

# The Gospel According to Luke

## **“Sow & Tell”**

Chapter 8:4-21

### Introduction

Polls and polling data are constantly in the news this election year. There are Gallup polls, and Zogby polls; even Barna polls, directed more towards the issues of interest to Christians.

Our text reads like poll results. If the question were posed, *“How do people respond to the message of Jesus?”* then the results would fall statistically into the four categories Jesus listed.

If a candidate for office saw poll results like this, noting that some of the hearers were not responding favorably to the message, he'd be tempted to change his message in order to reach the broader audience.

Jesus didn't do that; *He couldn't do that*, because His 'message' was and is the truth of God's Word!

You and I are called upon to go forth, giving this same message. Neither should we ever change it to reach a broader audience.

The Parable of the Sower, and the accompanying Parable of the Oil Lamp, are an encouragement to **you**, as followers of Jesus, to go on preaching and proclaiming the truth of God's Word. Regardless the response you receive, you are to both *broadcast seed*, and you are to *brightly shine*.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Go & Sow With The Seed Of The Word, and #2 Go & Glow With The Light Of The World.

#1    Go & Sow  
      With The Seed Of The Word  
      (v4-15)

**Multitudes** were now following Jesus wherever He went. *Nothing wrong with that!* Sometimes we complain about large numbers in the Church, that we somehow lose intimacy, or get lost, in a big group.

Still, a large group is not a success in and of itself. Spiritual success is measured by looking below the surface, into each heart. Jesus wanted to put His message, and the response of the multitudes, into perspective for His disciples.

Luke 8:4 And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:

Our English word **parable** comes from two Greek words that mean *to cast alongside*. A **parable** is a story or a figure placed alongside a teaching to help you truly capture its meaning.

A **parable** is much more than an illustration. A true **parable** gets you deeply involved and then compels you to make a personal decision about God's truth and how it relates to your life. A **parable** begins as a *picture* that arrests your attention and arouses your interest. As you contemplate the picture, it becomes a *mirror* in which you suddenly see yourself. If you continue to look at it by faith, the mirror becomes a *window* through which you see God.

Perhaps a farmer could be seen off in the distance. Perfect for a parable!

Luke 8:5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it.

Luke 8:6 Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.

Luke 8:7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.

Luke 8:8 But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Using crude implements, the farmer would clear out a field as best as he could. When he was done, all of the cleared ground would appear suitable for planting. He would walk up and down the field sowing seed, then turn it under a few inches. Then he would wait to cultivate and harvest the fruit from his labors.

Even though the ground had been cleared and the whole field seemed suitable for planting, there were certain difficulties that the farmer could not completely eliminate. **Each of these could be present in a single field:**

1. For one thing, either the wind or his bad aim would allow some seeds to be sown on well-trodden pathways that bounded the field, where the hovering birds would quickly snatch them up.
2. For another thing, the soil itself could prove difficult. There might be a layer of rock beneath the surface - too deep to be detected by the initial plowing. If that was the case, the shallow soil just above the rock would be warmer than the rest of the field. The seeds sown there would quickly germinate, but their roots had nowhere to go and the plants would be easily scorched by the sun.
3. Weeds were another soil problem. Even though the farmer had cleared out the weeds, their hidden roots remained in certain areas of the field. Some of the seeds would be sown among the hidden roots of weeds. Both the weeds and the plants would grow together, the plants eventually being choked out by the weeds in certain areas of the field.
4. Some seeds, ***perhaps the majority even***, would fall in good soil and produce the fruit the farmer anticipated.

The parable took His disciples by surprise:

Luke 8:9 Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

*What it means is a huge topic!* First, it marks a major change in God's dealing with the nation of Israel. You see that in verse ten:

Luke 8:10 And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.'*"

This does not mean God wanted to hide the truth from most people and only call a select few. *It means almost the opposite!* He was about to hide the truth from His elect, from the Jews, and begin to publish it instead among the Gentiles.

Jesus quoted from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. In Isaiah's day, the nation of Israel had closed their eyes and ears to God. They had hardened their hearts against God. As a result, God would temporarily judge them: He would send Isaiah to preach, but the Jews would not understand or respond to Isaiah. It was a sign they were headed for a time of judgment.

Jesus applied this verse to the first century Jews. They would reject Him as God's messenger. What would God do? Just as in Isaiah's day, He would temporarily judge them. Jesus' teaching by use of parables was a sign *to the nation of Israel* of their coming judgment. *And that is exactly what history records!* For almost two thousand years, the nation of Israel has been suffering.

Second, the parable means something to disciples. It is also in that sixth chapter that Isaiah hears the Lord ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah responds by saying, "Here am I! Send me."

Just as the Lord sent Isaiah, so now Jesus was sending His disciples. They, and all disciples after them, are sent out into the world with God's Word. They, and all disciples after them, go as sowers who sow the seed of God's Word.

**You are a sower of God's Word!** The field you sow in is the whole world. The people you encounter - *their hearts* - are the particular soil into which you sow God's Word. Like the farmer's field, your field presents certain difficulties:

Luke 8:11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

Luke 8:12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

There are times when the gospel is presented and it has no

noticeable effect at all. You can't see it, but in the realm of the spirit, the devil is stealing the word away from these hard-hearted people.

