

Introduction:

I have a confession to make. I have been a Christian for just over 30 years. For more than 20 of those, I've worked full-time with churches as an evangelist or preacher. And despite all of that, in the last few months, I've realized I've had evangelism and disciple-making exactly backwards. I discovered this from one of the most well-known parables, which I've read over and over for years. I'm talking about the Parable of the Sower. Let's study it together from **Luke 8:4-8**. By the time we're done, I hope we're all motivated to sow the seed like crazy.

Discussion:

I. We need to sow the seed like crazy.

- A. This is where I've been getting it exactly backwards. I've completely missed how startling this parable is. Perhaps because I didn't grow up on a farm or because I'm not the least bit agrarian, I just read through this like Jesus was telling a normal story. I've heard preachers talk about this story as if it is the most natural thing. In fact, just this week, while preparing this sermon, I'm reading a book that explains this parable as if it was just how farming worked back in Jesus's day. So, for years I've read this like it's just another day on the farm. It isn't.
- B. Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus's audience. Out of the blue this teacher starts talking about a farmer. You aren't reading it in the Bible where in just two verses it is going to explain what this teacher was actually talking about. You aren't hearing about it in a sermon where someone tells you a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. As you hear it, you aren't warned that this story means anything more than what it says. Listen to it again from **Luke 8:4-8**. Would anything in this story cause you to stop in your tracks and question? Would anything shout out to you and say, "Hey, I'm not really talking about farmers here. You should think harder about this story and what it means."? Is the only indication really that Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear"?
- C. Up until a few months ago, I'd answer that question, "No." But a few months ago, I was reading this story and it hit me. This story should grab everyone's attention and cause us to ask, "What on earth is this guy talking about?" This story is crazy. The farmer in this story is crazy. There isn't a farmer alive then or now who would act like this farmer did. Do you know any farmer anywhere who acts like this guy? Do you know any farmer anywhere who goes out throwing his seed everywhere without regard to the state of the ground? Do you know any farmer who just tosses the seed willy-nilly letting it land in all kinds of ground?
- D. Every sane farmer knows what happens to seed tossed on the beaten down path. In fact, every farmer knows, before I toss the seed over there, I need to break that ground up and make it ready. Let me go get my tiller. Every sane farmer knows what happens to seed tossed in stony ground. In fact, every farmer knows, before I toss my seed over there, I need to get the stones out of there. Every sane farmer knows what happens to seed tossed among weeds and thorns. In fact, every farmer knows, before I toss my seed over there, I need to get the weeds and thorns out of there. Every sane farmer knows you toss seed onto good, prepared, cultivated soil. But Jesus's sower doesn't do that. He throws seed everywhere. Jesus's sower is sowing like crazy. That is what we're supposed to do.

II. The seed is the Word of God.

- A. Why does Jesus's farmer sow the seed like crazy? Because Jesus isn't actually talking about literal seeds, literal soil, or literal fruit. The very nature of this story should cause us to say, "No real farmer would act this way, so this spiritual teacher who has demonstrated amazing wisdom and supernatural power must be talking about something else. I wonder what?"
- B. Perhaps this should go without saying, but then again, I have found if you go too long without saying the obvious, it quits being the obvious. Jesus's sower sows the seed like crazy because he isn't sowing literal seeds. In **Luke 8:11**, Jesus explains he is sowing the Word of God. Unless we are sowing the Word of God, we aren't sowing Jesus's seed.
- C. Though God has saved us to walk in His good deeds and we will perform them (**Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14; 3:14**), the seed we are planting is not our good deeds. Though we shine God's light through our example

(**Matthew 5:16**), the seed we are planting is not our great example. Though we are commanded to love all people, including our enemies (**Matthew 5:44**), and the world will know we are Christ's disciples because of our love for one another (**John 13:34-35**), and despite what Tears for Fears taught us back in the late 80s, the seed we are sowing is not love. The seed we are sowing is the Word of God. Why? Because we are striving to set people free from sin (**John 8:31-34**). And the only thing that will do that is the truth found in God's Word. We who have been saved and set free from our sins will set a good example by doing all kinds of good deeds because we love. We must. But we must always keep our eyes on the proper mission, sowing the seed of the Word of God so the lost can be found and saved, and those oppressed by sin may be set free. And we must sow this seed like crazy.

