

Luke 8:4-15 The harvest from your spiritual investments (Family Service message)

Introduction

How do you view what you are doing for God? Jesus in this short story talked about something all His hearers would have been familiar with. It is possible that He and they might have observed someone sowing seed in their strips of land on the day He told this story. This is what Jesus said: ⁴ *While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ⁵ 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 of the air ate it up.⁶ Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. When he said this, he called out, He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 8:4-8). Have you planted seeds in your garden (if you have one) this year? Do you think Jesus was talking just about planting seeds in the garden? I don't think so! As Jesus often spoke for hours at a time we only have a record of a very small amount of the things that He said. The teaching that has been recorded, including these special stories, must have been very memorable to the people listening to them.*

However, there was a problem because the close followers of Jesus were very confused. Luke 8:9 says: *His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 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.* In other words, a person not under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit will not understand the message that Jesus was giving to this congregation. One clear point is given in verse eleven: *The seed is the Word of God.* Therefore, the issue is how we respond to God's Word when it is presented to us. Jesus went on to help them, and us, understand better what He wanted to say to them. Jesus would tell them that we can face some very real problems in trying to live for God. There were four things that He had to say using this story about a farmer sowing his crop in his small field; four issues that were critical that had to be overcome, if we are to live the kind of lives God wants us to live.

1. The Problem of Busyness (Luke 8:12)

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 (Luke 8:12). This is not uniquely a Western society problem, but I suspect it is a bigger issue here than in the rest of the world. Our minds can be so full of things that are going on that we cannot genuinely listen to what other people are saying in our families, in our workplace or in this context listen to God. It can be when your mum or dad is asking you to do something and you are watching a favourite programme on the television – you make some kind of noise to indicate that you have heard what they have said and they go away thinking that you will agree to do what they requested. However, by the time the programme has finished you have completely forgotten what it was you were supposed to do next? Has that happened to you? It can happen to grown-ups in their conversations with each other as well. I find that if I do not write something down then it is quickly forgotten –even when I actually want to remember that information. There is always so much to remember –basic things of ordinary life – what are we going to have for tea? Did we buy ...? Have we paid that bill...? Responded to that phone or e-mail message? Completed that homework my teacher set for me? All of us can add in our own particular lists of 'things to do' for today or the next few days; sometimes the list can be very long and we can despair of ever getting through it. However, Jesus was not talking

about these things –important though they may be. He was concerned about people who do not make time for God in their lives. They know they should follow Jesus? they know they should be in church... they know that they should... but it always seems to get put off and sliding down the list of things to do sometime. Jesus was telling these people that the evil one, Satan, likes to distract people from giving their lives to God. He wants to fill their thoughts with all kinds of legitimate but less important things, rather than the things that please God. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Do you or I need to slow down sometimes and ask am I making time for God in my life? Or am I simply doing too much to allow me time to hear what God may be wishing to communicate to me?

2. The Problem of Superficiality (Luke 8:13)

Those on the rock 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 (Luke 8:13). Jesus has never been looking for converts. He has no interest in that objective. Instead He wants disciples –people who are life-long learners; individuals who are dedicated to becoming more like Him and honouring Him by seeking to work out their faith in practical ways in their daily lives. In John 2:23-24 it states: *Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and **believed in His name.***²⁴ *But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for **He knew all men.*** Some people at this festival had apparently declared with their lips that they wanted to follow Him. However, He knew that this was not a serious commitment and that they would not follow through in their daily lives. We do not know what people really think in their hearts, as Jesus did on that occasion. However, we will face the disappointment of seeing some people who appeared to be making such progress in their faith journey, but who never followed it through. By contrast in His Great Commission Jesus declared: *Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.*¹⁹ *Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*²⁰ ***and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Matthew 28:18-20). An addict to stay clean needs to win the victory every day of their lives. It is a daily battle they cannot afford to lose. The child of God each day needs to spend time in reading God's Word and in prayer to gain the strength and spiritual resources, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to maintain our witness for the Lord. We can all be tempted to go through the motions at times –and do to be honest, but regularly, or at least annually, to do a spiritual health check to guard our relationship with Jesus. And to ask ourselves: what kinds of things hinder my relationship with God? Are there activities that need to be dropped from my schedule or maybe replaced with better ones? Are there friendships that need to change? Could there be time that can be better used? Paul said these words to the Church at Colossae: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*² ***Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.***³ *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* To ask ourselves -what does this mean personally for me?

