

Gleaners Bible Studies c 3

THE PARABLES OF LUKE'S GOSPEL (PART 3)

Study 1

The Sower and the Soils

Read

Luke 8: 1-21

The Parable of the Sower is found in each of the first three Gospels – the Synoptics. It is important, because it illustrates the impact that the mission of the Lord Jesus had upon the people of His day. Humanly speaking, the numbers of disciples who became dedicated to the teachings of the Lord were few. By the time He went to the cross there were just a handful who were willing openly to stand by Him. His words so often fell on deaf ears. Of course, the Lord knew accurately the characters of those to whom He spoke and the reasons behind their rejection of His words. It is well to bear this in mind as we study this parable.

SETTING Notice **verses 1-3** of the chapter, where we find the record of the preaching tour of the Lord Jesus. He was visiting the cities and villages of Galilee and Judea, sharing with men and women the good news He had brought from God. With Him were the twelve disciples and also women who had experienced the reality of the power of the Lord Jesus to change their lives. They showed their love and gratitude by ministering to His needs, and they represented those who were the fruit of His work. With this in mind we can consider the story.

STORY Again, this was a story from everyday life. The Lord Jesus Himself had often seen a sower at work. So He recounts the sowing of the seed and in doing so describes four kinds of soil. First, the wayside, which was barren and trodden down. Then rocky, stony ground covered with only a little soil, making it dry and unresponsive. Next there was thorny ground, containing those vicious weeds which were much stronger than the fruit of the seed, so that when they grew up they choked the growth of the seed, making it wither and die. Finally, somewhere in the field, there was good ground with fertile soil. The combination of good seed and good ground brought forth varying quantities of good fruit. This, in essence, is the story which Jesus told.

SUBSTANCE The parable is interpreted for us (**verses 11-15**) and its meaning is made clear. Its first application, of course, refers to the effect the Lord's teaching had on the lives of those who actually heard Him. But this can also have great meaning for us with regard to the preaching of the Gospel today. Think of the GOOD seed of the Word of God. Whatever the outcome, the original seed is good. Within each seed is contained the possibility of fruit. We need to think about this. God's Word is good seed. It is through His Word that we see our need to be "born again" or made anew. (**1 Peter 1: 23-24**)

But next we notice the GROUND into which the seed was cast. Eastern sowers were far more carefree in their scattering of the seed than are Western farmers today. Wayside and rock were commonly found in any field. The Lord Jesus used them to picture the hard, unyielding hearts of those to whom He often preached. The wayside represents a heart and mind in

which the Word produces **NO FAITH** at all. The Word is at the mercy of all Satan's influences, to stop it working right from the start. How many there are today like this! The rock or stony ground represents a heart in which just a **SHALLOW FAITH** has begun. No deep or lasting effect is made upon those who hear the message.

It is easy to be just emotionally stirred by the Gospel, especially in the conducive atmosphere of a Gospel meeting, when surrounded by people of like mind. Sadly, many people make a 'decision' for Christ, but when the stern tests of life come, with opposition from those who are not on the Lord's side, it is discovered that real commitment to the Lord Jesus is missing. Profession without reality makes such Christianity ineffective. Let us be careful we do not make this mistake. Thorny soil illustrates a **STRUGGLING FAITH**. There are some who hear the good news of the Word of God and fully intend to commit their ways to the Lord and enjoy His great blessings in their lives. But alas, the influences of pleasure, wealth, friends, or just the everyday things of life, are so strong that all spiritual desires are gradually stifled. Good intentions are not enough! It is essential to surrender ALL to the challenge of Christ and His Word.

Finally, we come to the GOOD ground. We think of GROWTH and increasing fruitfulness. When good seed falls into good ground, miraculous things begin to happen. When the Word of God is accepted and obeyed, a **STRONG FAITH** develops. Have you ever studied what the New Testament says about fruit and fruitfulness? Look at the following Scriptures: **John 15: 1-8; Romans 6: 21-22; Galatians 5: 22-23; Philippians 1: 11; Colossians 1: 9-10 and Hebrews 12: 11.** Perhaps you can find others. It is a very important truth to grasp!

SEQUEL The possible sequel to this parable is found in **verses 19-21**. Who are the true relations of the Lord Jesus Christ? He looks at His earthly family and He seems to pass them by. Notice that it is those who "**hear the Word of God and do it**" who stand in true relationship to Him. These are representative of the good ground in the Parable of the Sower.

