

**THE FORGIVEN LIFE ... THE LOVING LIFE:
THE CONTINUAL WORK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH
The Message, the Messenger, and the Heart - Part 1
Luke 8:4-15 (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23; Mark 4:2-9, 13-20)**

Luke 8:4-15~ ⁴ And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 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. ⁶ And some fell on the **rock**, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ And some fell among **thorns**, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 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.” 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.’” ¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 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. 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. 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. 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. (ESV)

I. Introduction

We are continuing our look at “The Continual Work of Christ and the Church” ... the mission of the Church which is to LOVE. We are to:

- 1) Love God,
- 2) Love One Another, and
- 3) share this Love to the World.

Our love for God and our love for one another do two things:

1. First, our love for one another is what shows all men that we are followers of Jesus.

Our love for one another is what shows that we are Christians. Jesus says so in John 13:35.

John 13:35~ ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

... “if you HAVE love for one another.” “If you possess that love for each other, you are my disciples,” Jesus says. In fact, non-believers used to describe the Christians of early

Church in that way. They would say, “Behold, how they love one another.”¹ That was how they described Christians.

2. Second, our love for one another is what glorifies the Father.

Jesus also says in John 15:8 that:

John 15:8~⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

So we are to love. Forgiven Life is about loving God and loving one another and sharing this love to the world. I recall last year during the Christmas season, one brother was surveying the Church, like Boaz of Old who stood in his grain field surveying which person of need he could bless. This brother wanted to make someone’s Christmas season meaningful and joyful. He wanted to bless someone without them repaying him back in return. So he purchased two gift cards of significant amount and came to me. He asked me to hand them out to two individuals who needed those gift cards the most. However, he did not want me to mention his name. You see, he wanted them to thank God and to give glory to the Father for the gift that they received. So I did that, and the look on their face said it all. They were so appreciative and thankful. But without knowing who gave the gifts, they gave God the thanksgiving, which in turn made me thank God to see this beautiful picture.

That is love ... doing good things for people who need them so that the Father gets all the glory and Jesus gets all the thanks. And that glory and thankfulness spread like a contagion. That is what the Church is about. That is what Forgiven Life is about. Giving and showing love and excelling still more in our love and faith toward God and each other.

But in my early years of pastoring the Church, I was young, green, and idealistic. I thought that if I could just teach the word of God, “with the goal of [my] instruction is love from a pure heart” (1 Timothy 1:5), then the Church would naturally respond and would naturally grow. All I needed to do was to stay faithful to teaching the Word and to make sure that I stayed faithful to Him Who is the Word, then all people would just naturally grow in love. I thought that the Church, after hearing the Word accurately taught, would automatically give herself first to the Lord and then to each other. In my prayers, I would often pray Isaiah 55:11 over the Church.

Isaiah 55:11~¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it 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.

But it did not work out that way. As much as I taught, staying faithful to the teaching of the Bible, some people just did not respond ... the Church did not grow the way I had idealistically expected. There were some people that grew and there others that did not. And I was blaming myself, “What did I do wrong?” You see, it was either the messenger or the message that failed,

¹ Wikipedia contributors, et al. “They’ll Know We Are Christians”. Wikipedia, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 9 May 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=They%27ll_Know_We_Are_Christians&oldid=840428865.

in my thinking. And it was definitely NOT God's word that failed. So it must have been me that failed.

Did I pray enough?
Did I teach correctly?
Did I love miss something?
Were there unconfessed sins in my life that I needed to repent of?

I was really hard on myself ... "Why did the Church not love and grow they way Jesus said would happen?" It was not until I read this parable that Jesus called "the Parable of the Sower" (Matthew 13:18) that I began to understand. There was a third factor that I had never considered.

II. The Points of the Parable

The Parable of the Sower is found in Luke 8:4-15 with a parallel passage in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. The Parable is about a Sower who was sowing seed. And this seed fell on four different types of soils: hard soil, rocky soil, soil with thorns, and good soil. The purpose of the Sower sowing this seed is so that the seed can germinate and grow to produce fruit. The end product and goal is to have a harvest of fruit. But only one out of four soils yields what the Sower desires. That is just one fourth!

Before we delve into the Parable of the Sower (next week), allow me to give you three points of this parable ... three quick observations, if you will.

