

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## Luke's Gospel: The Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:1-15)

We look today at The Parable of The Sower in Luke 8:1-15.

I begin by quoting that gem of a statement in Psalm 126:5-6: *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."* Now, while that lovely statement is simmering in our minds, let us consider three main points:

1. General remarks about parables in general;
2. Specific parables depicting particular personal characteristics of the Lord Jesus; and
3. Parables and other scriptures showing in detail the Lord Jesus as The Sower.

### 1. Parables in general, and their significance in the Gospels

Parables were given, in general, by the Lord Jesus, to teach major principles. It was not His intention that we should put every detail of His parables under the microscope. Acceptance of that will preserve us from making the mistake of thinking that we are intended to look for an application for every detail of every parable left on record. It is certainly true that the detail is more significant in some parables than others. In the main, however, we are to look for broad principles to follow.

An equally vital point is this. When we first start studying Bible parables we probably gain an impression that they were given to illustrate certain truths in such a way as to make them easier to understand. However, as we study them more deeply, we come to the right conclusion, that this is the opposite to the truth. Parables were not given to make things easier to understand. They were given in such a way as to make the truth more obscure to the uninitiated, but as plain as the proverbial pikestaff to those who were let into the secret; those whose eyes were anointed to see.

The best illustration of this is perhaps the pillar which guided the Israelites in their movements through the wilderness. We read in Exodus 14:19-20: *"The angel of the Lord, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them, and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them [i.e. the Egyptians] but it gave light by night to these [i.e. the Israelites]: so that the one came not near the other all the night."*

In the same way, parables are darkness to the unenlightened, but as clear as daylight to those who are given the power of discernment. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: *"Unto **you** it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to **others** in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand"* (Luke 8:10).

Parables were often given by the Lord Jesus to mixed audiences, including both His own disciples and also a multitude of other people who were not His disciples. The multitude, including the rulers of the Jews, did not usually understand what He said. Neither did the disciples themselves, at first, until the Lord Jesus interpreted them afterwards, privately. (See Mark 4:10, *"When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable."*)

**All** Christians now have the power to understand **all** parables. We have the many explanations of the Lord Jesus. We have the power of the Holy Spirit, of Whom the Lord Jesus said, *"He will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:13). If we grasp these overriding principles, we shall be in a far better position to understand the many parables recorded in the Gospels and elsewhere.

### 2. Specific parables depicting characteristics of the Lord Jesus, and also things about us that made it necessary for Him to come into the world to save us

There will be few listeners who have not heard of The Parable of The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. The poor victim of what we would nowadays call a mugging, gives a picture of us in our great spiritual need. He was absolutely

helpless; stripped of his clothing, badly injured, and left half dead. This state is gone into in even more detail in the Parable of The Great Feast, in Luke 14:15-23. This tells us that those who eventually accepted the invitation to attend the feast came from amongst those who are said to be poor, maimed, lame and blind. In being poor, they couldn't pay for admission to the feast. In being maimed, they couldn't work to qualify for admittance. In being lame, they had to be carried there. In being blind, they needed guidance, every step of the way. Taken together, this is a comprehensive picture of a sinner before he comes to Christ. It is a graphic, moral picture of you and me, if we have not yet trusted Christ as our Saviour. If we are already the Lord's, let us not forget the moral pit from which we have been digged.

Luke 15 paints the same picture, in a slightly different way. The wayward sheep was unable to find its own way back to the flock (Luke 15:1-7). It didn't know the way back. The inanimate piece of silver was dead (Luke 15:8-10), inert. It had no idea that it was lost. The younger son, until he came to himself, didn't even want to be back home (Luke 15:11-32). For emphasis, let me put it alliteratively:

- The wayward sheep was **incapable**;
- The lost coin was **insensible**; and
- The younger son was **insubordinate**.

What a truly comprehensive, overall picture it gives us of what we were in our sins before The Seeker of souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, came down right to where we were to save us.

The opening verses of Ephesians 2 teach us the same truths, from a doctrinal point of view. Before Jesus sought us and found us, *"we walked according to the course of this world. We were dead in trespasses and in sins. We were children of disobedience"* (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Happily, the parables also emphasise the positive side of the story. The victim's benefactor in Luke 10 came right to where the victim was lying. Right to where he was, in his great need! This is another picture of the Lord Jesus, The Great Seeker. He left heaven's highest height. He came down right to where we were, in this dark, sinful world, to do for us what we could never have done for ourselves. He sought us out, in our deepest spiritual need, in order to bring us into untold spiritual blessing.

*"Came from Godhead's highest glory  
Down to Calvary's depth of woe."*

Robert Robinson (1735-1790)

Then, the parables of the pearl and the treasure in Matthew 13 tell us about the resources and generosity of rich business men, one seeking a unique pearl, and another a great but hidden treasure. The pearl (Matthew 13:45-46) emphasises the **beauty** of the object in the eyes of The Seeker. The treasure (Matthew 13:44) emphasises the **value** of the object to The Seeker.

The three-fold Parable of Luke 15 highlights the fact that the whole of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are deeply interested and involved in seeking the lost. In the order in which the parts of the parable come to us,

- The shepherd gives us a picture of The Unwearying Labour of The Son of God as The Seeker in seeking the lost (Luke 15:1-7);
- The diligent searching for the lost coin tells us of The Unceasing Care Of The Holy Spirit in seeking us out and bringing the power of the Word of God to bear upon our souls (Luke 15:7-10); and
- The longing of the father for the wayward son reminds us of The Undying Love of God the Father, Who sent His only-begotten Son, The Great Seeker, into the world, that we might be saved through Him (Luke 15:11-32).

