

Desert Spots or Flower Pots**Luke 8:1-15****(Daniel 4:1-2)**

Take your Bible and open to Luke 8. This begins what scholars call the second Galilean tour of Jesus. He had centered much of His early ministry in and around Capernaum also going around to various towns and villages and in this second tour He once again branches out. We note in the first verse His ministry, His mission, and His message.

He had but one audience wherever He went and that was to the lost sheep of Israel. He came for the purpose to seek and save the lost. So we find Him going from town to town and village to village. In His travels He had but one aim. That aim was to proclaim the Kingdom of God. It was not to heal the sick or give sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf or life to those who had died and so on. Those were merely a means to an end. They were the evidence of His deity and His authority, the confirmation that what He taught was true and what He taught was the Kingdom of God, which is the rule of God in a twofold way. The first is a very broad sense in which it is His sovereign rule over everything, even earthly kingdoms. And while there are kings and kingdoms which at the present seem to be far from His sovereign rule remember that it is He who sets up one kingdom and takes down another, He sets up one king or ruler and takes down another. He is in control of it all.

Two passages remind us of His sovereign rule over all kingdoms.

The first occurs from the proclamation of one of the most ruthless kings in history. Here's the testimony of Nebuchadnezzar following his seven year hiatus from the throne during which time he was insane.

“It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation.”

The second passage is about the same king but written by the prophet Jeremiah. It was in Nebuchadnezzar's first year as king and a prophecy about Israel's captivity that would last for seventy years that the prophet writes what God says: **“I will summon all the peoples of the north and My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.” (Jeremiah 25:9a)** (emphasis added)

Wherever we look in history and whoever we look at in history, every kingdom, every king is a servant of God to do His will, to accomplish some purpose and plan of God. Even in our 238 years as a nation every president good and bad are His servants. Most kings deny and would say they even reject the rule of God over them, but none the less every kingdom is under His sovereign rule.

But more specifically the kingdom of God has another more important and eternal meaning. The kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed was the rule of God in the heart of those who would submit to Him and live by faith in the very Messiah who was proclaiming that kingdom. Only through the new birth, what we call salvation can someone enter this kingdom. This is the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

John 3:5 “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

It was the message of God's kingdom that Jesus preached, a message of good news. That term is our English word evangelize meaning that Jesus went to towns and villages evangelizing. Now notice importantly that the good news is not something that is to be discussed as if it was one philosophy among many that can be chosen as the path to follow. It is not something to be discussed, but rather it is something to proclaim. Why? Because it is good news.

His ministry was to lost people in towns and villages.

His mission was to evangelize those people.

His message was the kingdom of God.

Wherever He took the message of this good news the 12 traveled with Him. They had completely left everything behind and now focused on following their Master. Luke notes that many others followed Jesus around and specifically names three who financial supported Jesus and the 12.

Mary Magdalene is named first. Her home town was Magdala. It was located on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee and well-known for its work in various dyes, its woolen goods and trade in pigeons and doves used in sacrificial offerings. It was also known for its moral corruption.

Luke notes that Jesus had on one occasion cured her of demon possession. This could mean she had seven demons in a literal sense possessing her at once or it could mean something else. Seven is a number that refers to something that is complete. In that sense it could mean that Mary Magdalene was completely controlled by a demon or a number of demons that possessed her. It should not be assumed that because Magdala was noted for its immorality that Mary Magdalene was immoral. She was however, completely controlled by demons from which Jesus cured her.

Also part of the group is a woman named Joanna, who is the wife of Cuza. Luke tells us that he is the manager or steward for King Herod's household. Now, why would Luke include that little bit of information? I think it's to show us the reach of the gospel, that even in the household of Herod, the son of Herod Agrippa who sought to murder Jesus at His birth, there is no place that the gospel can't find a heart to hear and receive the gospel.

You may think where you work is as spiritually dark as the palace of Herod. You may be the only

person in your family touched by the grace of God. You may be surrounded with unbelievers in your neighborhood, but by the grace of God He reached into your workplace or your home or your neighborhood and you trusted Christ. And now you are to be a light in the place. That's Joanna and she is using her financial means to aid Jesus in ministry to reach others with the same good news that touched her heart. There is no place that the Word of God cannot reach.

The Iron Curtain of the former Soviet nation could not keep it out.

The Bamboo Curtain of communist China cannot keep it out.

The commands of the Sanhedrin could not silence the Apostles.

The chains of prison could not silence Paul.

There will never be any law enacted or enforced by any nation past, present or future that can keep the gospel from going out and accomplishing its purpose. It will never return void and somehow the message reached the steward's home and Joanna responded by faith. Maybe it was through the imprisonment of John the Baptist. We don't know, but the gospel of grace was proclaimed and she responded.