1. First, the parable is about Salvation.

Please make no mistake. This parable is about salvation. It is about eternal life. Some people do not want to acknowledge this because of the hard teaching found in this parable.

Look at verse 12.

Luke 8:12~¹² The ones [seed] 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.

"Believe ... and be saved". It is about salvation. It is about believing the word (or the seed) in order to be saved. Look at the next verse.

Luke 8:13~¹³ And the ones [seed] 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.

This second soil is one who "receives" and "believes" the word for a while but falls away. What do we call those who receive and believe the word? We call them

“Believers”, right? We call them “Christians.” These people believe for a while, that is believed and be saved for awhile. But they fall away and left the faith. They cease being to believe. They cease being a Believer.

So the first soil is not a Believer. He or she is not a Christian.

The second, third, and fourth soil are believers. They are Christians. But only one out of three remain in the faith. The other two cease to believe. They have fallen away from the faith.

So can you lose your salvation? Well, yes ... if you stop believing. The Bible teaches so. Paul, writing to the believers in Galatia who have turned away from the gospel that he preaches to a different gospel, says:

Galatians 5:4~ ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Recall that Paul is writing to believers in Galatia.² To the believers, Paul says that they have been “severed” from Christ. They have been cut off. They have separated themselves from Jesus. Moreover, they have “fallen away” from grace. They were once in grace but now they have left grace.

The author of Hebrews, writing to the Christians who want to leave Jesus and go back to the following the Mosaic Law, pens:

Hebrews 10:38-39~ ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he [the righteous one] shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

I do believe in eternal security. But eternal life is secure only in those who keep the faith. If you and I walk in faith, we are secure. But if we no longer walk in faith, we do not have that security.

You see, at this point in Jesus’ ministry, it is growing. It is known as “the Time of Popularity”. A “great crowd” gathers around Jesus. Some of them are believes. Now is the perfect time to tell them that once they believe and are saved, they will always be saved. But Jesus does not. He tells them about continuing to believe in me. The result of this continual belief is bearing fruit.

2. Second, the parable is about bearing Fruit.

² **Galatians 1:6~** ⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

A believer is one who bears fruit. That is what the Sower is looking for. That is what God is looking for. God has been looking for fruit since the Old Covenant (cf. Isaiah 5:1-2). A Christian is one that must bear fruit in his or her life. And if one does not bear fruit, then the question is whether he or she is still a Christian.

Jesus teaches in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 that a person is known by his or her fruit. We can tell if a person is a Christian, or not, by looking at what kind of fruit he or she is bearing.

Matthew 7:16-20~ ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

People can claim all sorts of things. People can claim their loyalty to Jesus. People can claim their love for Jesus. But, it is their fruit (or lack thereof) that validates those claims. “You will know them by their fruits” the NASB translates.

If we know people by their fruit, what is the fruit that Jesus is talking about in this parable? We do not have time to develop this, but let me just tell you what kind of fruit God is looking for.

In Isaiah chapter 5, there are two kinds of fruit God is looking for.

Isaiah 5:1-2,7~ ¹Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ²He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes ... ⁷For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

- a. One: In the Old Covenant, the fruit is Justice.

Justice is the act of being just, being fair. It is impartial judgment on people regardless of their social status or their wealth or any other factors.

Jesus says that justice is the weightier matter of the law in Matthew 23:23

Matthew 23:23~ ²³“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

I was a poor college student who wanted to serve Jesus. Week after week I would go to the pastor and asked if I could serve ... if I could do things for God and for the Church. I wanted to be disciple and learned. I was just a poor college student, so I did not have much to offer, just a love for the gospel and a willingness to work hard. But even though I asked many times and showed my willingness to do anything, the pastor had never really given me the opportunity. It was always those who had money to offer to the church that the pastor spent time with.

I was young, so maybe there were reasons that I was not made aware. But I remember feeling that it was unfair or unjust. The pastor would spend time with those who could monetary support his ministry. Justice is showing no partiality, treating everybody fairly under grace.

- b. Two: In the Old Covenant, the fruit is Righteousness.

Righteousness is the state of being holy ... being pure. Righteousness is what the Kingdom of God is about.

Romans 14:17~ ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Righteousness is living in such a way that we are separated for God's purpose. We are distinct from others who do not know God. Righteousness is also what God is looking for.

- c. Three: In the New Covenant, the fruit is Love.

