

THOSE WITH A GOOD HEART BEAR FRUIT

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.”

We learn two things from today’s passage. Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, as he traveled with his kingdom workers. Then Jesus told the parable of the sower. We learn how we can hear God’s word, retain it, and bear much fruit. God created us in his own image so that we can bear good fruit in our lives. We have a fruit-bearing relationship with God. Let us learn how to bear good fruit in Jesus.

I. JESUS AND HIS KINGDOM WORKERS (1-3)

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.* “After this” here refers to the anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman which is recorded in Chapter 7. The woman crashed a dinner party held at the house of Simon the Pharisee. She poured a jar of perfume on Jesus’ feet wiping them with her tears. She loved Jesus who forgave her sins. She expressed her love in a dramatic fashion. This event looked small in human eyes, but it was evidence that the work of God was going on. Jesus was doing the work of saving sinners. After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another. What was the message he proclaimed? He preached the good news of the kingdom of God. To some people, this message seemed impractical. They probably wanted to hear some practical topics such as: “Eleven ways to survive under Roman oppression,” or “Exposing the scams of tax collectors,” or “How to make Judea great again.” But Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God. Why? It’s because only the kingdom of God can give us a true hope in this passing world. With all the problems we have here, America is still the best country in the world. Many people of the world want to come here to achieve their dreams. The visa lines at many embassies are very long. But America is no paradise. Most of all, we cannot live here forever. Only in the kingdom of God we will live forever with our Lord Jesus in peace and love. That’s why Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God. He said: “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15) The kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of God is our eternal home. We will be with Jesus in the kingdom of God after we are done here. But we should also know that the kingdom of God is near, that is, it begins here now (Lk 17:21). We can experience the kingdom of God in our hearts when we are with Jesus. When we commit our lives to Jesus, he rules in our hearts with peace and justice.

There were some people who traveled around with Jesus as he proclaimed the kingdom of God. They were his kingdom workers. Who were they? The twelve disciples were with him (1b). They were ordinary people. But they had a learning mind. Many religious leaders were proud and self-righteous. But the disciples were humble. They

were not the smartest bunch, but they were willing to learn. They faithfully followed Jesus and learned from him.

There were also women who followed Jesus. Look at verses 2-3. ... *and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.* These women had experienced the grace of forgiveness personally. They found a new life because of the grace of Jesus. They became new persons in Christ (2Co 5:17). Mary Magdalene had been tortured by seven demons. Jesus set her free from the evil spirits. In Jesus, she became a new person. The same thing happened to Joanna, Susanna, and many others. So how did they respond to Jesus who had changed their lives? They loved him back. They wanted to do something for Jesus. They wanted to follow him and serve him. When we personally experience the grace of Jesus, we cannot go on living the same selfish life we used to live. We want to serve the Lord out of our gratitude and love for him. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:15: "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

As we know, Jesus had no regular income. He and his disciples were so busy in taking care of God's sheep that sometimes they didn't even have time to eat (Mk 6:31), let alone make money. Who supplied their daily needs? Verse 3 says that *these women were helping to support them out of their own means.* Before they received the grace of Jesus, they had been selfish women. But now, they were changed into sacrificial women of God. At that time, Israel was a male dominant society. Women hardly had any financial means or social status. We don't know how they came up with the money to support Jesus' ministry. But one thing is clear. They were no longer selfish, but sacrificial. They had a sense of stewardship for God's redemptive work. When they were willing to support, God enabled them to support Jesus out of their own means. It is beautiful to see women expressing their love for Jesus by sacrificially serving the work of God. St. Luke gives these women an important place in Jesus' ministry. In fact, behind every successful ministry and leader are faithful and prayerful women of God. The faith and prayer of Hannah raised Samuel. Monica's tearful prayer laid a foundation for her son Augustine's conversion. May the Lord raise up many beautiful and faithful women of God among us!

II. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (4-15)

Look at verse 4. *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable, ...* Many people were crowding around Jesus. But most of them were seeking only some immediate benefits from Jesus. They had no interest on the kingdom of God. They had heard his message, but it was like they never heard it, because they were preoccupied with their problems in life. Jesus was sorry to see their indifference. The answer was right there in the word of God. But they did not pay attention to it.

How did Jesus try to help the people? Look at verses 5. *“A farmer went out to sow his seed.”* Jesus told them the parable of the sower. What is a parable? It is a simple story that has a deeper truth hidden in it. A parable can make spiritual truth more plain those who pay attention to it. It can also be easily remembered. In addition, parables can avoid offense to those who are hostile and not prepared to receive the truth, because the true meaning is hidden behind the story. Only those who have a right attitude can perceive the truth. By speaking in parables, Jesus challenges us to come to his word with a learning mind so we can have the secrets of the kingdom of God.

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 ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, 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.”* Jesus compares a person’s heart to the soil of a field. When our heart is receptive to God’s word, we can bear much fruit. On the other hand, if our heart is hardened or full of rocks and thorns, we cannot bear good fruit.

After speaking to the crowd the parable, Jesus called out, *“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear”* (8b). Jesus taught the crowd the word of God whenever they came to him. But they were only interested in some practical benefits, saying, *“That’s a nice story but what’s in it for me?”* Jesus’ heart was broken when he saw this. Once Jesus had compassion for a crowd of 5,000 hungry people, and fed them with five loaves and two fish. The next day, a larger crowd came to him, expecting free bread. Jesus didn’t give them bread. Instead, he declared, *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.”* Jesus helped them to accept him as the Messiah who came to save them from their sins. But the crowd became angry because he didn’t give them bread. All of them left him, except for the disciples. Jesus was sorry to see them leave. They had rejected the good news of the kingdom of God. Then Jesus asked his disciples, *“You do not want to leave too, do you?”* Peter replied, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (Jn 6:68).

