

The Seed of the Kingdom of God

Luke 8:1-15

Key Verse: 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 persevering produce a crop."

In this passage Jesus compares his ministry of the word of God to a farmer sowing his seed. Jesus teaches us what kind of heart attitude we must have toward the word to be saved and bear fruit. Jesus also teaches us the nature of gospel ministry so that we may take courage and persevere in sharing the good news. Let's listen carefully to Jesus' words in this parable.

I. Jesus proclaimed the good news with his coworkers (1-3)

Thus far in his gospel, Luke has portrayed Jesus' ministry in detail in a few short chapters. Jesus repeatedly taught the word of God. Jesus healed the sick, drove out demons, and raised the dead. In addition, Jesus called disciples to follow him and trained them to be like him. Jesus' power source for this great ministry was the Holy Spirit, who descended on him when he was baptized. Jesus' ministry also came forth from his eternal Being as the incarnate Son of God. Wherever Jesus was, there was the kingdom of God. Those who had faith in Jesus could experience his power to heal and save. In this passage Jesus' ministry comes into greater focus. Jesus proclaims the good news through a systematic evangelistic campaign with his coworkers.

Look at verse 1a. "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God." Jesus traveled about; he did not sit down and wait for people to come to him. Jesus went out and proclaimed the good news to all the towns and villages. Jesus wanted everyone in Israel to hear the good news. This is Jesus' heart's desire. Therefore, we, too, should take the initiative and reach out to students on every campus in this area. Thank God for using Dr. Sohn's fellowship to reach out to MVCC. Let's pray for all campuses in the USA!

Jesus' main work was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. This good news is that God sent Jesus as the promised Messiah. Jesus is God's king who defeated the devil and solved the problem of sin and death forever. Those who accept Jesus accept God into their hearts, and he rules over them with peace and love, and gives eternal life. This is the best news to anybody. Recently, in Korea

UBF, a young child, Ha Kyung Chang, was killed. She and five others were returning from a music lesson, walking down a narrow street to the An Am UBF center. A large truck was backing down the hill. The others avoided it by flattening themselves against the wall. But Ha Kyung slipped and fell. The truck crushed her, killing her instantly. Her younger twin sisters, Ha Eun and Ha Won, age 8, saw everything, and were even spattered by the blood. This happened at 11:00 a.m., in the midst of the morning prayer meeting at An Am center. Many who were praying ran to the scene, including the child's mother, Jin Sook. But there was nothing they could do. Jin Sook began to pray. In the midst of her great sorrow, she had a vision of her daughter going to heaven with Jesus! That very night the twin sisters had "wonder" dreams. They also saw their sister going to heaven with Jesus. She had a shining white dress and made a bright smile and waved to them as she left. The dreams were so real that they drew pictures of them. The hope of the kingdom of God gave them victory over sorrow. They were all encouraged to give themselves fully to Christ. The child's grandparents decided to believe in Jesus. The gospel is what all people need most.

The effect of Jesus' reign is not limited to the experience of a few believers. God's anointed King Jesus destroys all evil throughout the world, and extends God's righteous reign over all. Jesus restores God's honor as Creator and Sovereign Ruler, and restores paradise to mankind. It is glory to God and good news of great joy to all mankind. Jesus proclaimed this good news as the King's absolute decree. Entire villages were blessed with God's presence, victory and peace. There are many things that God's servants can do to reveal God's glory in the world, such as alleviating poverty, healing the sick, protecting the rights of the unborn, and so on. However, the focus of Jesus' ministry was on proclaiming the gospel; the focus of our ministry should be on preaching the gospel too. We all have many things to do: study hard for school, care for our family members, excel in our careers, and so on. However, sharing the gospel must be a first priority.

Look at verses 1b-3. Luke especially notes the participation of many women in Jesus' ministry. Some of these women are mentioned by name: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. These women had received Jesus' grace. Mary had been freed from seven demons. They tormented her with lust, jealousy, melancholia, guilt, condemnation and so on. She experienced hell on earth. She might have been beautiful on the outside, but when she went into fits of rage and vented her fierce anger with demonic strength, no one wanted to be around her. So she had no friends. But Jesus loved her and understood her. Jesus drove out the demons and set her free. Jesus taught her to live by the word of truth and have victory in her life. Jesus gave her peace, hope and love. So she loved Jesus and served Jesus

gladly. Her delicate hands may have become calloused as she learned to cook and clean and sew. But she was happy. She and the other women provided for Jesus' company by their own means. They were also disciples of Jesus. Sometimes they followed better than the men did. Jesus could have managed his ministry by other means. But Jesus accepted and used the sacrificial lives of these women as the most precious offering for his ministry. At the time Luke wrote this gospel, women were usually disregarded. Yet Luke had to mention these women, because they were so precious to Jesus.