Galatians 5:22-23~ ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The New Covenant is about righteousness and justice. Don't get me wrong. But the whole entire law is summed up in one word ... LOVE.

Galatians 5:14~ ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

And in Matthew 22:40, talking about the Great Commandment of loving God and loving one another, Jesus says:

Matthew 22:40~ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

I like the way the New King James Version translates this:

Matthew 22:40~ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (NKJV)

If we love God and love one another, we fulfill all the Old Testament law. The real fruit that Jesus is looking for is LOVE. The seed that Jesus sows is so that he can grow love.

Last week, we looked at what love is. It is a matter of doing good to those who are in need for their benefit.

3. Third, the parable is about the Heart.

Let's turn back to Luke 8, and look at verse 12 as Jesus explains these four types of soils.

Luke 8:12~ 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.

Jump down to verse 15.

Luke 8:15~ 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.

The soils are the heart. To bear fruit, that is to love justly and to love righteously, we need to have an honest and good heart.

Our heart is our character. Everything that we say and do comes from the heart. It comes from our character.

In my younger egotistic years, I thought that whether the Church would bear fruit or not depends largely on me. Narcissistic, isn't it? But I realize that it is about the individual's heart. Our heart, or our character, will determine how much we love and how much loving good that we will do. Each and every one of us is responsible for the condition of our heart; and each and every one of us must take time to cultivate our character. This is why Proverbs instructs us to:

Proverbs 4:23~ ²³ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

The kind of life we have with God depends on our heart ... on our character. We must watch over it and guard it with all diligence. You and I both have a part to play in this fruit bearing forgiven life that we have received.

III. Conclusion

There you have it. Three things we need to know about the Parable of the Sower:

1. First, the parable is about Salvation.

The parable is not instructing us on how we can get a large crowd to flock into our church. The parable is about instructing how one can be saved ... by cultivating his or her heart and believe in the message of the word.

2. Second, the parable is about bearing Fruit.

It is not about filling the church pew with a whole bunch of people. It is about getting people to love God, love one another, and sharing this love to the world. It is about refreshing people with the sweet nectar from our fruit of love.

3. Third, the parable is about the Heart.

It is not always the pastor's fault – whether he does things right or wrong, or whether his message is good or boring. It is about our heart on whether we can receive the word or the message. Yes, there is a part that the messenger plays, but a huge part of the fruit bearing depends on us. It depends on the condition of our heart.

IV. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

V. Forgiven Life Living

Please take some time to read Luke 8:4-15. If you have additional time, read Luke 8:4-15 on one day, Matthew 13:3-23 the next day and Mark 4:2-20 the following day.

1. Which type of seed are you in your walk with Christ (think about where you were, where you are now, and where you would like to be)? Write your thoughts on below.
 - a. The seed who has no root and believes for a while but quickly turns away from God in times of testing?
 - b. The seed that grows among thorns and gets choked by the cares and riches of this life and cannot bear fruit or
 - c. The seed that grew in good soil who hears the Word, holds fast to it and is able to bear fruit?

2. The fruit in the Bible the fruit of (a) Justice, (b) Righteousness, and (c) Love.

What does each fruit mean?

Justice : _____

Righteousness : _____

Love : _____

How are you demonstrating those fruit in your life? _____

3. Look at the different type of heart the Bible talks about below:

Cheerful Heart (Prov. 15:15; 17:22)

Discerning Heart (Prov. 15:14)

Happy Heart (Prov. 15:13)

Peaceful Heart (Prov. 14:30)

Pure Heart (Prov. 20:9; 22:11)

Trusting Heart (Prov. 3:5-6)

Wise Heart (Prov. 10:8; 16:21; 23:15)

Corrupt Heart (Prov. 17:20)
Deceitful Heart (Prov. 6:14)
Evil Heart (Prov. 26:23)
Hardened Heart (Prov. 28:14)
Haughty Heart(Prov. 18:12)
Lusting Heart (Prov. 6:25)
Proud Heart (Prov. 16:5; 21:4)
Heart that Devises Wicked Schemes (Prov. 6:18)
Heart that Rages Against the LORD (Prov. 19:3)
Heavy Heart (Prov. 25:20)
Sick Heart (Prov. 13:12)

a. What is the spiritual condition of your heart right now? _____

b. Do any of these descriptions apply to you? _____
