

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 23 November 2003

No. T0293

Speaker: Mr. George Bell

The Sower and the Seed - Luke 8

Much of the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels was by parables. This is particularly so in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Today's talk and the following three talks will be from the Gospel of Luke. When some of us were quite young, maybe in our Sunday School days, we were told that a parable was an 'earthly story with a heavenly meaning'. This was all right so far, but much more needs to be said. The word 'parable' is derived from a word that means 'placing one thing alongside of another'. An illustration was given and alongside, the interpretation. This is very evident in the parable of the sower and the seed.

The parable of the sower is given in each of the first three Gospels. This cannot be said of many other parables. This stresses the obvious importance given to it. It could be said to be basic to an understanding of the others. This is borne witness to in the words of Jesus to the disciples in the Gospel of Mark. Referring to the parable of the sower, He said to them, "*Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?*". The disciples often had difficulty understanding His teaching but He was always patient with them.

There are differences in the Gospels and this is evident in the interpretation of the parable given by the Lord Jesus in each. In the Gospel of Matthew the emphasis is on the sower. Just listen, "*Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower*" (Matthew 13:18). Whether we think of the Lord Jesus as the sower, or those who follow in His steps as preachers of the Gospel, the one who sows is prominent. Mark's Gospel is that in which Jesus is seen as the servant. His service is prominent. This time, when He explains the parable, He begins, "*The sower soweth the word*" (Mark 4:14). The sowing must be done; the results are not obvious at once; labour must precede the harvest! Now it is Luke's Gospel we are interested in today. Once again the emphasis is different. The explanation of the parable is given like this, "*Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God*" (Luke 8:11). No one can over estimate the value of that word and its life-giving potential.

I may be talking to some very accomplished gardeners today who know all the rules to observe, or on the other hand, some like the speaker today, who just muddle along and hope for the best. Whatever the case, we need some seed. So along we go to the garden centre and purchase some seeds. We may be interested in vegetables or we may like colour in the garden and go for flowers. Just think of the seeds, they are so small yet they yield great results. In another parable, Jesus referred to a grain of mustard seed. This is the least of all seeds but when it is grown it becomes a tree and provides a home for the birds of the air. Let's think of the word of God; it grows; it multiplies and, in hearts that are dead in trespasses and sins, it gives life. In those who have been under the power of Satan, the word of God is able to overcome sin and Satan and set captives free. The Bible tells us that "*the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12).

Another characteristic of the word of God is that it produces faith in the hearts of men and women. By nature we have no leaning toward faith. The Bible says, "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). There must be the preaching of the word if there is to be a real result. Let's come now to the parable itself and think of the sower. Firstly, it is the Lord Jesus who is the sower. The parable is prefaced in Luke 8:4 with these words, "*And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable*". What a marvellous setting this was in which to tell this parable! This happened often when Jesus was on earth. On another occasion the people "*pressed upon Him to hear the word of God*" and He used Peter's fishing boat as a pulpit while the crowds listened from the shore. The people must have given their earnest attention to what He said. This is the meaning of the parable when it says, "*A sower went out to sow*".

The parables of Jesus, for the most part, revolved around subjects with which people were familiar. They had all seen the sower at work; there were no modern farming implements in those days. It was very hard work; the sower would have his tray of seed and cast it right and left as he thought was best. There would be a certain skill in the way he went about his sowing; it wouldn't be haphazard! It has been said that as they were listening to what Jesus was saying, if they turned their eyes across to the fields they might even have seen a sower at his work. In other words it became an object lesson.

We have said quite a lot about the seed to be sown. Let's think now about the ground into which the seed falls. Twice over in the parable, as it is told in Luke 8, the ground is said to represent the heart of man. Just listen while I read part of verse 12. Referring to the devil, Jesus says, *"and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."* It is the heart which must be reached and affected by the sowing of the word. There will be no response otherwise. Of course the word may be taken in through the mind or the intellect but it must get down to the heart to be effective. In one of his letters, the Apostle Paul writes, *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:10).

Let's go to the beginning of the parable. We have established that the ground speaks of man's heart. Jesus says of the seed *"some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it"*. Usually there is a path around a field and people walk along. It becomes ever so hard so that the seed just lies on the surface and the birds come and away it goes. The New Testament warns us *"lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"*. Sin is a terrible deceiver. There are many to whom you can speak about the love of God and about the love of Christ at Calvary and it makes no impression. Then there are some who come to our Gospel meetings week after week, year after year and there is no evidence of faith. In my younger days we referred to these as being "Gospel hardened". The devil is a subtle foe and will do anything to prevent the word from taking root. When I was a lot younger, I can remember being asked to preach at a mission. I didn't know what to expect but when I got there they told me what they would do at the end of the service. This is what they did! As soon as the service was over, all who were responsible in the mission knelt down and they had a prayer meeting. I was really impressed; Satan didn't have a chance to snatch the word out of the heart. This was better than the usual hubbub of conversation at the close of the Gospel service. These opposite conditions provide plenty of scope for the devil to do his deadly work, *"lest they should believe and be saved"*.