### III. The soils are the hearts of men.

- A. Why does this farmer sow like crazy? Because Jesus isn't really talking about different kinds of soil. He is talking about the hearts of men and women (**Luke 8:12, 15**).
- B. What difference does that make? With real farming, we can tell the difference in the soils. I don't need a doctorate degree to tell that a certain piece of ground has been beaten down and stomped on so long that the ground is too hard to accept seed. I can easily tell that a certain part of a field has too many rocks and stones or weeds and thorns in it. As a literal farmer, I know what to look for regarding the ground and where to plant the seed for maximum yield. But we aren't talking about literal soils, we're talking about hearts. And I don't know what kind of heart anyone has. As Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, only God knows the hearts of men (**I Kings 8:39; II Chronicles 6:30**).
- C. I would never have thought the persecutor Saul had the kind of heart that would become the apostle Paul. I would never have thought tax collectors like Zacchaeus or Matthew would have the heart to become disciples, much less one of them be an apostle. But I certainly would have thought the rich young ruler had a great heart. Consider **I Corinthians 6:9-11**. Who would have thought a group of people who were sexually immoral, idolatrous, engaged in homosexual behavior, thieves, drunkards, greedy, revilers, and swindlers would have the heart to accept the gospel. But Paul claims they did.
- D. Why do we sow like crazy? Because we can't see the heart.

### IV. The only way to test the soil is to sow the seed.

- A. I've heard it said and I've said it, because it just sounds so cool. It's fun to say. We come to this parable and say, "We're sowers of the seed, not testers of the soil." And certainly, the spirit of that statement is true. However, in another sense it isn't true at all. The truth is we are testers of soils. But the only way to test the soil is to sow the seed.
- B. We can't see the hearts. We can only see outer actions. Those actions could stem from any number of emotional, psychological, and spiritual motivations. The mean jerk who stabs us in the back on the job so he can get the promotion and gives us the finger on the way up the ladder may be just pure evil. But then again, he may be a guy who is hurting and insecure because he was abused by his parents and knows how awful he behaves but compensates by succeeding on the job. He's looking for something that will make him alright, but he hasn't found it yet. He needs to hear the gospel. On the other hand, the guy who is nice to his wife, productive on the job, serving his co-workers, and making trips to Africa to feed hungry children may be a great guy who loves God and just wants to pass on God's love to others. But then again, he may actually be self-righteously trying to prove how great he is, believing he doesn't need God because he is good enough without him. We just don't know. We don't know the hearts.
- C. How do we find out what kind of heart anyone has? Sow the Word of God in it. Don't prejudge the soil, test it by sowing the seed like crazy.

### V. Be prepared for the results of sowing the seed like crazy.

- A. I've realized I have a real problem with this parable. Jesus explains the results that will come from sowing the seed like crazy, but I don't like them. In fact, the amazing thing is, Jesus tells us what kind of results we will get when we are sowing the seed the way He wants us to, but I venture to say when we get the results He claims we will get, we think we are doing something wrong. The reality is when we don't get the results He explains, we are doing something wrong.
- B. What will result from sowing the seed like crazy?
  1. When we are sowing the seed like crazy, some of it will fall on completely hardened hearts (**Luke 8:12**). They hear the word and Satan steals it right out of their hearts. They deny it and reject it. We almost tacitly believe that if we sow the seed properly everyone will obey. That is why we wait around trying to figure out the just right way and the just right time to sow the seed. This however is simply not true.

When we are sowing the seed properly, we are often going to sow it on pathway soil. Pray for them, because God's Word can break down and soften wayside soil, but you haven't done anything wrong just because someone rejects the seed.

