

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 the last passage we learned that Jesus’ grace produces love. Jesus’ grace changes cold, critical hearts into hearts that overflow with affection toward Jesus. Those who know Jesus’ grace can feed Jesus’ sheep with affection from their deep hearts. But without knowing the grace of Jesus we can be ungrateful to God and ready to criticize others. Such people have no sheep. Or if they have sheep, their sheep deserve “perseverance awards” for enduring shepherds who lack affection. May God help each of us to realize Jesus’ grace until our hearts overflow with the affection of Christ Jesus.

In today’s passage Luke, the evangelist and historian, explains how Jesus’ earthly messianic ministry went forward. Jesus worked hard to plant the seed of the kingdom of God in people’s hearts. We can learn how to accept the seed of the kingdom of God in our hearts, and how it produces fruit. Finally we receive the kingdom of God as our inheritance. What could be more important than that? May God help us to receive the seed of the kingdom of God in our hearts and bear fruit.

First, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God (1).

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 worked hard to visit all the towns and villages to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the best news to anybody, no matter who he may be. The kingdom of God is where God reigns. The kingdom of God comes to the hearts of those who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Mark 1:15 says, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” When the kingdom of God comes into our hearts, we can have the peace of God. The kingdom of God is our glorious eternal home. It solves all the problems of all people. So it is good news of great joy to all people.

Some think that America is the best country in the world in history. But America is not paradise. Despite all the precautionary efforts, we cannot guarantee homeland security. Still, fear arises whenever a new threat is discovered. Many cannot get adequate health care. Injustice occurs. Because of this we agonize. But Jesus came to this world to save us from our sins and bring us back to the kingdom of God. There are no terrorists in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is perfect paradise where we live forever with our Lord Jesus Christ in peace and love. We enjoy the kingdom of God on earth when Jesus is in our hearts.

To Jesus, it is most important to spread the good news of the kingdom of God to the towns and villages around us. Harper College is a nearby village of 23,000 students from suburban families. An easygoing and affluent lifestyle has spoiled many. A corrupted lifestyle is considered normal. Depression patients abound. More than anything else, they need the good news of the kingdom of God. Dr. Paul Koh’s fellowship prays for Harper students. May they proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to all 23,000 Harper students. We must proclaim the kingdom of God in all Chicago area campuses.

Second, Jesus’ coworkers in spreading the message (1b-3).

In verses 1b-3, Luke introduces Jesus’ coworkers in the gospel ministry. They were, first of all, the Twelve. We thought about them in chapter 6. They were all different kinds of people. They were ordinary men who did not seem to be born leadership material. But they had great learning minds. They accepted Jesus as their Lord and humbly learned from him. Jesus bore with them until they grasped the secret of the kingdom of God and grew up to be great men of God.

In addition to the Twelve, there were some women who followed Jesus. They had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. They had tasted the grace of Jesus and committed their lives to Jesus. Mary Magdalene had been possessed by seven demons who tortured her day and night. But Jesus cured her from demon possession. Now she had peace in her soul and joy in her heart. She wanted to be with Jesus all the time and to serve Jesus in any way. There was also

Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household. She might have been an aristocratic woman who knew how to behave at social events. But she got sick when she saw the animal behavior of hypocritical political leaders. When she met Jesus, she was moved by his spiritual power and authority. She was moved all the more by his humble heart and integrity. She would not exchange one day with Jesus for a thousand days in the palace. There was also Susanna and many others.

These women were helping to support them out of their own means (3). These women sacrificed themselves for the sake of Jesus' gospel ministry. Jesus gave his full time to Bible study, prayer and serving the needy people who were coming and going. Jesus' disciples had a full-time job just to hang around Jesus and learn from him. Most of the people Jesus helped were poor and needy. How did Jesus' company manage to meet their daily needs? These women did whatever was necessary for Jesus and his disciples. They offered their own income. They washed dirty clothes. They cooked and cleaned. They gave haircuts. They tried hard to bring grace and beauty to the company of brawny disciples. These women were part of a new history of God with Jesus. To Luke, they were key members in it.

In the same way, UBF ministry was founded on the sacrificial lives of many beautiful women of God. First there is Mother Barry. She offered her life to Jesus from her youth, giving up the chance to marry and going to war-torn South Korea as a missionary. She served Korean people with humility and tears for 22 years, until 1977. This year, she returned to Korea as the main speaker for the World Mission Report 2002. On the way into the stadium to speak, a Korean man greeted her and asked, "Do you remember me?" She did not recognize him at first. She had met him in the late 1950's while visiting a rural village to preach the gospel. He could not attend that meeting because he was sick with T.B., which was usually fatal at that time. So Mother Barry visited him. Then God moved her heart to help him. She brought him to the Kwang Ju hospital and by God's grace, he was healed. Afterward, he looked for Mother Barry to say, "Thank you," but he could not find her. Nearly fifty years later, he happened to see her picture on a brochure for the World Mission Report. He recognized her and came to see her with his wife and daughter. He has been a pastor and has served many people with the word of God and prayers. He was overflowing with thanksgiving for Mother Barry whom God used to save his life. Mother Barry's message at the World Mission Report was powerful. But the fruit of her shepherd heart for one perishing person may have been more powerful.