**Luke 8:13** But the ones on the rock *are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*

We've all seen what appear to be *conversions* that turn out to be *catastrophes!* These people seem open and receptive to God, but as soon as they are called upon to endure and obey in the midst of difficulties you see that they have had no real change of character.

**Luke 8:14** Now the ones *that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

It is pretty clear that the first two heart conditions describe people who never were genuinely saved. People with crowded hearts, who become unfruitful, are a different matter. Unbelievers can certainly be described this way; but there are also many warnings in the New Testament to *believers* concerning the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. You all know people who still have a strong profession of faith, but have gone after these things and have become unfruitful as Christians. It is also possible for otherwise fruitful believers to find one or more areas of their heart still crowded by things that are contrary to God's Word. Can any of us claim we are completely free from *the cares, riches, and pleasures of life*?

**Luke 8:15** But the ones *that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*

As you sow the Word, there are those who get saved *and* who, with uncluttered hearts, go on bearing fruit.

The sower and the seed are the same in each case; only the soil is different. What makes the soil different?

I don't think we can fully answer that, since we are talking about the human heart. The farmer can't tell where the rocks are buried, or where the roots of weeds will spring up; we can't see below the

surface of the heart. A word that God spoke to Jeremiah might encourage us, though:

Jeremiah 4:3 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns."

God saw their hearts as hard and crowded - *just like the hearts described in the Parable of the Sower*. God appealed to their hard and crowded hearts. His appeal was also His enabling them to do what He asked: To break up the hard, crowded soil of their hearts so that they could receive the Word into good soil.

You never know when the Gospel might begin the work of plowing up hard, weed infested ground! Just because a person responds with a hard heart doesn't mean that he or she will remain that way. The four soils **do not** describes types of persons; they describe the potential condition of hearts at any given moment. Some commentators even call this the Parable of the Soils.

Your heart was once hard, like the well-trodden pathway. You ignored many invitations. But one day the gospel plowed up you hard heart and the seed sown found good soil.

The Parable of the Sower (or Soils, if you prefer) was given to encourage you to go and sow. The Parable of the Oil Lamp was given to encourage you to **glow!**

#2     Go & Glow  
         With The Light Of The World  
         (v16-21)

The fact that Jesus tells the Parable of the Oil Lamp immediately indicates it is a further encouragement to go on sowing the seed of God's Word into the soil of the human heart.

Luke 8:16 "No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts *it* under a bed, but sets *it* on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light.

The common household **lamp** Jesus was describing was a clay dish filled with oil, with a wick put into the oil. It should be obvious that, since its purpose was to give light, it ought not to be hidden.

**You** are the **lamp**, filled with oil; the oil is the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

God wants you to shine for Him. I'm using the word 'glow' because it better describes reflected light – light from another source. You glow because you are given the Holy Spirit.

Luke 8:17 For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor *anything* hidden that will not be known and come to light.

Luke 8:18 Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Whenever verses seem a little difficult (like these), I try reversing their order, and often I see that the *subsequent* verse or verses gives commentary on the *preceding* verse or verses. Jesus warned you to **take heed how you hear**. In light of the Parable of the Sower, this would mean you should first take a soil sample from your own heart and determine if you are a Christian, or not a Christian:

1. If you are a Christian, what you **have**, and what is **given to you** even **more**, is the Holy Spirit. (We'll see in Chapter Eleven of Luke's Gospel an encouragement to believers, you who are definitely already saved, to go on asking for, seeking after, and knocking on heaven's door, for more of the empowering of the Holy Spirit).
2. If you are not a Christian, you may **seem to have** God in your life, but instead you eventually fall away. It appears, on the surface to observers, that **what you have** was **taken away** from you. It wasn't **taken away**. In the end, at God's judgment when **secrets** of the heart are **revealed**, what was **hidden** – the spiritual reality that you were never saved - will **come to light**.

Let's get back into our context and see if we can summarize everything we've discussed. Multitudes were following Jesus. It seemed a tremendous success; but Jesus saw below the surface, beyond the numbers, into each individual heart. He also knew that



the Jews would officially, nationally, reject Him. For several centuries, His followers would need to take up the work of going into the world and sowing the Word of God. They require encouragement for their work, because many would hear the Word of God, but not all would receive it into good, prepared soil. Christians should go on sowing regardless the response. And they could glow as they go – meaning they would have an inexhaustible source of spiritual power by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

There is a final encouragement for sowers and glow-ers. It's not a parable; it's the arrival of Jesus' earthly family.

Luke 8:19 Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd.

Luke 8:20 And it was told Him *by some*, who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You."

Luke 8:21 But He answered and said to them, "**My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.**"

Within the **crowd** were Jesus' **mother** and **step-brothers** – the other children of Mary and Joseph. This was the clearest way for Jesus to say that salvation is not a matter of *heritage*, but of the *heart*. There was no national salvation by being a Jew; and there was no natural salvation, by being a relative. There was, and is, **supernatural** salvation by receiving God's Word into your heart.

## Conclusion

Take a soil sample from your heart. You can do it, with God's help, by examining your response to God's Word. Your response will fall into one of the four soils Jesus listed... **And it better be the fourth!**

If you find **good ground**, then check to see if you're also glowing. Are you telling folks about Jesus? More importantly, Do they see the Lord reflected in your daily life?

If not... Ask, seek, and knock – and God will give you His Spirit in greater measure. He'll fill you with an inexhaustible supply of oil to shine ever more brightly against the deepening darkness of this world.