In the same way, God's history in UBF is filled with many women who received Jesus' grace and love him sacrificially. Shepherdess Jae Eun Cho met Jesus through UBF Bible study at Sung Shim Girl's College in Choon Chun, South Korea. She received Jesus' grace of forgiveness and calling to mission and began to serve Jesus joyfully. God gave her Genesis 12:2, "You will be a blessing...", as her life key verse. She moved to Seoul and married Sh. David Cho by faith, and God blessed them with four children. When her babies had a problem digesting milk and became ill, she learned to come to God in prayer. When her husband died young, she learned all the more to depend on God in prayer. In the late 1970's and 1980's she joined Dr. John Jun and M. Maria Ahn in daily prayer to raise 60 young Pauls as shepherds. Within 20 years, God raised 600 young Pauls, ten times what they prayed for. After hearing Dr. Samuel Lee's message on Moses' decision of faith, she decided to serve God with all her heart and life, entrusting her children and finances to God. At that time she said, "If I perish, I perish." Under the leadership of Dr. John Jun, she and others prayed to reach pre-med students in the Kwan Ak campus of SNU, the best university in Korea. She overcame difficulties and despair by holding on to Mark 9:23, "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." In one year, 1992, God raised 12 freshmen leaders. A year later, God established Kwan Ak III chapter, with 60 members. God has raised many missionaries and professor shepherds through her prayer, including Dr. Jieun Kaier at Oxford (the wife of Dr. Abraham Kaier), and Dr. Mary Shin, a world class scientist and Bible teacher. Shepherdess Jae Eun Cho has been a blessing to the world, as God promised in Genesis 12:2. There are many sacrificial women disciples of Jesus. Personally, I am thankful for my wife, Deborah, who worked full-time for 20 years to support our family financially, bore six children, and has taught the Bible to students one-to-one faithfully. Without her support and prayer I would not be here today. Sorry to say, we men sometimes overlook sacrificial women of God in our ministry. But Jesus recognizes them and loves them dearly. So should we.

II. Jesus teaches the crowd through a parable (4-10)

Look at verse 4. People responded to Jesus' evangelistic outreach and came in large numbers from town after town. What did Jesus do with this crowd? Jesus did not talk about political reform, health care, the economy, or a resurgence of Israelite nationalism. Instead, Jesus told a parable. Parables are stories taken from everyday life which illustrate, through what is known and understood, truths about the kingdom of God. In that largely agrarian society, Jesus told a parable about a sower. Let's listen to Jesus' parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That was it.

We can imagine that many people, who had traveled some distance to hear Jesus, scratched their heads, wondering what it meant. Fortunately for us, Jesus' disciples asked him what the parable meant. Jesus was happy that they asked. Jesus wanted to teach interactively, not through proclamation only. Jesus wants us to ask good questions in order to grow as his disciples. It may seem risky, because we reveal our lack of knowledge. That is why some students never raise their hands in class. But Jesus taught us, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Mt 7:7). We must learn to ask Jesus boldly, by faith. Then Jesus shares the answer. However, before answering, Jesus explained why he taught in parables. Look at verse 10. "He said, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."'" Here, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, who preached God's message to his people in the 8th century B.C. Jesus saw his own ministry in light of God's work in history. Jesus teaches us two things.

First, Jesus reveals the secrets of the kingdom of God to his disciples. The kingdom of God has been a great secret, promised from the Fall of man. The Apostle Paul calls the gospel "the mystery hidden for long ages past" (Ro 16:25; Eph 3:3-6). This mystery or secret can be known only through revelation from God by his word. It cannot be known through reason or the scientific method. It cannot be bought with money. It can be known only by revelation. Nicodemus was a very successful Pharisee, but he did not know the secret of the kingdom of God. It is God's wisdom to hide this secret from the wise and learned of the world and to reveal it to little children. God reveals it to those who come to him in simple faith because they realize who he is and that his word is truthful. Jesus gave this secret

to his disciples. He had called them by his grace. They responded with faith and obedience. They lived with him, worked with him, and came to know him personally. He trusted them with his secret. To know this secret we must make a personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus shares this secret with his friends.

Second, Jesus concealed the message from others. People who did not know the secret of the kingdom of God could not understand the meaning of the parables. This was intentional on Jesus' part. Jesus hid the meaning from those whom he could not trust with the secret. At this time, Jesus was being persecuted by Jewish religious leaders. He could not teach freely in synagogues. There was a constant danger that his teaching would be twisted and branded as seditious. By teaching in parables, he could appear harmless to the suspicious while continuing to impart spiritual truth to those who were thirsty for it. Jesus was as wise as a serpent and as innocent as a dove. We should not doubt Jesus' love, or conclude that he was trying to keep some people from being saved. Jesus is not willing that any should perish, but he wants everyone to come to salvation (2 Pe 3:9). But in his wisdom he taught in parables at this time. Jesus believed what was promised to Isaiah, that the remnant would believe and be saved.