Study 2

Discipleship

Read

Luke 14: 25-35

We study now two of the parables that the Lord Jesus told. They seem almost like illustrations, used to pose questions that demanded answers from those who followed Him. They are directly connected with the idea of discipleship. While you are studying, keep the Parable of the Sower in mind, for it is in some ways connected with these two stories. Remember especially the way in which the good soil shows the kind of people the Lord Jesus is looking for.

SETTING These parables fall within the general context of Jesus making His way to Jerusalem (**Look at Luke 9: 51**). This may explain the "**great multitudes**" who now flocked after Him (**14: 25**), for His ministry and activities were attracting

much attention. But these multitudes did not necessarily mean that discipleship was increasing, and no one knew more deeply than the Lord Jesus Himself, the true motives of those who followed Him. Many probably thought that He was about to take Jerusalem by storm, throw out the Roman occupying forces and set up an earthly kingdom. But nothing could have been farther from the truth – see **John 18: 36**. Jesus was on His way to be crucified, not crowned, and Christianity was not going to be an easy ride in the wake of a revolutionary national hero! The Lord Jesus was totally honest and sincere in all that He did, and He did not want crowds of followers for the sake of them. He was not looking for quantity in discipleship but quality. To drive this lesson home, Jesus suddenly stopped His enthusiastic followers in their tracks (notice the word **“turned”** in **verse 25**) and solemnly laid down the terms of Christian discipleship. He said that there were certain conditions to be met, without which a man (or woman) could not be His disciple (**verses 26-27 and 33**). His three-fold use of this phrase **“cannot be my disciple”** points us to specific conditions He mentioned. This, then, is the setting in which the stories are told.

STORY The illustrations are simple. Construction is the idea in the unfinished tower. Conflict is the idea conveyed in engaging in war. Building a tower demands thought and care. To begin and not be able to finish, is to invite ridicule and also to engage in a futile exercise. **“This man began to build and was not able to finish.” (verse 30)** During the Victorian era in Britain, several odd and completely useless buildings were erected. It became almost fashionable for some of the wealthy and more eccentric folk to have these edifices built. They were often so elaborate or impractical and sometimes took so long to build that many were never finished and so became known as ‘follies’. Several of these can still be seen in Britain today – a constant memorial to man’s foolishness.

Engaging in warfare needs careful consideration too. The strength of the enemy has to be determined. If he is too powerful, conflict is out of the question and terms of peace must be negotiated. Both stories demand an intelligent assessment of the situation.

SUBSTANCE First let us look at this statement the Lord Jesus made leading into His illustrations of the Tower and of the King. We have already said that the Lord was looking for ‘total commitment’ in His followers. This commitment must be in every area of their lives – including their emotions!

The words of **verse 26** seem, at first reading, to be hard to understand. But the Lord Jesus was not telling His would-be disciples to actually ‘hate’ those of their own family, for He elsewhere teaches us that we must honour our parents and even love our enemies. (See also **1 John 2: 10-12, 15 and 1 John 4: 20**). In the sense in which it is used here, the word ‘hate’ means ‘to love less’. Jesus was saying that to be a true disciple of His means that whenever there is conflict of claims or loyalties, He must have priority. Love for Him must exceed the love we have even for those nearest and dearest to us on earth. This may produce difficulties – notice the three verses that come before Matthew’s account of this teaching at **Matthew 10: 34-36** – but there is no obedient alternative! **Acts 5: 29** puts the issue very clearly and precisely. Even our own self-desires and self-interests must take second place to Him. **Verse 27** is simple but searching – compare it with **Luke 9: 23**, and notice the word ‘daily’ there. Jesus was not, of course, suggesting that only Christians put to death on a cross would rank as genuine disciples – yet the picture He used was a vivid one. You see, a man carrying his cross to the place of execution would have no future plans of his own; he would have forfeited the control of his life. In the same way, the true disciple is marked by spiritual self-crucifixion – which can sometimes be agonisingly painful. To ‘die’ to our own comforts, ambitions and plans is the very essence of true Christianity.

Paul puts it perfectly in **Galatians 2: 20**. An everyday maxim to sum it up would be, ‘Christ first, others next, self last’.

The Lord Jesus wanted men to follow Him but He wanted them to be under no illusions as to the consequences. True discipleship would be costly! So in **verses 28-32** he exhorts His would-be disciples, to first count the cost before committing themselves to following Him. No wonder there were not many who were willing to accept such terms. I wonder if we would have followed Him then! And this is an important point. Have WE counted the cost of following the Lord Jesus?

