



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Friday – Read Luke 8:4-15 – How are you hearing?

V7 and V14. The third soil the seed falls into is good in many ways. It has no initial impediments to the seed taking root; it is well watered and provides the ideal basis for healthy germination and growth in many ways. And so, the seed gives life to a plant that grows steadily and healthily over a prolonged period. But then the thorns hit their season of growth, and spring into renewed life. They demand the light the plant is growing in. They crave the moisture the plant is drawing life from. Their demands, their cravings, are overwhelming. They must be fed; they must be watered. Their needs are all-encompassing, and they will not relent.

There are people in every congregation who fall within this category of soil. People deeply affected by God's Word; men and women who make a profession of faith, and for years give apparent evidence that their profession is genuine. They are relatively consistent in their attendance at worship. Their 'giving' may not be what the Bible teaches, but it is more than just something. They may even find themselves playing a role in the church's life. There is nothing deceitful or manipulative in their behaviour. They believe themselves to be Christians; others see no reason to think otherwise, but then it happens. An issue comes into their lives, a significant problem, and instead of being like the man in Psalm 112:7,8, who "is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid until he looks in triumph on his adversaries", they collapse, unable to address the matter in a measured, thoughtful, godly way. God has let them down; the church leadership has failed them; the people in the church don't really care; and they're gone.

V8 and V15. The fourth and final soil is not perfect because there is no perfect soil, but it is good soil. The seed falls on it and takes root. There is water in the ground to meet its thirst. With time the plant grows and matures. Each year getting stronger, visibly maturing, withstanding some of the onslaughts of the weather and the birds, and in due season it does what it is supposed to do – it produces fruit, much good fruit. It's neither a simple nor an easy process. Fruit is never easy to produce. It doesn't just happen. It takes feeding, which requires consistent diligence and weathering, which is always demanding and is frequently relentless. But the truly converted believer will, by the grace of God, both persist in being in the right place to be fed and endure the weathering trials because of the joy set before them as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. And as they do so, they will produce some wonderful fruit to the Father's glory.

The fact that this is serious is clear from Jesus' concluding line, that those who have ears need to listen to what he is saying.

Thursday – Read Luke 8:4-15 – How are you hearing?

Luke in his account is much more concise than both Matthew (Matthew 13), and Mark (Mark 12), but the key to understanding this parable in all three Synoptic gospels is to get the fact that it's not about the seed nor the Sower, but the 'soils'.

V5 and V11. God is the one who sows the seeds of his Word in the person of Jesus, the Mediator King. Matthew says it is the 'Word of the Kingdom' (Matthew 13:19); we can't escape the idea of the Kingdom. This sowing is done through preaching, and it results in the seed falling on four different types of ground, leading in turn to four distinct results.

V5 and V11. When some of the seed falls on the path, it gets no time to nestle into the ground and form even the barest connections with the hardened soil before people trample on it. If some of the seed does manage to avoid being trampled, the birds quickly devour it. The seed doesn't have a hope of taking root and germinating. It might as well not have left the Sower's hand.

When the Word of God is preached, the enemy of Christ is active and would, if he could, steal the Word from the hearts of every human being. But he has been granted neither the right nor the power by God to do so. When they have been granted, though, he takes and uses them highly effectively. The power of the gospel has no impact on the hearer's heart because the hardened heart's impenetrable barrier, allied with the devil's swift action, means that there will be no response.

V6 and V13. There is the seed that falls where the bedrock is poking out through the smattering of soil on the surface. The seed does draw some life from whatever soil is available, and dramatically so, but the rock means there is no moisture, and the sapling plant quickly dies through dehydration.

