we see in our telescopes. The gospel can be reasonably defend, reasonably explained, and is not afraid of skeptics but instead calls out to be examined by them.

But at the end of the day it is not our mind which needs convincing, but our heart which needs tilling. In one sense there is a terrible reality in this text and that is that we are dirt. But tilling comes. Our Bible memory verse this week speaks of this **Ezekiel 36:26**. God gives us new hearts, he takes dead soil and breaks it, he finds rocks and removes it, he discovers weeds and unearths them.

Jesus calls us to know our hearts because he wants you to know that he gives new ones. So how do you know where you are in this parable? Well, Jesus has given you the seed. He has just preached to you the secret of the kingdom, believe and be saved.

So what do we do? Jesus tells us doesn't he? Though we are but soil, Jesus gives the soil hands at the end. We can't quite tell dirt to do anything, but Jesus here calls our dirty hearts to hold fast to his word and to bear fruit with patience.

I remember being on vacation when my son was just over two years old. We were on a boat that took us to a small picturesque island that was too surrounded by reefs to land the boat at. So she told us we could get out and swim to it, but she also told us she had no life jackets. But somehow none of us were really deterred by that and I jumped in holding a two-year old Owen with no life-vest for him or for me.

I quickly realized that the waves which seemed small from the boat, were large and powerful in the water. The land which seemed close on the horizon was farther than I thought and I only had one thought: "Don't let go." No matter how hard the waves crashed, I would hold onto my son. Even if I was thrown under for a moment there was nothing in the world that could pry my arms from him.

To hold fast to the gospel is to honestly hold fast. But unlike my story it isn't holding fast to a toddler, but it's holding fast to the only thing which will guarantee your safe arrival home. The devil is sure, the arms of Christ are more sure. The heat is real, the comfort of the cross is more intense. The weeds are quick, God's grace is quicker. Hold fast and don't let go.

Hold fast, and bear fruit with patience.

Notice the kindness of Jesus here. Yes, true belief, saving belief produces fruit. It cannot not, for the seed is not an impotent seed. But it bears fruit with patience. We need this. Many of us are frustrated when our sin doesn't fall away the moment we are saved, we become disheartened when long standing sin issues don't immediately resolve themselves, when conflict arises in our own hearts and our own communities, but bear fruit patiently.

Trust that God's word will bear fruit for all who hold it fast. The secret of the kingdom of God is an eternal perspective on our present joys and current frustrations. So let us hear with our ears, believe with our hearts and bear fruit with patience.