Sacrificial women of God have laid the foundation of UBF USA. For example, in the beginning of Chicago ministry many full-time staff shepherds received little or no pay, though they worked hard day and night. Their wives supported their families while raising children and feeding sheep, receiving no recognition. In this way, many fruitful Bible teachers and messengers have been raised. These days modern women want to enjoy successful careers for their own glory and honor. But women of God sacrifice themselves for the sake of Jesus' ministry. Now we pray for a new history of God in America by raising young American women into sacrificial mothers of prayer. This is what Jesus did at the beginning of his ministry. May God raise 500 young American women into sacrificial mothers of prayer through Chicago UBF.

Third, the character of gospel ministry (4-8a).

Look at verse 4. "While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable." The crowds swarming around Jesus were amazing in their number. And they were coming from many places. What could Jesus do with this crowd? Jesus began to proclaim the kingdom of God through parables. Look at verses 5-8a. "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 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." Jesus compared his ministry of the word to a farmer planting seed. Although the farmer planted many seeds, only the ones on good soil came up and produced a crop. Likewise, in the crowd of people, many heard Jesus' parables. But only a few of them would accept his word and be changed. Here we learn the character of gospel ministry. It requires sowing a lot of seed. Most of the seed does not produce fruit. But when one seed is planted on good soil, it is really fruitful. Someone said, "I fished 100 students. Among them, 25 gave me their phone number. Among those, 12 gave the right phone number. Among those, one began Bible study. His response was so good!" This is not something unusual. It is the character of gospel work. Jesus experienced the same thing.

Fourth, those who receive the secret of the kingdom of God (8b-10).

After finishing his parable, Jesus called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What does this mean? Does it mean that some people have ears, not for hearing, but only for wearing earrings? Not really. It means that hearing Jesus' word requires greater attention than we give to a news flash on the radio. We must not let Jesus' word go in one ear and out the other. After hearing Jesus' word we must let it sink into our hearts and meditate deeply on it. Most people in the crowd were not coming to listen to Jesus' words, but for something else. On the other hand, Jesus' disciples really wanted to understand Jesus' teaching. So they went to him and said, "What does this parable mean?"

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.'"" Through the parable of the sower Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. To those with no spiritual insight, it was just an interesting story about gardening, like a Martha Stewart program. But to those who know the secret of the kingdom of God it was the most meaningful explanation about how the word of God works and how to receive the kingdom of God in their hearts. Jesus' disciples, who had committed their lives to Jesus, asked for understanding. They would receive it as a gift. But those who let Jesus' teaching go in one ear and out the other never understood what Jesus was really saying. They heard the best parable from the best Bible teacher. But they went away without the secret of the kingdom of God. They missed the chance to gain eternal life. Jesus grieves over such people. Nevertheless, Jesus did not stop preaching the word. Jesus comforted himself, remembering Isaiah 6:9. It says, "He said... 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'" Though most people did not listen to the word, Jesus would continue to teach them and never give up.

Fifth, the seed produces fruit in a noble and good heart (11-15).

Jesus explained the parable to his disciples. Look at verse 11. "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God." Like a seed, the word of God has the power to give life and to grow. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." The word of God gives life to the soul. But it can grow only in good soil, that is, in a noble and good heart. In verses 12-15 Jesus explains what men's hearts are like and how the word of God bears abundant fruit.

* The heart soil of the path. 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." The characteristic of the path is a hard surface. Such people may be arrogant and opinionated. When they have a chance to study the Bible, they say, "No" in one second and never reconsider. Their favorite words are, "I know. I know that already." Thus they miss the chance to believe and be saved.

* The heart soil of rock. 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." People whose heart soil is like rock live by their feelings. When they feel good, they say "Amen" with a loud voice. But when they confront the self-sacrifice inherent in Christian life, they wilt and look like a dead flower. The process of taking root is invisible. Most likely, these people neglected personal Bible reading and prayer. Most likely, they never really accepted God's sovereignty over their own lives. Just as there are final exams in school, there are tests in the life of faith. No one can go through testing without a deep root. In the time of testing, they fall away.

* The heart soil of thorns. 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." The seed seems to grow in these people, but it has to compete with their endless worries, love of money and vacation plans. The cause of their worries may be their future security anxiety or how to invest their hard-earned money. Their hearts are always painful, filled with thorns. Finally, the word is choked out and does not mature.

* The good heart soil. 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." A noble heart is set on things above. It seeks the meaning of life and truth and immortality. One nine-year old boy said to his mom in the middle of the night, "I want eternal life more than anything else." A good heart discerns between good and evil and seeks the good. When those with a noble and good heart hear the word, they realize its value. They do not just listen and forget. They retain the word in their hearts like a treasure. They meditate on the word of God day and night. When understanding comes,

they make it part of their lifestyle. When conflict arises because of their faith in the word, they persevere with long-suffering patience. In the end, they bear abundant fruit, a hundred times what was sown!

When Dr. Samuel Lee was young, he studied philosophy. He wanted to know the truth and the meaning of life and why he had to suffer in this world. Through John's gospel study the seed of the kingdom of God was planted in his heart. Since then, the kingdom of God grew in his heart. Whenever persecution or trouble arose, he studied God's word all the more. The kingdom of God grew in him until he became a father of many nations and a blessing to the world.

The seed of the word of God has the power to give life. The seed of the word of God grows into the kingdom of God in our hearts. The kingdom of God can grow until it bears one hundred times what was sown. But the word of God needs a noble and good heart. May God help each of us to have a noble and good heart that hears the word, retains it, and by persevering produces a crop.