2. I think we all grasp that first one, though it still gives us trouble. But I think this second result is going to give us problems. When we are sowing the seed like crazy, sometimes it is going to fall on rocky, stony soil that doesn't have much depth (**Luke 8:13**). These hearts receive the word and respond to it with joy. They confess Jesus as Lord, they are baptized for the remission of their sins. They start coming to church. But then testing comes. Whether that testing is the way the world treats them, how Satan tempts them, false teachers perverting the Word once it was planted, or just finding out that confessing Jesus as Lord means serving Him as Lord, the testing causes them to drop out. Understand what this means. When we are sowing the seed like crazy, there are going to be plenty of people who respond, we rejoice over their baptism, and then in a short time they have fallen away. I know this causes us problems. I know it causes me problems. I know this because, sadly, I have to confess that I've been in conversations with others as we look at brothers and sisters who sow the seed like crazy, making me look bad for not doing so, and our last bastion to defend our limited activity and sometimes inactivity is, "But look at their retention rates. They do all that sowing and all that baptizing, but how many of them are still here a year later?" Certainly, we should ask every responder to the gospel to count the cost (**Luke 14:25-33**). And certainly we should water the seed once it is planted, following up with new converts, helping them deepen those roots (**I Corinthians 3:5-15**). But the reality is we shouldn't be discouraged when people respond but then fall away, we should be more discouraged when that is not happening. Because when we are sowing like Jesus teaches, that is exactly what is going to happen sometimes.
3. The third result is often harder to detect. This is the seed that falls on weedy, thorny soil (**Luke 8:14**). These folks confess Jesus as Lord, are baptized for the remission of their sins. The sprout shoots forth from the ground, they look a lot like other Christians. But they just never bear any fruit. They never get to maturity. They bounce along acting like they are faithful to the Lord, often getting incensed if you suggest they aren't, but their lives continue to look more like the world than like Jesus. This is painful. And of course, the work we do is to continue planting and watering that seed, allowing God's Word to cultivate their hearts (**Luke 13:6-9**), warning them of God's coming judgment. Certainly, this is sad and painful to witness. However, it is a natural result of sowing the seed like crazy.
4. The fourth result is the greatest, and yet, perhaps it is the most surprising result for us. I know I feel like I spend so much time trying to help short circuit any discouragement we might get from the first three results that I sometimes forget this fourth result is out there. This is why we sow the seed like crazy. Because there is good soil out there. Be ready for this. When we sow the seed like crazy, the seed will often fall on the first three soils, but it will also fall on good soil. Here is the key we need to grasp. We only get this result when we sow the seed. The more we sow the seed the more we get this result. In fact, just imagine how often we might get this result if we started sowing the seed like crazy.

#### VI. Even working with good hearts takes patience.

- A. I love the final statement in Luke's version of Jesus's explanation. In **Luke 8:15**, Jesus says, "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). Some translations say "perseverance;" some "endurance." Primarily, this is saying that the good soil hearts endure. They patiently persevere despite harsh conditions, despite the cares of the world, despite the testing.
- B. However, I believe we should recognize a secondary point about this. If the good soil is patiently persevering, so is the farmer. Bearing fruit to maturity doesn't happen overnight. The sower doesn't toss some seed out on the good soil, come back the next day and find fully mature, ripened, ready to harvest fruit. Fruit-bearing takes time and work on the farmers part. He will come back and tend the growing plant, watering (cf. **I Corinthians 3:5-7**), weeding, fertilizing. There is nothing about this parable that says we simply do drive-by evangelism, drop in a seed and then nothing else. It may take seeding and reseeded the same soil for the fruit to grow. Additionally, there is nothing in this parable that says once we've taught them enough gospel to get them baptized we are done discipling them. As **Matthew 28:19-20** points out, even after baptizing, we must teach the disciple to observe all that Jesus has commanded. We work with the sapling to help those roots dig deeps, getting grounded. We should never practice dunk and drop evangelism.
- C. Even working with the good soil takes patience, perseverance, and endurance. Aren't you glad someone has been patiently enduring with you as you grow to maturity? Do the same for others.

## VII. Do the Lord's work, not the devil's.

- A. Before we close there is one aspect of Jesus's story we must not breeze past. When Jesus talks about the first soil, the pathway soil that is beaten down and trampled underfoot, he explains that the birds eating the seed are not literally birds eating the seed. Rather, they represent the devil taking the Word out of the heart of the hearers.
- B. Our enemy actively works against us. In Luke's account of the parable, Jesus says the seed gets trampled underfoot on the pathway soil (**Luke 8:5**). Don't be surprised when the enemy strives to trample underfoot the Word of God. People will speak against us. False teachers will rail against God's Word (even while proclaiming to teach it). Folks will call us names, mock us, despise us, accuse us. The enemy will stop at nothing to trample God's Word out and steal it from the hearts of men and women. Don't be surprised by this.
- C. But more importantly don't do the devil's work for him. He is trying to keep the Word out of people's hearts and his biggest success comes not when the birds snatch up the seed we've tried to sow, but when we keep the seeds in the bag. The Lord wants to sow seed in the hearts of men, the devil wants to keep it out of there. When we hang on to the seed, we are doing the devil's work. When we scatter it, we are doing the Lord's. Do the Lord's work, not the devil's and sow the seed like crazy.

### Conclusion:

There it is brethren. Jesus's parable teaches us we need to be sowing the seed like crazy. Who are you going to sow the seed with this week? How are you going to do it? Do you have any goals? Do you have any plans? Don't hang on to the seed. Sow it like crazy.