Let us strive to take advantage of those daily divine appointments and impart the truth of the gospel. Don't debate it, proclaim it.

Luke then names one other woman by the name of Susanna of whom we know nothing about.

I think this is a good reminder to us as a church that we do what we can to financially support those who go out to proclaim the good news. But supporting others who go out as missionaries to preach to and reach people with the gospel does not dismiss us from our obligation to God's Great Commission. We still have that mandate to do what Jesus did and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

With so many people around Him, Jesus took the opportunity to tell three parables. We will discuss each one over three messages.

In verses 4-15 we are taught a parable about hearing and receiving the Word.

In verses 16-18 we are taught a parable about hearing and sharing the Word.

In verses 19-21 we are taught a parable about hearing and obeying the Word.

Let's define what a parable is.

Webster's dictionary defines it as a short, simple story, usually something familiar, from which a moral or religious lesson may be drawn.

Paraballo is a Greek word that means to lay alongside of or to compare. In the Biblical sense it is to take something familiar and teach some Biblical truth. You may have heard it defined as an earthy story with a heavenly meaning. As Jesus taught He used everyday examples from life or nature to teach spiritual truth.

In this parable He uses soil to illustrate spiritual truth. He speaks about four different types of soil, all which would have been familiar to this agrarian culture. Maybe as Jesus was teaching He called attention to a farmer out planting his field. Here are the four types of soil considered.

Let's read the parable and the explanation.

Soil that is indifferent

Soil that is inadequate

Soil that is invasive

Soil that is ideal

Before we talk about these different types of soil we need to notice a couple of important points.

Notice that as the sower spreads the seed, the seed is the same in all four instances. The seed hasn't changed. The seed won't change and the seed will never be the problem because, as Jesus explains, it is the Word of God - it is the gospel that is being

proclaimed. If you know anything about seed, it can do nothing until it is sown. **In science this last year David learned that three things are needed for a seed to germinate: soil, water, and sunlight. So you will never go into Home Depot to buy seed for vegetables or flowers, and find packages on the display rack where such things are found and find packages of seeds that have begun to sprout.**

The seed of God's Word cannot take root unless it is sown.

Notice also that the sower scatters everywhere. He is not selective, because who knows if seed will take root. We may look at a person and come to the conclusion that the seed of the gospel will never take root there so why bother? Paul said that some plant, some water, but God brings the increase.

We also find that there is only one sower, so the sower hasn't changed. Now we make the inference that in the parable the sower is Jesus, but I want to suggest that anyone who proclaims the Word of God, the gospel is a sower.

We also find that there was only one field, and the field is the world and within that field are these four types of soil on which the seed fell.

The final point I want to bring out is found in verse 8. **"When He said this, He called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"** Jesus used this term 15 times. Seven occur prior to the cross and the other eight occur in Revelation 2 and 3 as He sends a message to the seven churches.

The word **"hear"** means more than just listening or even listening with understanding. It means that you go and do what is being taught. There is obedience.

Now, I want to also talk for a minute about vs. 9-10. The disciples are a bit puzzled by what the parable meant. On another occasion they asked Jesus why He taught in parables. Notice the response Jesus

gives. (Read verses 9-10)

He explains that the disciples have been given the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God. These secrets are those things that had been previously hidden but now revealed by God only to those who have the faith to understand. In this case what was hidden was the kingdom of God and how to become a part of it. They had now been taught that the Kingdom of God is only attainable through Him. While this truth was revealed to them Jesus explained that it remained hidden to others so He used parables to hide that truth. Quoting from the Old Testament prophet Jesus cites **Isaiah (6:9)** **“though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.”**

Now you may say, ‘wait a minute Pastor, I thought Jesus came to seek and save the lost and that God isn’t willing that any should perish so why would He want to hide the truth from them?’

That’s a good question and there is a good answer. It’s not that they cannot understand what Jesus is saying, the sad truth is that they choose not to understand. It would be like trying to talk to someone and all they are doing is covering their ears and shouting ‘la-la-la-la’ the whole time. Or perhaps more like putting in their ear buds and turning up the volume on their iPod or iPhone. It is a conscious, willful decision to ignore the truth of the message. They just don’t want to hear it. Those who would understand would get the meaning; those who choose to ignore it won’t get it.

So let’s consider these four types of soil and as we do each of us needs to ask which type are we and if we discover that we are one of the first three types of soil what are we going to do about it.

I. SOIL THAT IS INDIFFERENT – v. 5, 12

The farmer heads out to his field and begins to sow his seed. The method of planting seed in Bible

times was called broadcasting. The farmer would sling over his shoulder a sack. In the sack would be the type of seed he would be planting. If you remember the days of newspaper boys carrying a bag over the shoulder delivering the morning paper you have an idea of what it probably looked like.

