

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."

Study Questions:

1. To what does "After this" refer? What characterized Jesus' life-giving ministry? What is the good news of the kingdom of God? (Mark 1:15) Why is the kingdom of God the focal point of Jesus' ministry?
2. Who traveled around with Jesus? How had Jesus helped the women? Why and how did they serve Jesus and the Twelve? Why is the serving of sacrificial women essential to Jesus' ministry, then and now?
3. How did Jesus see the crowd that gathered? What was evidently the crowd's attitude toward the word of God? What parable did Jesus tell them? What are the 4 different heart soils into which the seed of the word fell? What is the difference between mind and heart?
4. Read verses 8b-10. Who are the ones who can have spiritual insight, and know the secrets of the kingdom of God? (Compare Jn 6:66,67) Why was Jesus discouraged? How did the quotation from Isaiah 6:9 comfort Jesus?
5. What kind of heart does the path represent? The rocky soil? The thorny soil? What happens to the seed that falls in each of these? What is the good soil? How can we have good heart soil? How does the kingdom of God grow within us? To which kind of soil do you belong? (Name just one kind.)

Today Jesus talks about the parable of the seed. Luke also talks about several women specifically and many other women with no comment. In this passage we learn how to accept one word of God and retain it and bear much fruit. Finally, we obtain the kingdom of God as our inheritance. It is interesting to see many kinds of people in this passage.

First, 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." In this verse, the words, "After this," are immediate reference to the event of a sinful woman in the previous chapter. The sinful woman heard that Jesus came to Simon the Pharisee. As soon as she heard the name of Jesus, she felt that her sinsickness was completely healed and she came to Simon the Pharisee's house to thank Jesus for the grace of forgiveness. As soon as the woman saw Jesus, she began to weep continuously, pouring a jar of perfume on his feet. In other words, this kind of activity looked like nothing. But life-giving work of God was going on. The proclamation of the kingdom of God was going on. Some were coming to hear the word of God from Jesus, and life-changing work of God was going on. As history is continuously going on, the work of the kingdom of God was aggressively going on.

Also, Jesus' coming was the coming of the kingdom of God. Mark 1:15 says, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus himself is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is "right there" in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus (Lk 17:21). While on earth, the kingdom of God can grow within us endlessly. The more the kingdom of God grows in our hearts, the more we can experience the peace of God. The kingdom of God is the focal point of Jesus' message. Jesus came to this world to heal those who are sick with sin. Ultimately, Jesus came to this world to bring those who believe in the Son back to the kingdom of God.

Second, the followers of Jesus (2-3).

Who were they who followed Jesus? They were the twelve disciples and some women and many other women. Let's think about the twelve disciples. They were ordinary people. Most of them were tagalongs. But they had a learning mind. A learning mind comes from a humble mind. Fallen man is born to be rebellious. But the disciples were men of humble heart. They were also men of loyalty. They doggedly followed Jesus because they were men of heart. Despite themselves, Jesus helped them open their spiritual eyes so that they might grasp the secrets of the kingdom of God.

There were some women and many other women in addition to the twelve disciples. They were the women who were cured of evil spirits and diseases. Once they had been sick with demon-possession. Mary

Magdalene had been a beautiful woman. But while living a sinful life, she was possessed by seven demons. Because of seven demons she had lived a life of endless sorrow. Since she met Jesus, she became a new person. Joanna was the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household. Probably, living among the rich and corrupt people in the aristocratic stratum of society, she lost the meaning of her life and became a depression patient. But she saw the light of life in Jesus. There were also Susanna and many others. All of them had experienced the healing mercy of Jesus and had found the new joy of life. Now, they were all new creations in Jesus (2Co 5:17), with new hope and new joy. They were useful women of God in the gospel work of Jesus. What did they do for Jesus after conversion?

Verse 3b says, "These women were helping to support them out of their own means." At that time, women were considered inferior to men, mainly because they hardly had financial resources. But Luke gives these women an important place in Jesus' life and work. It seems to be a small matter. But in view of history, where there were faithful women there were beautiful works of God. In the work of God, women's roles have been indeed great.

As we know, Jesus had no regular income. Jesus and his disciples were so busy to take care of God's flock of sheep under their care that frequently they had no time to eat (Mk 6:31), much less make money to support themselves. Jesus' band needed supplies for daily bread on a regular basis. Verse 3b says, "These women were helping to support them out of their own means." Once, they had been selfish and evil women. But since they met Jesus, they were changed from selfish women to sacrificial women of God. We don't know whether these women had money or not. But one thing was certain that these women were changed by Jesus and that they had the stewardship of his gospel ministry. When they were willing to support, God enabled them to support Jesus and his disciples with their own means and by any means.

It is obvious that Jesus and his disciples did not live like John the Baptist, each wearing a leather garment. They wore ordinary clothes and they needed their laundry done from time to time. But do you think Peter washed their clothes? Then do you think that Matthew washed their clothes? No. They lived in a feudal age. It's more than sure that these women cooked breakfast early in the morning. These women washed their

smelly clothes. The words, "their own means," contain many beautiful stories and episodes. The women cooked for them and washed their clothes because they had hearts like Jesus. These women followed Jesus everywhere he went because they loved him and knew his grace of forgiveness of sin. These women followed Jesus because they did not think this world is everlasting, but very temporal. These women followed Jesus because they wanted to live a holy life, acknowledging that they were holy pilgrims on earth.