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.”* Jesus gave the secrets of the kingdom of God to everyone, but only his disciples accepted the message. Others ignored it, as if they didn’t hear it. Their rejection broke Jesus’ heart, because he cared about them. Only the words of Isaiah comforted him (Isa 6:9): *He said, “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’”* Isaiah stated the sad truth that those who are not willing to accept God’s word will find the truth hidden from them. One missionary said, *“I invited 100 students to study the Bible. Twenty five of them gave me their phone numbers, of which only 12 were real. And only one of them actually came to study the Bible. His response to God’s word was very good!”* This is not unusual. Our Lord Jesus experienced the same thing.

Most people left Jesus after hearing his parable, probably saying it was a nice story but it was not relevant to them. But his disciples came to ask him what the parable

meant (9). Jesus was very happy to explain the meaning to them. He said, “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God” (11). Then Jesus explained how the word of God produces different results depending on the condition of the heart soil. Our hearts are like computer memory. If we store only worldly things in our hearts, we reap only the sinful fruit. If we store the word of God in our hearts, we can reap the fruit of righteousness. Let us think about what kind of heart soil we have in us, as we study the characteristics of each heart soil.

First, the heart soil like 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.* The people with path-like soil listened to God’s word but reject it right away. They give no chance to God’s word. It goes in one ear and comes out the other. God’s word makes no impression on them. They hear the word of God, it does not penetrate their hearts. So what makes a person’s heart hard like the path? Many ideas and desires can trample on a person’s heart, hardening it like interstate highway. Likewise, a proud and stubborn heart rejects God’s word. For example, God wanted to teach Pharaoh who he is by sending terrible plagues on the Egyptians. But the king did not treat the word of God as God’s word. Instead, he hardened his heart and did not listen to Moses and Aaron (Ex 8:15). He missed the opportunity to know God personally. To those with a heart like the path, the word of God is no more than a piece of information they learn in a gen-ed class. As long as the thick layers of common sense, pride, and sinful passion are paved on their hearts like asphalt, God’s word has no chance of working in their hearts and lives. Without the word of truth, they just follow the trend of the world or their own ideas. Those with a path-like heart cannot obtain the kingdom of heaven.

Second, the rocky heart soil. Look at verse 13. *Those on the rocky ground 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.* The problem with the rocky soil is that it is shallow. The seed germinates quickly on the thin layer of soil, but it cannot take a deep root. Without root, it cannot survive. Likewise, the people with the rocky heart soil hear the word of God with joy, shouting “Praise the Lord!” They believe the word of God for a while, but their faith is shallow. Their relationship with Jesus is superficial. These are very emotional kinds of people. They become quickly enthusiastic, and again quickly become as cold as ice. Emotional people can do something when they are emotionally high. But they cannot do anything when they are emotionally down. The life of faith requires decision of faith and commitment, in addition to emotion. Without deep roots in the word of God, they fall away in the time of testing. When trials come, which is normal in the Christian life, they fall away. They cannot bear fruit of eternal life.

Third, the thorny heart soil. Look at verse 14. *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, and they do not mature.* The thorny soil is a rich soil. Everything grows well there, including thorns. The seed cannot bear fruit because it is choked by the thorns. Likewise, people with thorny soil have good hearts. They hear the word of God and want to live by faith. At the same time, they worry about many things.

When they let desires for money and pleasures grow with the word of God, the thorns outgrow the word, preventing them from bearing fruit. Now, the poor people naturally worry about money, but what about the rich? Recent surveys found that people who make more than a million-dollar annual salary still worry about money. They cannot sleep comfortably because they worry about stock market crashing. Any desire they may have for God is choked by their worries. They cannot bear the fruit of eternal kingdom of God.

Fourth, the good heart soil. Let us read 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.* Who are the people with the good heart soil? Jesus says that the good soil represents those with a noble and good heart. What is a noble heart? “Noble” means honorable and worthy. During his second missionary journey, St. Paul preached in the Macedonian city of Berea where he met people with a noble character. Acts 17:11-12 says: “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.” We learn that those with a noble heart hear the word of God with great eagerness and study the Bible everyday.

Verse 15 also teaches us that those with a good heart hear the word, retain it, and produce a crop by persevering to the end. Those with the good heart soil first hear the word of God. Hearing the word of God sounds so easy. But it is not. Sinners have a sinful tendency to hear only what they want to hear. Some people hear God’s word, but only selectively, paying attention to only what they like, ignoring what they don’t. But the word of God is the word of God whether we like it or not. Those with the good heart soil accept God’s word as the word of God. Noah is a good example. “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Ge 6:22). People made fun of him for building a huge ship, hundreds of miles away from sea. He obeyed the word of God by faith even when doubts arose from within him. Jesus is the best example of this. He obeyed God’s word humbly until he was crucified on the cross. Only truly humble people can hear the voice of God.

How can we retain the word of God? We must meditate on the word and struggle to apply it practically to our lives. Those who have the good heart soil keep God’s word in their hearts and take root in it. They persevere with the word of God, despite many trials of life, until they produce abundant spiritual fruit. Jesus promises that they will inherit the kingdom of God!

The word of God is the word of life. It has the power to give life. The word of God grows into the kingdom of God in our hearts. It produces fruit one hundred times what was sown. This happens only when we have a noble and good heart. What kind of heart soil do we have? May God help us to have a noble and good heart so that we may bear good fruit in Christ!