When the gospel is preached, there will be people who will react with great joy. They will tell the minister that they have never heard anything like this before. With excitement, they will say they cannot get enough of the way he preaches the Bible. They may write a note or send him a card, telling him just how pleased they are to have come to 'his' church – at last, they have found a spiritual home suitable for them. Members in the congregation will see the joy in the person and be encouraged by their response; but then one day, probably within the space of four or five months, they won't appear at worship on the Lord's Day; and within a matter of a few weeks they are gone, saying to those who will listen to them that the minister is too harsh, too demanding, too overbearing in his preaching. They thought they had come to a church where they would hear about God's love in a way that would let them live as they pleased, but that's not the case. They don't like the fact that they are being challenged in terms of how God requires them to live, and so they'll go elsewhere. (Of course, that's not how they will express it.)

Monday – Read Luke 7:39-50 – It's about love, not religious activity!

V39. Simon doesn't say what he's thinking, but Jesus knows what it is. 'Jesus cannot be a prophet because he is permitting this woman to behave outrageously.' Jesus speaks, breaking the tension, and tells Simon that he has something to say. Simon's response is polite, but hints at contempt in its brevity.

v41. The analogy of the story Jesus then tells is simple; God is the creditor, man is the debtor, and sin is the debt. Neither debtor can pay, so the creditor graciously cancels the debt of both, no conditions attached. It's a simple scenario and matched by the simplicity of Jesus' question, "Now which of them will love him more?" The answer is obvious, but Simon manages to give the correct answer hesitantly revealing what is in his heart.

v44-47. Jesus turns his gaze on the woman and redirects everyone's attention to her. But he's not going to speak with her, Jesus' verbal focus is still on Simon. The conclusions he makes are direct and stated in a few words. In essence, this woman has done everything that Simon had abysmally failed to do. As host, Simon gave no water for Jesus' feet, contravening common politeness, Genesis 18:4, Judges 19:21. Simon had offered no kiss of peace, Genesis 29:13, 45:15. Simon had offered no oil and so, treated a friend without respect, Psalm 23:5, 141:5. 'This woman' had done all this and more. Her actions show one thing – she is overwhelmingly grateful that her sins, which, yes, are many, have been forgiven. Her outburst of affection flows from a heart set free by Christ's love for her. Her coming to Simon's home, her standing and then kneeling at Jesus' feet, the outpouring of her tears, the wiping of his feet with her hair, the relentless kissing of his feet, the unhesitating pouring of her perfume over his feet – they all speak to one thing – LOVE! How much she loved Jesus for setting her free from the guilt of her sins, yes many, but no more heinous than anyone else in the room, bar Jesus. Simon, on the other hand, what do his failures say of him?

Love is not evidenced in mere words; it is conveyed in deeds. The Christian doesn't need to be coaxed, cajoled, to worship God, to delight in obeying his commands, to fulfil the vows made to God when becoming a member of the Bride. The response of the heart to sins forgiven will always be marked by an overabundance of love for God and His people.

V48-50. Jesus' pronouncement of "Your sins are forgiven" to the woman is not a proclamation that her actions have warranted the forgiveness of her sins. It is a declaration of what the woman had experienced, before entering Simon's house. The resulting muttering in the room about who Jesus is goes unanswered; Jesus is not going to get involved. Why should he? If they can't deduce from what they have just seen and heard, then so be it. Instead, he turns to the woman and, with love and tenderness, bids her to "go in peace". A possession that is now her's, through the gift of faith that she has received from God – a gift that has led to her salvation.

Tuesday – Read Luke 8:1-3 - The blessing of godly women in the church.

V1. Jesus continues to travel throughout the country, declaring the good news of the Kingdom of God. It is genuinely sad that much of the church at large today is dominated by a culture of the 'kingdom of me'; manifested in the crave for emotionally engaging worship, for church that offers me the opportunity to pursue my personal ministry, and utilise my gifts as I understand them, towards the goal of 'my' fulfilment. The resulting loss of God's blessing is uncalculatable.