III. The meaning of the parable (11-15)

Look at verse 11. "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God." The word of God, like a seed, has a tremendous potential to give life. Hebrews 4:12 begins, "For the word of God is living and active...." When Mother Barry began to teach the Bible in English in Korea, many young people came to learn English. They would study and go away, thinking that was the end of their English lesson. But the word of God continued to resound in their minds and hearts. As it worked in them, they came to know Jesus and to have new life in him. Later, many went out as missionaries to the ends of the earth. Charles Spurgeon's conversion is legendary. One Sunday morning a snowstorm forced him to join a small Methodist worship service, though he was a Baptist. The pastor could not get to the church, so an elder prepared the message quickly and spoke on Isaiah 45:22: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (KJV). As he finished his short message, he looked right at Spurgeon and said, "Young man, you look very miserable. And you will always be miserable--miserable in life and miserable in death--if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment you will be saved. Young man, look to Jesus Christ!" Spurgeon testified that a cloud of darkness rolled away. He accepted the blood of Christ with a hymn of praise bursting in his heart. Spurgeon went on to preach the gospel to over ten million

people in his lifetime. The word of God has tremendous power to grow and bear fruit. However, the hearts of people must be right for it to bear fruit.

To teach us what hearts bear fruit, Jesus compares our hearts to soil. Look at verse 12. "Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." Just as a path is very hard, the hearts of some are so hard that the gospel does not penetrate at all. The fake spirituality of new age religion and the self-righteous pride of people like the Pharisees make them reject the gospel message outright; it bounces off. The consequence is very serious. They lose the chance to be saved; they will be condemned eternally in hell. Still, they dismiss the word of God, as if it were nothing. Notice that there is another force at work. Jesus said that the devil comes and takes away the word. The devil does his best to prevent the salvation of souls. The devil exchanges the truth of the gospel for his lies to keep people as prisoners. Paul said, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the...powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). So we must pray. Only God can drive out the devil. God can turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh (Eze 36:26).

Look at verse 13. "Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." These people rejoice at first and shout "Hallelujah!" However, they do not pass God's test. God allows tests of hardship or persecution to help us grow in personal faith. He wants us to decide to live by the truth. Some people seem to believe until testing comes; then, they quickly fall away. Only those who overcome can grow. When Whitney Koch began to believe the gospel, she was persecuted by some family members. It was painful. However, she committed her life to Christ and decided to persevere. Her faith grew until she could raise a disciple, Amber, and go as a short term missionary to Africa. She no longer thinks entirely about marriage, but about serving God's mission. So she has entered a master's program in teaching. She is preparing to go to an African country as a permanent missionary. She has taken root in the gospel. Moreover, her family members respect her as a woman of God.

Look at verse 14. "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." They let everything into their hearts: the gospel, anxiety about the future, worry about children, desire for new clothes and shoes, pornographic images, sports teams, technological gadgets, and so on. In the competition for time

and attention, the gospel is choked out. They must pull out the thorns, even though it is painful.

Look at verse 15. "But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." Some people have noble and good hearts. In the book of Acts there were the Bereans. Luke says that they were of a more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Ac 17:11). A noble and good heart is a truth-seeking heart that honors the word of God and studies it diligently. It seeks the truth in order to live by the truth. This kind of heart retains the word and perseveres in it. For example, when Old Testament Joseph was a boy, he lived a pure life and worked hard for his father Jacob. His heart was right with God, and God gave him prophetic dreams about the future. He held these dreams in his heart through many changing seasons of his life--through the betrayal of his brothers, false imprisonment by a wicked woman, and the amazing success that came upon him overnight. Finally, he could accomplish God's will in helping his brothers repent and live for God's purpose to be a great nation. He was a blessing to God's history and to all people. In this kind of heart, the word grows and produces abundant fruit.

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. But to bear the fruit of the gospel, our hearts must be noble and good; we must have truth-seeking hearts that hear the word, retain it, and persevere. We can have such hearts when we pray for God's help to cast the devil out of our hearts, decide to deepen our commitment to Christ in times of trial, and pull up the thorny plants of worry, riches and pleasures. Then the the gospel will grow in us and bear much fruit.

Jesus also teaches us how to see gospel ministry. In this relativistic age, there are many who show no interest in truth. They will not respond well to the gospel. When we see them, we can be discouraged. However, just as in Jesus' time and Isaiah's time, there is a remnant of truth-seeking people who will accept the gospel and bear its fruit. When even one person believes and is saved and grows, his or her life can become a blessing to the whole world. We must pray to meet these kinds of people in this new fall semester. When we persevere in faith God will bear much fruit through us. May God bless each of us to bear much fruit and to be a blessing.