### 3. Details directing us to the Lord Jesus

#### a. The Parable of the Sower

This parable appears in each of the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15. The emphasis in each of the three accounts is consistent with the theme of the Gospel in which it appears.

The Gospel of Matthew depicts the Lord Jesus as The Coming King, in all His regal dignity and majesty. This was entirely appropriate. Matthew geared his message towards the people of Israel, who had an extended history of longing for a Warrior King to deliver them from a succession of cruel Gentile taskmasters. In speaking of the

responsible achievements of the people of Israel, Matthew depicts a gradual diminution of return on the labour spent. This is a clear reference to the fact, that any scheme dependent on men, even the best of men, meeting their responsibilities will be a system which produces diminishing returns, listed in Matthew as reducing from 100 fold to 60 to 30.

Mark, depicting the Lord Jesus as The Perfect Servant, said things that were relevant to any servant, but emphasised that in the hands of The Perfect Servant, the result would be an ever-increasing yield from 30 fold to 60 to 100.

Luke, setting forth the Lord Jesus as The Perfect Man, does not anticipate any other result than a full yield of 100 fold, as we read in the first mention of the concept in Genesis 26:12. Not, mark you, 100%, i.e. 1 for 1! Oh! No! Each seed produced 100 plants.

As to the character of The Sower, and consistent with these presentations, Matthew emphasises the sovereignty and generosity of The Sower. Mark highlights the actual work done by The Sower. Luke concentrates on the full moral result of the perfect work done by The Perfect Man'.

As usual, the Lord Jesus based His parable on well known, everyday events and activities. The Sower begins the growing operation. He sows the seed. The Lord Jesus is The Beginning, The Originator, the Life-giver, or, as in our parable, **The Sower**. We are specifically told in the text of the parable that the seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). There is no other vehicle for the giving of spiritual life than the Word of God, made good in the soul in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In case we think that it was an easy task, we are told of the various difficulties in the way. The ground was not at all appropriate or conducive to a good harvest. There were four conditions to be encountered. Three of them were adverse.

- There was a path around or through the field, hardened by years of being trodden down;
- There was rocky ground, full of stones, with hardly any depth of soil to retain moisture, or provide space for roots to form and develop; and
- There was ground where any plants that did begin to grow were completely choked by very strong, persistent thorns.

All these things militated against seed succeeding in producing a good harvest of healthy corn.

The hard pathway is a picture of someone not understanding the Word and Satan snatching away what is sown, just like the birds snatched away the seed.

The stony ground with its shallow soil is a picture of someone who initially receives the Word with joy and it looks at first as though the Word has taken root, but as soon as trouble or opposition arises, that person falls away.

In the thorny ground, the seed, the Word, is choked out by the cares of normal life and the pleasure and glamour of riches.

Lastly, the only condition conducive to the production of a healthy harvest is that called "*good ground*" (Luke 8:8). This is like the person who genuinely receives and understands the Word and goes on to bear fruit for God. Interestingly enough, I once asked a Christian farmer if he was in any way surprised that apparently only one seed out of four came to full fruition. He smiled. "It is no surprise to me at all. When we farmers measure out the seed to be sown, we work on the principle: one out of four for the wind to blow away; one out of four for the birds to eat; one out of four will not even germinate; and only one out of four will bear fruit." Just as the Lord indicated, only one out of four will persist and produce a harvest. This is not intended to be an arithmetical guide. It highlights, in broad terms, how essential it is that the Word of God must be preached, and believed, if there is to be any spiritual blessing.

In addition, wherever God is at work for the spiritual blessing of men, Satan is also active, seeking where possible to prevent or spoil the work of God. The Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13:24-30 is a salutary reminder of this.

Overall, as Lord of the Harvest, The Sower was patient, versatile and effective. In the ultimate, The Sower is the Lord Jesus, but the principle is the same whenever any of His servants present the seed of the Word of God to any who are willing to hear it. The Word of God produces faith in the souls of those who are exercised thereby. Romans 10:17 gives us the reason and the principle of working. "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

**b The incident involving Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10 is a living parable, illustrating the Lord Jesus to be a Seeker after the lost.**

Luke 19:3 tells us that Zaccheus was a seeking soul. *"He sought to see Jesus Who He was."* But we learn in Luke 19:10 that long before Zaccheus was a seeking soul, Jesus was a Seeking Saviour. *"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10). What a wonderful Saviour He is!

### **c Psalm 126:5-6**

But let the Psalmist have the last word. Let us return to the verses we started with, that gem of a statement in Psalm 126:5-6: *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."*

This cannot be any other than a picture of the Lord Jesus. He, The Great Seeker, came down from heaven's highest glory, seeking for you and for me. He directs the sowing of the seed of the Word of God in the hearts of men. He suffered pain, loss and ultimately went all the way to Calvary, and suffered the death of the Cross, that you and I might have our sins forgiven, and be ready for heaven while still living on earth.

Long before we have any desire to come to Him, He longs for us to do so. And what a wonderful prospect is in view. I wonder! Can we identify with the words of Gerhard Tersteegen?

*"He and I, in that bright glory,  
One deep joy shall share -  
Mine, to be forever with Him;  
His, that I am there."*

As we read in the Song of Solomon 7:10: *"I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me."*

And, then, after the private joy, the public honour, in association with Christ in His day of glory. As we read in Jude 14 *"Behold, the Lord cometh, with ten thousands of His saints."*

### **Final comment**

Delightful though these considerations are, these scriptures clearly have wider implications than only the preaching of the basic Gospel message, vital though that is. In essence, they do emphasise the need for all of us who hear the word of God to be obedient to it. We must not only be hearers of His word, but doers also (see James 1:22). God grant that it might be so!

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