V2. Jesus was not alone as he travelled; he had the full complement of twelve disciples/apostles, those men whom he had chosen and called to follow him, and there were several women also. The first woman named is Mary Magdalene, named after her home town of Magdala on the west shore of the Lake of Galilee. Mary had been delivered from seven demons, evil spirits, and several infirmities. Jesus had changed this woman's life, and she would appear prominently in his life. This Mary was among the first people Jesus appeared to after his resurrection. Joanna is also named among the few women who were at the tomb of Jesus and subsequently saw him. Her husband, Chuza, was the chief steward or finance minister to King Herod (Antipas), so she was married to a man who held an influential position. Susanna is named, but nothing more is said of her in the New Testament.

The thing that unites these women, and the others who accompanied Jesus, is their care for him and his disciples. Some of the disciples would have had money, for example, Matthew the former Capernaum tax collector, and probably James and John from their family fishing business, as would Peter and Andrew; but evidently there was a need for more financial support and these ladies provided some of that "out of their means". Not that it would have been a luxury tour. It is clear, reading what Jesus undertook, that this would have been a demanding entourage to be part of. It wasn't just a case of turning up occasionally and cooking a few meals. Nor would they have needed continuous direction and encouragement. These women had weighed the cost and were in this no matter what it took, heart and soul, out of love for Jesus.

It is a blessing that we have such women in our congregation. Women who are, out of love for Christ, not only caring for and nurturing their families, but also willingly investing what time and gifts they have in the work of the kingdom of God. Yes, men are called to fulfil the biblical offices, but in my 27 years as a minister, my experience has been that if it hadn't been for godly women, the work of the church would have been severely impacted. Godly, mature women, who know that Christ loves them, and have a clear Biblical understanding of the church and how she functions, are essential to the life of the church.

Wednesday – Read Luke 8:4-15 – Parables.

This is the beginning of the second great body of Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Luke, which continues to Luke 9:50. Jesus is now being mobbed daily with people. Luke tells us that a great crowd gathered to hear him. Thousands of people are engulfing Jesus every day, eager to listen to him teach and see him do a miracle. The level of his popularity is breathtaking. Ordinarily someone caught up in such adulation would be focused on trying to maintain the level of fever pitch interest. But not Jesus. Why not? Surely the more people who hear him, the better. Yes, the issue is about the cost involved. Typically, when the size of the crowd increases, the message become less demanding. The mantra is 'Keep them happy, and don't ask them to be over-invested'. Jesus knew nothing of that type of an approach. His focus was on communicating reality and calling people to serious involvement based on genuine faith, not superficial interest.

V10. *Teaching in parables.* This new body of teaching begins with a parable that has a place of prominence in all three of the Synoptic gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Parables are the revelation of what Jesus calls the 'secrets' or 'mysteries' of the Kingdom of God. Those 'secrets' exist, because men, darkened in their minds and defiled in their hearts, cannot discern and understand the spiritual truth of the Kingdom of God. The capacity to understand the truth must be 'given' to man by the Holy Spirit. The fact that we can, by the work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives, understand these truths, is truly astonishing, given their eternal worth.

V11 But what of those who hear and do not understand? Jesus says, "seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." The unregenerate can listen to the truth, but they will not get it; why not? Because of the absence of a work of God's grace in their lives. Their minds are held in darkness, and their hearts continue to be as defiled, even more so now because of the impact of sin than the day they were born. The giftedness of the preacher is to no avail. Yes, there may be the occasional comment when something is said that moves them emotionally, but it superficial and has no long term, let alone eternal, effect. They may seek to replicate the behaviour of the truly converted, but there are always tell-tale gaps. It's the lack of genuine hunger, a real desire for the things of God. Their conversations are not peppered with references to Christ, his Kingdom, the work of the church, and of blessings received. The good news of the Kingdom has been freely offered to them without strings attached, but their minds and hearts simply aren't in it, so the secrets of the Kingdom remain as a mystery to them. The spiritual blessings are there for the taking, but they stay undevoured. Note, this is deliberate on God's part. This making of Kingdom truth, plain and clear, even though they cannot see and hear it, means that no one can have an excuse come Judgement Day, Romans 1:19,20.