Let's move on to the next part of the parable. *"And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture"*. Judging by the account of the parable in other Gospels, for instance in Mark's gospel, the ground is said to be stony ground. The stones or rocks are not visible, they are just below the surface. There is a very thin layer of soil and because of this there is no depth of earth. There is also no room for the seed to grow. Another factor was that there was a lack of moisture, the shoot was not able to reach far enough down and because of this it withered away. We are all well aware of the necessity of moisture in summer time when there is a shortage of rain. We have to get our watering cans out and supply what is lacking.

Just listen now to the interpretation of this part of the parable given by Jesus. *"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"*. There is an attractiveness about the message which the Lord's servants have to tell. It offers great blessings and in some cases is received joyfully but without any real conviction. There may be only mental assent to it. Sowing the good seed of the Gospel offers to all the forgiveness of sins, but at the same time the Bible insists upon the sinner's repentance. The Apostle Paul when preaching in Athens said, *"God...now commandeth all men every where to repent"* (Acts 17:30). We are to be sorry for our guilt. The danger of withering away through lack of moisture shows how necessary the work of the Holy Spirit is to produce a permanent result that will stand the test of adverse reaction from others. In the above verse, 'temptation' means 'testing'. And those who believe are sure to be put to the test; it is not popular to be a Christian.

In the next part of the parable the problem is the thorns. In the telling of the parable and also in the explanation given by Jesus this stands out. We have seen it happen in our gardens. The seed has been so carefully sown. We have followed all the rules and we wait for the shoot to appear. How pleased we were when the tender plant was seen. All seemed to be well but we didn't keep an eye on it. After a while there they were, thorns! Listen to what Jesus said, *"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it"*. The meaning to all this is easily seen. Jesus tells us what the thorns represent. *"... cares and riches and pleasures of this life"*. There are many people we sometimes contact that are just full of their burdens and cares. Their problem is really self; they are self-centred. We may pass on a little Gospel message, hoping to help them. But the seed hasn't a chance to germinate and there is no fruit. Even Christians are in danger of the word of God being choked in their heart by cares and there is no excuse! The scripture is clear, *"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). The seed doesn't get a chance and there is no fruitfulness. As believers, we should be good examples! Then there are riches. There is an incident told in the Gospels of a certain rich ruler who came to Jesus with a genuine query, *"Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"* He declared that he had kept the law, wasn't that sufficient? Jesus put him to the test and said to him, *"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and follow me"*. The response was negative, *"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions"*. We may not be asked to give up all our possessions, but the entrance of the seed into the heart means that we must get our priorities right. There is a line of an old Gospel hymn that goes like this, 'I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold'. These things put us all to the test. As Christians we must take care not to trust in the uncertainty of riches. Then there are pleasures of this life. How attractive they may become, but they *"bring no fruit to perfection"*. There has never been a day when pleasure is at such a premium as

now. To the minds of many the Gospel is regarded as kill-joy. These days are well described in 2 Timothy 3:4 *"...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"*.

We are now left with the brighter side of the parable to think about. Let's listen to the parable as Jesus told it in verse 8. *"And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold."* This is a marvellous result! In the other Gospels the results are shown differently. Let's take one example: in Mark's account it says, *"And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit...and brought forth, some thirty and some sixty, and some an hundred"* (Mark 4:8). Why the difference? We saw earlier in our talk that the emphasis in Mark is on the sowing. When it is ourselves who are sowing the seed how often we fail in our service; how dependent upon the Lord we need to be. The result starts with only 30 but, thanks to the Lord's help and our diligence, there may be increase; it rises to 100. However, in Luke's Gospel it is an hundred fold. Why the difference? There is no doubt that this is because the emphasis is upon the word of God in Luke. The integrity of the word and its power is seen in the positive result.

Let's listen to the interpretation given by Jesus of the good ground hearer. *"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"* (verse 15). Maybe it takes us by surprise to hear this - *"an honest and good heart"*. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us very plainly, *"there is none that doeth good, no not one"*. The matter does not lie with us, but with God alone. The ground has been broken up and is suitable to receive the seed of the word of God and new life is the result. Those who receive the word are to keep it. This means there is a new way of life. Then there is fruitfulness which is pleasing to God. This brings into evidence the life of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. God does it all!

Last but not least, there is the need of patience. There may be trials to face; the Christian life is not easy and we are put to the test. This is where patience is necessary. There are some wholesome words written by James who describes himself as a servant of God. In his short letter he writes, *"Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye might be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:3 and 4). It is very interesting that after ending this parable, Jesus goes on to speak about light bearing. Fruitfulness is to be seen in our lives but there is also to be a witness given. Luke 8:16 goes like this, *"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it...but setteth it on a candlestick, that they that enter in may see the light."* This additional verse rounds off very well the telling of this parable. The Lord Jesus had come to His own nation, but their hearts were hardened, they didn't want to know. May we be like the disciples who asked Him, *"what might this parable be?"* May God open our eyes to understand this striking story and act upon it and so become fruitful Christians!

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.