Third, the crowd of people (4-8a).

A large crowd of people from every town were thronging around him. When Jesus saw them, they were frantic to get some immediate benefit. But their hearts were not prepared to receive the word of God. Also, they had no idea to know about the secret of the kingdom of God. Jesus was sorry for them that they hoped to solve their agonies of life. The solution was right there, the good news of the kingdom of God. But they rejected the word of Jesus.

So Jesus told them a parable. 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 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." According to these verses, we come to know what a man's heart is like. Some people think the size of a man's heart is the same as his chest. It is funny to say, most people talk a lot about mind. One young man said, "Well, I guess my mind is the smartest among my fellow roommates." But it is true that there are not many who talk about their hearts. We must know that when we study the Bible, man's mind is rarely mentioned. But man's heart is mentioned repeatedly.

A man's heart is like a good heart and good soil. Furthermore, it is a huge harvest field. When God made man he gave each a good heart as good soil and as the huge harvest field. God wants men to grow their hearts with the word of God and bear many fruits of goodness. Moses' heart embraced 600,000 difficult people. Jesus had heart to embrace the people of the whole world. But when we see, fallen men's hearts are usually as small as the eye

of a needle. Animals have no heart, but only chest. So they have to walk with four feet.

Fourth, spiritual insight (8b-10).

After speaking to the crowd wholeheartedly, Jesus deeply sighed and said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." These verses mean that those who are eager to have spiritual insight can understand his words. Up until now Jesus healed the sick and preached the kingdom of God. Of course, a few seeds of the word of God were planted and grew. But to Jesus' eyes, the crowd of people were coming to him only to get immediate benefits. The crowd of people were comparable to the crowd of 5,000 people who were happy when they ate their fill with Andrew's five loaves and two fish. But they left Jesus when Jesus told them about spiritual food which gives them eternal life. Their leaving made Jesus sorry, until Jesus asked Peter, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (Jn 6:67). It meant, "You are tempted to run away, too."

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.'"" The meaning of this verse is clear. The secret of the kingdom of God is proclaimed. But they don't understand because they don't want to understand. Here we learn that Jesus grieves over people who don't want to understand his word intentionally. Though it was a heart-breaking situation for Jesus in doing the work of God, Jesus did not despair. Jesus comforted himself by remembering Isaiah 6:9. It says, "He said...'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'" This verse means that though people never listen to the word, Jesus should continue to teach them and never despair.

Of course, Jesus' disciples understood Jesus' word. But they were sorry that Jesus was so sorry for those who came to Jesus and did not take one word of God. The disciples felt that their spiritual condition was not better than that of ordinary people. The disciples really wanted to know the meaning of the parable of the sower. So his disciples asked him what this parable meant. Jesus said in verse 10a. "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables...." Jesus' disciples listened to Jesus' words concerning the

kingdom of God with a good attitude. The crowd of people were happy to hear but never take the word in their hearts. Jesus told them in parables so that those who have a right attitude might understand, and those who do not have a right attitude might not understand.

Fifth, a man of good soil of heart can enter the kingdom of God (12-15).

First kind, 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." As we studied the word a few minutes ago, our hearts are compared to soil which can produce much crops and fruits. But there are four kinds of hearts to the people. The people with pathlike soil are men of common sense. The characteristic of the path is a hardened heart like asphalt. Such people are filled up with worldly common sense. They live as others live. They are very nervous about other people's opinion about them. One grade school student lived a pure life. But she saw that all other girls in her class lived a immoral lives. So she began to live like others. As a result, soon she quit school, next she became a slave of fear since she contracted the HIV virus. Most of them say, "Let's enjoy pleasure as the means of forgetting fear and anxiety." But it doesn't work like that.

Second kind, 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 are men of giant egos. Generally, these people are clever. So they like to hear the word with joy, saying, "Amen, Amen." The underlying rock has a thin skin of earth over it. The shallowness of the earth helps the seed to germinate quickly. So with undesirable rapidity, growth begins, and shoots appear above the ground when there is not enough root and they perish. They are men of no root. When they have to face the self-sacrifice inherent in the Christian life, they run away from God because of their rock-like giant ego.

Third kind, the heart soil of thorns. Look at verse 14a. "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...." They are usually men of wealth. They have too much money, which causes them to

worry. They worry all day long. The cause of their worries is that they want to keep their wealth on the earth forever. Men of worries live very painful lives because, according to statistics, most of them have a heart problem.

Fourth kind, 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." What is good soil? Verse 15 says that good soil stands for those who accept the word with a noble and good heart. Those who have the good heart and good soil keep the one word of God in their hearts and take root in it and grow until they can bear abundant fruit, 30 times, 60 times or even a hundred times. Those who have the good heart and good soil know how to endure to retain. To retain one word is harder than to retain an undisputed heavyweight boxing championship, because of the devil's gossip. Those who have good heart and good soil are happy to meditate on the word of God. Those who have one word of God and retain it are like a tree planted by the stream of water which yields its fruit in season. But those who have no word of God in their hearts are like chaff that the wind blows away.

May God help us to retain one word of God so that we can inherit the kingdom of God.