In **John 6: 66** we read of those who went back and followed the Lord no more. This, no doubt, often happened in His contacts with men. When we decide to follow the Lord, we must, like the builder of the tower, consider whether we are fully prepared to finish the course we have begun. How many people do you know, who started well, continued for a while, but then fell back and are now away from the Lord? It was rather like this with the Galatian Christians. Paul had to say to them, **“You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Galatians 5: 7** It is sad when people have to say about Christians, ‘they began... but were unable to finish.’ It has been said that when we decide to follow Christ, we should be willing to do so whole-heartedly without considering the cost. But this was not the Lord’s teaching. Discipleship means following the Lord ALL the way, ALL the time.

Having said this it is also important to remember that the Lord Jesus does not expect us to try and follow Him purely in our own strength, or merely using our own natural abilities. To attempt to do so would most certainly end in failure. He knows our weaknesses and the power of Satan’s temptations and has promised us His Holy Spirit’s help along the way.

SEQUEL Look again at the three verses (**26, 27 and 33**) where the Lord said **“cannot be my disciple”**. Note them carefully. Now look at **verses 34-35**. These two verses represent the sequel to these challenging stories. Salt was used as a preservative, as flavouring and as a fertilizer. The inferior salt used in those days sometimes lost its saltiness by exposure to the elements, and when it did so it was virtually useless. It was then only fit to be thrown away. In the same way, the Christian disciple whose character becomes diluted with worldliness completely loses his effectiveness. **“You are the salt of the earth.” (Matthew 5: 13)** Christians should penetrate the world without ever becoming part of it. The Lord Jesus leaves us in no doubt as to the effect the testimony of committed Christians have upon the world in which we live. Are YOU having an effective influence on those with whom you live and work?

Study 3 The Wicked Husbandmen

 **Read Luke 20: 1-20**

The two remaining studies in the parables of Luke are linked with the closing days of the Lord’s earthly ministry. He felt increasing hostility towards Him because of the message He was bringing to the people. He was aware that counsel was being taken against Him and knew that the cross was not very far away. There is something very sad about those days. **Chapter 19 verses 41-44** tell us how the Lord drew near to Jerusalem and wept over it. It would seem that He could not bear to leave the world in which He was rejected, and especially His own earthly people, without revealing His deep love and concern for them. No one could really appreciate the deep feeling within the heart of the Lord for those who rejected Him. Think of this as we study this parable.

SETTING The parable was spoken in the Temple. The Lord Jesus had been teaching the people as He often did. While He was speaking, the chief priests, scribes and elders came, questioning His authority, with hostility in their tone. The Lord Jesus saw even deeper into their thoughts than was apparent. He saw rejection and rebellion in their hearts. Notice the skilful way in which He deals with these religious leaders. Rather than give them a direct reply, Jesus in turn asked them a question about John the Baptist's ministry. (**verses 3-4**) Now they were cornered! – caught out in their own unbelief and fear of the people. For whilst they had rejected John, he had been very popular with the people. (**see Matthew 3: 5**) More importantly, John had clearly said he was preparing the way for Jesus, whom he called **“the Son of God”** (**see John 1: 29-34**). So if they now acknowledged that John was a genuine prophet sent from God, they would be condemned for rejecting him – and for rejecting his testimony about Jesus. (**verse 5**) On the other hand, they were afraid to disown John in case of a violent reaction by the crowd. (**verse 6**) – (compare Herod's dilemma at **Matthew 14: 4-5**) In the end, they pretended that they were incapable of coming to a decision on the matter. (**verse 7**) Jesus refused to exchange words with such hypocritical liars. (**verse 8**) He was under no obligation to answer such dishonest questions, instead He told this parable to the assembled crowd.

STORY The story is typical of Eastern life. A man planted a vineyard and hired husbandmen to tend it for him. Leaving the responsibility with them, he went away for a long time. At the fruit-bearing season, the Master sent for the harvest due to him from his vineyard. Each servant he sent was ill-treated in one way or another, and no fruit reached him. What should he do? **“I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.”** (**verse 13**) But their response was even **more violent**, **“This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.”** (**verse 14**) The story says that they cast out the son and killed him. The Lord Jesus concludes the story by passing His own verdict. The husbandmen would be destroyed at his coming and the vineyard let to others.

SUBSTANCE The parable itself was simple enough, but its obvious interpretation was a word of warning to the scribes and the chief priests. It was also a word to the nation of Israel which was rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ for the VINEYARD represents the nation of which the scribes and Pharisees were a part. The Lord's hearers would have remembered and recognised the same kind of picture used by one of their great Old Testament prophets – see **Isaiah 5: 1-7; 27: 2-6**. The idea is that God had expected from His people something that He could enjoy. Just as in the natural realm, when we plant our gardens with vegetable seeds and fruit trees, we expect a harvest from them.

