

Luke 8:1-21: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 May 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 21 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Cusa, her household manager, and Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their means.

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

And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 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. And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But for others they are in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. Now the parable is this, The seed is the word of God.

[1 : 2 0] 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. 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. 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.

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. No one, after lighting a lamp, Covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, But puts it on a stand, So that those who enter may see the light.

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, Nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, For to the one who has, More will be given, And from the one who has not, Even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, But they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, Desiring to see you.

[2 : 3 9] But he answered them, My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. In Luke chapter 8, We learn that Jesus' ministry was supported by faithful women, In much the same way as the ministry of people like Elisha.

In 2 Kings chapter 4 verses 8 to 10, We read of Elisha, These women also seem to have accompanied Jesus and his disciples, As they travelled around.

While the focus is usually upon the twelve, Luke wants us to know that they were only some of a larger group, And that the women played an indispensable role, And not just as witnesses to the death and resurrection, In the earlier part of Jesus' ministry too.

We see many women in the life of the early church, Involved in aspects of its ministry, As patronesses of churches, As those who hosted churches, As those who performed works of service.

Within the cultural context, Having women accompanying around a peripatetic teacher like Jesus Would have been very surprising, And maybe even scandalous to some. Jesus delivered these women from evil spirits and illnesses, And they ministered to his material needs.

[4 : 10] Joel Green observes, His graciousness toward these women Is not repaid by their benefactions, Rather his graciousness is mirrored in theirs. In the twelve and these women, We also get a sense of the type of group That is forming around Jesus.

One of the features of the gospel, Portrayal of women, Is their concern for the presence and the body of Jesus. Here they minister to his needs. In the preceding chapter, We have a woman who washes his feet with her tears, And dries them with her hair.

Mary bears the body of Christ in her womb. Women are the ones who follow Christ to the cross, To the tomb, And then are the first to visit on the day of resurrection. Their recognition of the importance of Christ's body, And his presence, Is something that seems to be far more pronounced in them, Than in the male disciples.

Jesus here delivers the parable of the sower. There are four types of soil, With different responses to the seed that is sown in them. Seed along the path, Consumed by the birds. Seed on rocky ground, Without much soil and scorched by the sun.

Seed among thorns, Choked by those thorns. And then finally, Seed on good ground, Yielding a hundredfold crop. Following this, Jesus explains his use of parables. Parables are found at various occasions in the Old Testament, That are often used by prophets, As a form of prophetic discourse.

[5 : 30] Symbolic stories that open up something about a reality, While also hiding it from many people. The kingdom of God is a secret, It's known only by those to whom it has been given to know it.

Jesus is following in the footsteps of the Old Testament prophets, Who are cryptically revealing God's purposes. Parables are not illustrations, But they're more like cryptic riddles, Designed to hide prophetic mysteries from the unfaithful, Yet reveal them to the remnant.

Speaking in parables and riddles, Was a form of judgment upon a people without spiritual perception. And this is in part, To fulfil the judgment spoken of by Isaiah, In a passage that is very prominent in the New Testament, Isaiah chapter 6.

It's where Isaiah sees the vision of God, And he is given his calling, His mission, To a people that will not hear, Who will not understand, And who will be judged. The passage speaks of a catastrophic judgment upon the people, But there will be a remnant, A holy seed, Will be the stump.

And the quotation of Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9 in verse 10, Is a very significant gesture towards what is a central theme in the Lucan material. In Acts chapter 28 verse 26 to 28, That verse concludes and sums up Luke's entire narrative.

[6 : 44] God sows his people in the land, In the return from exile. Isaiah chapter 61 verse 11, For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 27, Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, When I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah, With the seed of man and the seed of beast.

Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 9 to 10, For behold I am with you, And I will turn to you, And you shall be tilled and sown, And I will multiply people on you, The whole house of Israel, All of it.

The city shall be inhabited, And the waste places rebuilt. Hosea chapter 2 verses 21 to 23, And in that day I will answer, Declares the Lord, I will answer the heavens, And they shall answer the earth, And the earth shall answer the grain, The wine, And the oil, And they shall answer Jezreel, And I will sow her for myself in the land, And I will have mercy on no mercy, And I will say to not my people, You are my people, And he shall say, You are my God.

Jesus is describing what the restoration looks like. This is a sowing that occurs by the word, Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 to 13, For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, Making it bring forth and sprout, Giving seed to the sower, And bread to the eater, 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.

[8 : 23] For you shall go out in joy, And be led forth in peace, The mountains and the hills, Before you shall break forth into singing, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands, Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle, And it shall make a name for the Lord, An everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

N.T. Wright suggests that the parable of the sower Should be read as the climax and recapitulation of Israel's story. In the sense of a climax, It presents the history of Israel as a story of successive sowings, Of differing success and duration, Leading up to the great kingdom sowing, Which Christ is undertaking in his own day.

In the sense of recapitulation, It presents all of these different responses to the word of God, Sowing a restored people, As occurring within Jesus' own ministry. Jesus' ministry won't meet with a universally positive response, But the word of the kingdom that re-sows a restored Israel, Will receive mixed responses.

A lamp is not brought in to be hidden. Things secret are to be brought to light, And things hidden to be revealed. Jesus is speaking in a hidden way at the moment, But ultimately things will be brought to light.

It will be made known, What he is saying. We must act accordingly. Our actions right now, The measure that we use with others, Will have consequences. Our passage ends with a visit from Jesus' family, And it raises the question of who the insiders are, Who are the outsiders?

[9 : 53] Jesus isn't just an independent teacher, An exorcist, But he's forming a people around him. Jesus challenges the supposed claims of his natural family upon him, Just as the temple was his father's house back in chapter 2, So his true family are those who hear and obey God's word.

A question to consider. How might Jesus' statement about his mother and his brothers, And Luke's reference to the twelve, And his description of the women who provided for Jesus' material, Needs, Be brought into fruitful conversation?

What might we learn from the connection between the two?