3. The Problem of Perspective (Luke 8:14)

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* (Luke 8:14). Here was seed that had been planted in good soil that had great potential with real opportunities to produce a good harvest. However, we can all get distracted from what we need to be doing in life. Your teacher at school may sometimes have to tell you to stop daydreaming and get on with your work? Any employer can sometimes ask an employee to regain their focus because their work input had fallen below an acceptable level. Some of the people in Thailand, featured in the BMS Harvest DVD, were distracted by the availability of drugs to ease their pain, instead of first looking for the redemption from sin that God offers us through Jesus Christ. What were the three distractions that Jesus noted here? **life's worries** –worrying about things instead of trusting the Lord when we have prayed about issues can undermine or diminish our joy in the Lord. The devil wants us to have a in-tray full of 'negative what if's'. **riches** –how many people can handle being both materially and spiritually prosperous? We'd all like to have a go! But the reality is that too many believers loose their sense of dependence on God when they have no worries about material things. **pleasures**: the pleasure industry in its many forms has used up more and more of our time –whether it is entertainment on a big screen in the home or cinema or one of many other small gadgets that can be so useful but also can eat up a disproportionate amount of our time.

Sometimes even Christians lose a sense of what is really important. I suspect that our Karen brothers and sisters, along with fellow believers from other tribal backgrounds in the refugee camps along the Thailand –Myanmar border have a clearer grasp on this than many Christians in our own land. After all they have risked their lives to follow their Lord and Saviour. Simon Peter certainly lost his sense of perspective concerning God the Father's plan for Jesus' life on one occasion. Jesus, after His disciples had been told about His death and resurrection and how it was necessary for Him to go to the cross to die in our place so that our sins could be forgiven, had to face this problem with at least one, possibly more of His disciples. In Matthew 16:22-26 Jesus gave a reply to Peter's critique of God's plan for His life. ²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Never, Lord! he said. This shall never happen to You!* ²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.* ²⁴ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.* ²⁵ *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it.* ²⁶ *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?* We all have our good intentions, but if we are to progress in our faith as we should then we need to go much further than that by putting our lives into His hands and acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

4. The Problem of Perseverance (Luke 8:15)

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.*** Jesus outlined here three things that are key in someone becoming a successful disciple. First of all: **who hear the word** – they need to be in the place where they can hear God's Word proclaimed. As Paul told the Church in Rome: *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile— the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him;* ¹³*for, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* ¹⁴ *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them.* ¹⁵ *And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*

(Romans 10:12-15). Secondly: **retain it** I have a slight problem with remembering things. I need to write things down quickly or it is lost! This can happen to us all. God wants us to come to know and love Him, but also to retain the memories of what He was teaching us. It can be helpful to keep a journal or diary in which we can jot down a few thoughts that might encourage and assist us in coming days. This word implies a conscious choice. Have you made such a choice to follow Jesus for the first time? Have you as a believer, who in your heart had been out of fellowship with the Lord, renewed your faith with a prayer of dedication? In Joshua 4, after the miraculous crossing of the River Jordan on dry ground by the whole Israelite community, their leader set up a permanent memorial to remind future generations of Israelites what the Lord had done. *And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan.* ²¹ *He said to the Israelites, In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?'* ²² *tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'* ²³ *For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.* ²⁴ **He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God** (Joshua 4:20-24). Thirdly: **by persevering produce a crop**: This is no overnight wonder. It is the fruit of dedicated Christian service over many years. In the witness of our words and of our lives we intend to signal that our greatest desire is to see other people come to know our Saviour. Do people around us get that message from us? Are we committed to life-long service for the Lord? In 1640 brilliant young Englishman John Harvard emigrated to America, dying one year later. The bright future planned for him in educating America's young people was dashed. He left £780 in his will (half his estate), together with around 320 books, to found a new university that would later be named after him. John Logie Baird experimented for a lengthy period of time trying to create a working television. Baird built what was to become the world's first working television set by purchasing an old hatbox and a pair of scissors, some darning needles, a few bicycle light lenses, a used tea chest, and sealing wax and glue. His persistence paid off. In October 1925 he visited the offices of the *Daily Express* to publicise the device he had invented: The news editor was terrified: he was quoted by one of his staff as saying: "For God's sake, go down to reception and get rid of a lunatic who's down there. He says he's got a machine for seeing by wireless! Watch him — he may have a razor on him-[Donald F McLean, *Restoring Baird's Image*, p.37]. We have a greater work to accomplish to see lives transformed by the Lord Jesus. However, your witness and mine is not just in the near future but equally over the longer term. Will you/ will I pledge to dedicate our lives to God to be available to be used by Him in pointing other people to Jesus? Look at this promise from Psalm 126:5-6: *Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy carrying sheaves with him.* May we by persevering in God's work experience great joy as we see many people in the years to come joining us in living for and serving our precious Lord and Saviour Amen.