The **SERVANTS** sent for the fruit, were the many prophets and servants of God who had been sent to the people of Israel during its long history. Each one had come with a message and looked for those things that would please God. Men like Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah came and were often ill-treated. Some were even put to death. Each one when they came had found no 'fruit' from the vineyard of the nation. There is one prophet in the Old Testament who is known as the weeping prophet – Jeremiah. When you have the opportunity, read through his writings and you will see what the Lord Jesus meant in this parable.

As to who the **BELOVED SON** was, we need not ask! For last of all, God sent His only Son into the world. **“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”** (**John 1: 11; Hebrews 1: 1-2**) When you think that the cross of Calvary was not very far away from the Lord when He was actually speaking these words, the parable takes on a very vivid meaning. Possibly some of these very men to whom He was speaking

would, before many days had passed, be in Pilate's judgment hall shouting **“Crucify Him, Crucify Him.”** The lesson of this parable is that the Lord Jesus came to His people of Israel and found no fruit – nothing to please God in them. He was God's only Son, (**John 3: 16**), the perfect Servant and they cast Him out and crucified Him.

SEQUEL The sequel to this parable is very important. The Lord Jesus never spoke of His death as the end of things. Firstly we must notice the effect it had on the scribes and Pharisees. They were aghast at the thought of the kingdom of God being given to 'others', (**verse 16**) which could only mean the inclusion of the Gentiles. But instead of repenting, they hardened their hearts and watched for an opportunity to get rid of Him. (**verse 20**) How true the saying 'Light refused always brings greater darkness'.

Jesus now drove home the point concerning His authority by quoting from the very Psalm that the crowd had used in welcoming Him into the city. (**link verse 17 with Psalm 118: 22**) Peter applied the same quotation to the Lord Jesus more than once – see **Acts 4: 11** and **1 Peter 2: 7-8** – and, of course, the issue is crucial. These words are a wonderful prophecy of the final triumph of Christ. He who is 'the head of the corner' – the key-stone by which the entire building is held together – will one day take up His true position as head of the very nation that rejected Him and put Him to death. Notice how solemnly Jesus puts this in **verse 18**. If a person strikes himself against Christ in opposition or unbelief, he will hurt himself badly (compare **Isaiah 45: 9a**), and if the day comes when Christ comes down on him in judgment, he will then be utterly destroyed.

We can end our study of this important parable with this in mind. Israel, the chosen people of God, will one day see their rejected Messiah and will weep bitterly because of what they did to Him, and will acknowledge His power and glory.

Look at the following Scriptures: **Zechariah 12: 9-14; John 19: 37 and Revelation 1: 7.**

Study 4 The Meaning of Service

Read Luke 19: 11-27

It is quite difficult to see the connection between the incident of Zacchaeus (**Luke 19: 1-10**) and the Parable of the Pounds. The Lord Jesus ends the conversation with those wonderful words: **“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”**. (**Luke 19: 10**) He describes Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham. This is interesting because as a tax-gatherer he was a disgrace to the nation, and hated by his own people. Yet to the Lord Jesus, he was one of the lost whom He had come to save. It is quite wonderful to stop here and realise how the Lord Jesus is able to transform the most sinful and wasted life into something really worthwhile. Do you appreciate the value of God's salvation? However, it may well have been that the Scribes and Pharisees saw in the words of the Lord, the idea of setting up the kingdom of Israel with Jesus as its leader. Indeed there must have been similar thoughts in the minds of many who listened to Him. But the Lord KNEW He was going to the cross. This parable was spoken not very long before He went there to die.

SETTING Two reasons are given by Luke for the telling of this parable. Jesus was near to Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. No doubt there was a change in the attitude of the Lord Jesus as He neared the end of His ministry. We can detect His deep sense of burden and urgency. (**see Mark 10: 32-34**) His

disciples were aware of this too. Yet there were those who wanted a political Messiah – a popular hero to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. The Lord was able to detect this spirit in those around Him, so He told this parable of the nobleman who went away.

STORY The parable tells of a nobleman who goes on a journey. He goes in order to receive a kingdom and then return. Having ten servants, he gives them each a pound to trade with. Compare this with the story of the talents in **Matthew 25: 14-30**. You will quite easily see the difference in the stories, although in some ways they are similar. It is while he is away, that his citizens send to say that they no longer want him to reign over them. Then he returns and first of all deals with his servants. Two of the servants have traded well, so they are rewarded. The other appears before his lord having buried his pound in the ground. This pound is taken from him and given to the one with ten pounds. The enemies of the nobleman who were opposed to his rule are destroyed.