After the field was plowed he would head out to the field, reach in for a handful of seed and toss it by hand onto the ground as he walked along the rows. We read that some of the seed he scattered fell along the path. Fields were divided into plots. A path separated each plot and this path was used by the farmer to walk between the plots among the field. Travelers would also use these paths to get around. Because they weren’t plowed with the rest of the field and with additional foot traffic, these paths would be almost as hard as concrete.

Any seed the farmer scattered onto this path did not grow because it was trampled on by travelers and eaten by birds. It did not have the opportunity to take root. Jesus gives an explanation about this type of soil by saying that the Word of God is broadcast out and the heart of some people is like the hardened path. It just lays there on the surface and doesn’t penetrate the ground because the surface is too hard or isn’t given the chance because of the birds. He likens the birds who eat the seed to the devil who comes and devours the Word from being able to germinate and take root in the heart of the hearer.

If you have ever had a bare spot in the lawn where you tossed out grass seed you know how quickly the birds swoop in to eat it up.

The moment the seed of God’s Word is spread to the heart of this person, the devil swoops in and devours the seed so it can’t take root. And notice his reasoning. **“So that they may not believe and be saved.”** His goal is to keep people from trusting Christ, so he wants to remove that seed.

The person may sit in a service, hear the sermon, hear the invitation to trust Christ but the devil swoops in and distracts the person by snatching it away. He thinks about what he is going to do after the service is over or she mentally jots down the grocery list or think about some TV program to record or remembers some great play a favorite team made the day before. Any thought of making a spiritual decision is snatched away.

Now understand this isn't necessarily the heart of someone who is an avowed atheist, who doesn't believe in God. It could also be the person who is religious, who thinks their moral life or their good behavior or their charitable giving is sufficient enough to be part of God's kingdom.

I would suggest that Pharaoh was someone resembling the hard soil. Ten miraculous plagues couldn't turn his hard heart to God and even at the tenth when his firstborn son died could not break up that hard heart.

I also think of the Pharisees. They had the 10 commandments and the Temple. Why would they need Jesus? They refused to hear and believe.

My theology professor told a story of someone in his congregation who faithfully attended each week with his wife. Every Sunday he could be found sitting in the front of the church. Every Sunday as they stood for the invitation the man would grab hold of the pew in front of him resisting the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Every Sunday he refused to acknowledge his need of Christ. One Sunday the man was under so much conviction that he literally clenched his fists and walked in circles refusing to give in to the wooing of the Spirit of God. The next Sunday there was the man seated next to his wife with just a blank stare. His heart was hardened to the message and as far as my professor knew, the man died without Christ.

There are several ways Satan robs the truth.

He robs the truth through false teachers.

He robs the truth through fear of what others will say.

He robs the truth through fear of identifying with Jesus.

He robs the truth through pride.

He robs the truth through love of sin.

You and I know people with hard hearts, people indifferent to the gospel, but hard hearts can be broken up. Just ask Saul of Tarsus.

II. SOIL THAT IS INADEQUATE – v. 6, 13

As the sower spreads his seed, some seed fell on soil that was shallow. It can't be seen, but underneath a few inches of topsoil is rock. *As we stood on one of the hills overlooking the battlefield at Gettysburg I was struck by the rocky terrain and the wheat fields around it. In some areas you just know the soil is thin.*

Jesus likens this soil to those who readily hear the Word and respond with eager enthusiasm make a profession of faith, but then quickly fall away. This is not saving faith folks, this is superficial faith. They are like many who followed Jesus for superficial reasons. They didn't follow Him and believe His message because of sin in their life that He came to die for. Rather they only followed because of what He could do for them – heal their illness or injury, feed them. They only believed Him so long as He did good things for them, but once He began to talk about the cost of following Him, they were gone. Their early faith, if we can call it that, was spurred by emotion. They thought Jesus would be a quick fix to their problems and when they didn't get what they wanted they followed Him no more.

This easy believism that is taught today, come and follow Jesus and all your problems will be gone is the same thing the crowds of Jesus' day wanted. When life gets better they fall away or when life

doesn't get better, they run to the next thing they think will help them out of their jam. They're like a plant in thin soil that sprouts up too quickly, has no spiritual root and withers away when trials come. They show great interest at the start because they think Jesus can fix their problems but when the heat of trials come they flee in a heartbeat. These people heard and may have even understood, but they only accept the facts of the gospel but then fall away. It means to desert, withdraw, or depart. That does not mean they lose their salvation. They were never saved to begin with. The sun, which represents the trials of life, will reveal the real depth of their roots and in this case they are shallow. Disappointments easily wither away the person who may have professed Christ, but never possessed Christ.

This soil is insufficient to support the life of the plant. It's too shallow.

