

Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Luke 8:4-8 (to 1st .), 11-15

The subject of this parable is receptivity. The verb “to hear” (*akouo*) is used seven times. “Take heed how ye hear” will be the great lesson for Jesus’ listeners. “To show them that the only true fruit of good teaching is holiness of life, and that there were many dangers which might prevent its growth, [Jesus] told them his first parable, the Parable of the Sower” (Farrar 172).

This is the most concentrated discussion of listening or hearing in the New Testament. According to Mark’s account (chapter four), the setting is by the Galilean Sea.

4 And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:

A huge crowd gathers and stands on the shore. “The imagery of [the parable] was derived, as usual, from the objects immediately before [Jesus’] eyes – the sown fields of Gennesaret; the springing corn in them; the hard-trodden paths which ran through them, on which no corn could grow; the innumerable birds which fluttered over them ready to feed upon the grain; the weak and withering struggle for life on the stony places; the tangling growth of luxuriant thistles in neglected corners; the deep loam of the general soil, on which already the golden ears stood thick and strong, giving promise of a sixty and hundredfold return as they rippled under the balmy wind” (Farrar 172-173).

The word “parable” in Greek is *parabole*, which means, “a teaching aid cast alongside the truth being taught” (Strong #3850).

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

“Way side” indicates a soil that gives the seed no opportunity to sprout. “In Palestine the common ground was divided into long narrow strips which each man could cultivate as he wished. There was no fence or wall round the strips, but between each of them ran a narrow ribbon of ground perhaps not much more than three feet across. These narrow dividing ribbons were rights of way. Anyone could walk up and down them. The result was that they were beat as hard as a pavement by the feet of countless passers-by. When any seed fell on the it might as well have fallen on the road for all the chance it had of getting into the ground” (Barclay 18).

6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

“Rocky ground” is soil that chokes the seed after it has grown before it can yield fruit. “It had no depth. If the seed fell there it would sprout quickly; but the moisture and the nourishment it needed to withstand the heat of the sun were simply not there and it soon withered and died” (Barclay 19).

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

“Thorny ground” – “At the moment that ground would look good enough. It is easy to make a garden look clean by simply turning over the soil. But if the weeds have been allowed to seed the seeds are still there in the earth and it is proverbial that one year’s seeds make seven years’ weeds. So in that ground the seeds of the weeds were still there; the weeds always grow more strongly than the good seeds; and there was only one possible result – the good seed had the life choked out of it” (Barclay 19).

8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold.

Good ground is the fertile and rich soil. “It was receptive enough to take the seed in; it had depth to allow the seed to let down its roots and draw the nourishment and the moisture it needed; it was clean enough to give the seed an unhindered chance to grow” (Barclay 19).

This parable is one of the few for which Jesus actually gives his listeners “the key” or spiritual interpretation.

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

What the seed does in the ground is the same as what the word of God does in thought. Our mental condition determines the fruitage of the word.

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

The first group of listeners never really receives the word. The devil takes it away. “Devil” in Greek is *diabolos* and it means, “accuser, calumniator (slanderer)” (Strong #1228). “His mind is shut and the truth cannot gain entry. There is mental arrogance – the man who thinks he knows everything already and that he has nothing left to learn” (Barclay 20-21). The word makes no impression.

13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

“Rocky ground” – “This stands for those whose faith is shallow” (Barclay 21). According to The New English Bible (verse 13), “they are believers for a while, but in the time of testing they desert.”

“Jesus explains this as denoting those who hear the gospel; who are caught with it as something new or pleasing; who profess themselves greatly delighted with it, and who are full of zeal for it. Yet they have no root in themselves. Their hearts are not changed. They are not really attached to the gospel; and when they are tried, and persecution comes, they fall—as the rootless grain withers before the scorching rays of the noon-day sun” (Barnes 63-64).

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

“These represent cares, anxieties, and the deceitful lure of riches, or the way in which a desire to be rich deceives us. They take the time and attention. They do not leave opportunity to think and examine the state of the soul. Besides riches allure, and promise what they do not yield. They promise to make us happy, but when gained, they don’t do it. The desire to possess more wealth brings with it every temptation to be dishonest, to cheat, to take advantage of others, to oppress others. Every evil passion is therefore cherished by the love of gain, and it is no wonder that the word is choked” (Barnes 64).

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The good ground represents “those whose hearts are prepared by grace to receive it honestly, and to give it full opportunity to grow. In a rich and mellow soil – in a heart that submits itself to the full influence of truth, unchecked by cares and anxieties . . . the gospel takes deep root, and grows; it has full room, and then and there only shows what it is” (Barnes 64).

“The seed of Christian Science, which when sown was ‘the least of all seeds,’ has sprung up, borne fruit, and the birds of the air, the uplifted desires of the human heart, have lodged in its branches” (*Mis.* 356:16).

“The seeds of Truth fall by the wayside, on artless listeners. They fall on stony ground and shallow soil. The fowls of the air pick them up. Much of what has been sown has withered away,

but what remaineth has fallen into the good and honest hearts and is bearing fruit” (*Mis.* 357:13).

“The Parable of the Sower and the Seed”

by Barbara M. Prince

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