SUBSTANCE We have already thought about the character of servants. We noticed how essential it was that a servant should be faithful in every detail to the master he serves. We especially spoke about the Lord Jesus as the Perfect Servant. Now we are going to look at the meaning of SERVICE, as illustrated in this parable.

The main teaching will be made clear if we see the 'nobleman' as representing the Lord Jesus, and the 'ten servants' as representing all Christians. Although the Lord Jesus would indeed **"receive for himself a kingdom"**, (**Link verse 12 with Revelation 17: 12-14**) He must first go into 'a far country' (**Luke 19: 12**) that is, Heaven (**see John 14: 1-2**). In the meantime His servants had work to do in hostile surroundings.

1. **RESPONSIBILITY.** The nobleman gave each servant one pound and commanded them every one to, **"Do business, (or trade) till I come"**. They were responsible to their Master for what he had given them. Notice the pounds were still his, but the servants were to trade with them. We can think of this as representing the fact that the Lord had entrusted us with the stewardship of every gift we have, including the gospel itself (**see 1 Thessalonians 2: 4**) and we are answerable to Him for all we do. (Look up **2 Corinthians 5: 10**) In one sense the responsibility is the same. It may be, like the talents, we have different capabilities and gifts, but we all have the opportunity to use what God has given to us in order to WORK for Him. Notice we are only responsible for that which the Lord gives us to do, and we must never be tempted to judge the work of others.

2. **RESPONSE.** The nobleman returns. He has received his kingdom and now comes back to establish his rule. He requires an account of the outcome of his servants' work. One has gained ten pounds, another five. Good trading, you say! It is true that if we use what we have in God's service, He will multiply it. Look at **Revelation 3: 7-13** for an illustration of this. Yet one man buried his pound. True he gave it back to his lord as it was, but nothing had been gained and he stood fruitless before his Master. Will you be like that?

3. **REWARD.** The nobleman rewarded each servant for his labour. It is worth noticing that the rewards were according to the work done. The principle is always that each worker will receive its own reward. (See **1 Corinthians 3: 8-15**) We have looked at this Scripture before and it speaks to us of what is known as the Judgement Seat of Christ. When the Lord Jesus comes back again, every Christian will have to give an account of the work done for the great Master, who will reward in as

much as He values the things we do for Him.

Whether or not we receive the kind of reward mentioned in the parable will depend entirely on the quality of our stewardship. But of one thing we can be sure – His rewards will be fair. (**Revelation 22: 12**)

SEQUEL. The sequel seems to be in **verses 26-27**. The value of the reward is according to diligence. **"To everyone who has will be given."** The more we have in the things of the Lord and His service, the more increase we shall find. But the one who has done nothing useful was impoverished, and **verse 27** tells us of the sad end of all who rebel – they will be judged and destroyed at the coming of the King. Make sure your service for Him is of the highest order, so that in that day you will hear Him say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your Lord."** (**Matthew 25: 21**)

Questions

Study 1: The Sower and the Soils - Luke 8: 1-21

1. What important point does this parable illustrate?
2. a) What does **verse 1** tell us about the work of the Lord Jesus?
b) Why did the women of **verses 2-3** follow the Lord Jesus?
3. In what way does the stony ground illustrate a shallow faith?
4. What things in life can choke the good seed of the Word of God?
5. Who did Jesus say were those who were truly related to Him?

Study 2: Discipleship - Luke 14: 25-35

1. What is the possible explanation of why great multitudes of people followed Jesus at this time?
2. What point was Jesus making about discipleship by telling these two stories?
3. Explain briefly in your own words what Jesus was saying in **verses 26 – 27**.
4. Why did Jesus make His terms of discipleship so difficult?
5. What challenging message do you see in Jesus' statement **"You are the salt of the earth"**? (**Matthew 5: 13**)

Study 3: The Wicked Husbandmen – Luke 20: 1-20

1. Explain in your own words why Jesus wept over Jerusalem.
2. With what part of our Lord's ministry is this parable linked?
3. What did Jesus' question about John the Baptist reveal about the character of the Scribes and Pharisees?
4. What two things will the nation of Israel do in a coming day, when they meet their Messiah?
5. What Old Testament Scripture did Jesus use to explain how He would be victorious?

Study 4: The Meaning of Service – Luke 19: 11-27

1. Give two important things that the story of Zacchaeus tells us about the Lord Jesus.
2. What similarity is there between Christians today and the servants in this parable?
3. What principle, illustrated for us in this story, is also confirmed by **1 Corinthians 3: 8**?
4. What will take place at the Judgement Seat of Christ?
5. What part of this lesson has been most challenging to you and why?