III. SOIL THAT IS INVASIVE – v. 7, 14

Next we come to the thorny soil, soil that has been invaded by weeds. The weeds were so thick that other vegetation gets choked out.

Maybe you have heard of creeping Charlie. That it's called creeping is a misnomer. It spreads quite rapidly and can take over grass and the garden quickly. Come over some time and I'll show you. It's invasive, just like other weeds. God didn't call it a curse for nothing.

Jesus explains that the weeds that choke out plants are likened to three things in life, things that can effectively choke out the gospel.

Life's worries

Riches

Pleasures

There is enough soil for planting, but there is no growth. This person listens to the gospel, hears the gospel, but never allows the gospel to mature because there is something in their life that chokes

out the gospel. Rather than allow the gospel to help them through these times, they allow these times to choke out the gospel. These things deter the gospel from really taking root, because the soil is supporting other things.

Let's face it, there will always be something that we could worry about – job, health, children, economy, education – you name it there is no lack of things to worry about. But there are those who allow worry to choke out the gospel.

A second weed that chokes out the gospel is riches. Material things keep them from hearing the gospel. They either have things that keep them from hearing the gospel or they are consumed with thinking about things they want that keeps them from the gospel.

A rich, young ruler came to Jesus one day asking how he could have eternal life. By all accounts he had everything life could afford. He was even religious having kept the law, yet Jesus said he lacked one thing, he needed to go and sell all he had and give it to the poor. Jesus was not suggesting that was a way to earn eternal life. Instead He was testing the man to see where his true heart was. Pride and greed kept the man from following Christ.

The third weed that chokes out the gospel is pleasure – living for the next thrill, the next fun adventure. People go from one roller coaster ride to the next and it keeps them from letting the gospel take root. Maybe they think that the Christian life is a drag, that it's the cosmic kill joy that saps people of having any fun. People allow pleasure to rob them of the gospel.

Perhaps one of the saddest passages in Scripture is **II Timothy 4:9-10**. Writing to Timothy Paul encourages his protégé **“Do your best to come quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.”** Are you allowing worry, riches or pleasure to keep you from trusting Christ?

James 1:8 says that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gave two admonitions. The first admonition reminded them that they could not serve two masters. The second admonition was not to be concerned or worried about what to eat or what to be clothed with. Instead we are to first seek the kingdom of God.

John reminds us that we are not to love the world or the things that are in the world, because if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us. These things can distract us from hearing and responding to the gospel. **Is that you?**

IV. SOIL THAT IS IDEAL – v. 8, 15

This is the fertile soil, the soil that has been prepared, is ready to receive the seed of God's Word, ready to mature and bring forth a healthy crop. It is soil that is productive, soil that brings a bountiful harvest. There is evidence that the gospel has taken root and is growing. The evidence is in the fruit being produced. **"By their fruit you will know them."** The evidence of the gospel taking root and maturing is seen in your fruit.

Galatians 5:22-23 describes that fruit as being **"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."** This fruit is the growth of Christian character.

In **Romans 1:13** Paul states that winning others to Christ is fruit we bear as a Christian.

He then notes in **15:25-28** that giving to the ministry of the church is a type of fruit.

According to **Colossians 1:10** our good works are fruit we produce.

One final type of fruit we produce from the gospel taking root and maturing in our lives is found in **Hebrews 13:15**. It is the fruit of praise to God from lips that confess His name.

How is this done? Verse 15 gives us the answer. The person hears the word, retains it and then perseveres to develop fruit in their life. I prefer the KJV rendering here when it says that the person whose heart is the good soil **"keeps it."** It's a word that means to hold fast to, to cling to, to hold possession of. By keeping His Word we can develop the fruit He desires to produce in us.

John 14:21 "He that has my commandments and keeps them" shows that He loves God.

Scripture describes the heart as being wicked, idolatrous, perverse, evil, deceitful, proud, greedy, rebellious, dull and so on, but the heart can be prepared to be good soil in which the gospel can take root and mature.

The problem isn't the seed or even the method of sowing. The problem is the soil. **Which type are you?**

The admonition of the prophet Hosea for Israel is for us as well. **"Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you."** (Hosea 4:12)

Jeremiah 4:3 "Break up your unplowed ground."

The sower went out to his field to sow and cast his seed on four types of soil. We have been given the command to go out and sow the seed of God's Word. Here's why we sow the seed everywhere.

1. This Seed of the Gospel is Precious – Psalm 126:6 "He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

2. This Seed of the Gospel is Powerful Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto

salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

3. This Seed of the Gospel is Productive –

Luke 8:15 “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the Word, retain it, and by perseverance produce a crop.”

4. This Seed of the Gospel Brings Peace –

Romans 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do you want to have purpose and be productive and bear fruit or do you want to be fruitless? The answer lies in which type of soil you are.