

SEXAGESIMA

60 days before Easter

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Andrew Richard



LUKE 8:4-15 ESV

Author and Date:

Written by St. Luke from material that was compiled by him, likely between AD 58-60 while he kept company with St. Paul during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. While himself not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, he has investigated all things very closely and has his information from eyewitnesses (see the Prologue of Luke's Gospel, Luke 1:1-4). The Parable of the Sower appears also in Matthew 13:1-23 and Mark 4:1-20.

⁴ And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable,

- This great crowd is made up of the four types of soil that Jesus details in the parable.
- "He said." This is the Sower sowing the Word.

⁵ "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.

- "Went out." Like the owner of the vineyard in last week's parable. This is how the Gospel begins: with Jesus acting, by Him coming to us because we could never come to Him.
- Two things happen on this type of soil: 1) the seed gets trampled, 2) birds eat it.

⁶ "And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

- In this account of the parable, Jesus speaks of the lack of moisture. In Matthew's account of this parable, Jesus focuses on the scorching sun. Lack of moisture and scorching sun are a bad combination.

⁷ "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.

- This type of soil experiences competition. Thorns fight against the seed for possession of the soil.

⁸ "And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

- The good soil is known by the fact that it produces fruit. As noted in Matthew's and Mark's accounts, some yield thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold. The *amount* of fruit is not the point, just that the seed *does* bear fruit.

⁹ And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰ he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

- The Lord says that the Word that goes out from His mouth "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). It is true that God "desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 4:2). But it is also true that the Word of God *always* does something: if it is not received in faith, it is received as a hardening of heart, just as the Word of the Lord spoken through Moses hardened Pharaoh's heart. In this way Jesus carries out the same duty that was given to Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes" (Isaiah 6:10, Jesus quotes from the same verse here in Luke). Some soils receive God's Word and it results in the strengthening of faith, some receive God's Word and it results in the hardening of their hearts. But it is *always* either one or the other.

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

- Jesus doesn't identify the sower, perhaps because He identifies himself so closely with His Word that He can say whatever happens to the Word happens to Him.
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- Jesus doesn't identify the sower, perhaps because He identifies himself so closely with His Word that He can say whatever happens to the Word happens to Him.
- The seed is the Word. The various types of soil correspond to various ways of hearing or receiving God's

Word. Note that all the soils hear the Word of God, so wherever God’s Word is spoken, all these types of soil can be found.

¹² **“The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.**

- The seed on the path would be the Word that goes in one ear and out the other, the one who hears the Word in the pew and leaves it there when he walks out the door. The devil steals the Word by many means: Distraction, when one focuses on other things when the Word is being spoken; laziness, when one doesn’t want to make any effort to follow along through a sermon or apply God’s Word to one’s own life or open a Bible at home; boredom, when one doesn’t pay attention to the Word “because I’ve heard it all before.” In this way the Word is stolen by the devil and trampled by men.
- Notably the devil can’t take the Word from the ears, and ultimately he doesn’t have to. He’s concerned about the heart, because it’s with the *heart* that we believe and are saved. No Word in the heart = damnation.

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

- The lack of moisture was the problem when Jesus initially spoke the parable. When He explains it, He focuses on the time of testing (the scorching sun, as in Matthew 13:6). Both are a problem. When the sun beats on a plant the plant can endure when it has plenty of moisture, which in this case would be hearing plenty of God’s Word. So times of tribulation are very beneficial for Christians who are receiving enough moisture. A lack of nourishment combined with a scorching sun leads to an initial enthusiasm, but then the person falls away.
- “Fall away.” The words “apostatize” and “apostasy” come from the Greek word that’s used in this verse: the person believed, but then becomes an unbeliever once more.
- The “times of testing” correspond to tribulations (hard times), persecutions (hatred from the devil and the world toward Christians), and temptations (the struggle against the devil, world, and flesh that seek to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, etc).

¹⁴ **“And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.**

- On this soil the Word has competition: worries, riches, and pleasures. In Mark 4:19, the pleasures are defined as

“desires for other things,” or in other words: a discontent with the Word of God, as if it wasn’t good enough. The Word is choked, meaning faith is smothered.

- “Their fruit does not mature.” Faith that does not bear fruit is not faith, because faith always bears fruit. That’s just what faith does.

- The fruit could be defined as faith toward God and love toward the neighbor, the two marks of the Christian life (e.g. Ephesians 1:15).

¹⁵ **“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”**

- We cannot take refuge in the fact that we hear God’s Word: so does everyone. Hearing the Word, while necessary for salvation, does not guarantee salvation. We do not trust hearing the Word. We trust the One of whom the Word speaks: we trust Jesus. Jesus is the sower who sows on all manner of soil, who would rather His Word be trampled and snatched and scorched and choked than that we poor sinners should be without it. His Word is like Him: Jesus is the Word that was sown on the Stone Pavement as He stood trial before Pilate and was taken away by the devil. Jesus is the Word that was sown on that rocky hill called Golgotha where He sprang up on the cross and withered away. Jesus is the Word that was sown among the thorns of chief priests and scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees, who competed with Jesus out of love for the world. And it was by sowing Himself on our wretched soil, by dying and rising, that He made a little plot of good soil: people who are saved for His sake.
- Luther alludes to this verse in the Large Catechism, commenting on the Third Article of the Creed: “In the first place, he [the Holy Spirit] has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they *grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it*” (*Large Catechism* II.42). The Holy Spirit working through the Word is the only one who can make us good soil.



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