Good morning, Moon Valley!

We are continuing our sermon series titled, “So You Can Know For Sure.” It is a study through the Gospel of Luke.

Today, we are going to be studying ▶ Luke 8:4-15. From this text, we are going to learn why people have such different responses to Jesus. Some reject him outright. Others are on fire for him. Some start out excited, then fall away. Others want to be more devoted but are drained by the busyness of life.

At the same time, we are going to learn why our own responses to Jesus can vary from one season to the next. In one season, we can be a fully devoted follower. In the next, we can feel dry and skeptical. In one season, we can experience the exhilaration of bringing life to others. In the next, we can feel overwhelmed and lifeless ourselves.

Why the different responses? And what can we do about it?

Our text is going to give us some insight. It begins in ▶ Luke 8:4, where it says,

> ESV Luke 8:4 And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he [Jesus] said in a parable,

Some time has passed since the events of the immediately preceding context in Luke 8:1-3, where Jesus’ entourage, including women, followed Jesus in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

We know from other gospels that intervening events include some people who wondered if Jesus could be the Messiah. Others said that he had lost his mind. Still others, including some Jewish leaders rejected Jesus outright, saying he is possessed by Beelzebul. This would have prompted

Jesus' disciples to question, Why the different responses? If Jesus really is the Messiah, why doesn't everybody just believe in him and follow him?

Now, in our text, a crowd is gathered. It is composed of people from all over, and if the most recent events are any indication, their receptivity to Jesus is all over the map. Some have rejected him. Some believe. Some have believed but now have doubts. Others are interested yet skeptical, drawn yet hesitant, compelled yet confused.

So, Jesus speaks to the varying degrees receptivity. But he does so using a ▶ parable. A parable is a figure of speech in which a spiritual truth is conveyed by an analogy of everyday experiences. The word, "parable" literally means to place alongside. It brings a spiritual truth alongside an everyday circumstance for the sake of comparison and learning.

In this case, the parable is of a sower or farmer who sows his seed on four different kinds of soil. It is commonly called the parable of the sower, and there may even be a subheading in your Bible that says that. But the focus of the parable is actually not on the sower, who is only mentioned once. The focus is on the different types of soil.

In our text, Jesus first tells the parable. Then he explains to his disciples why he uses parables. And finally, he explains to his disciples what this particular parable means.

In ▶ verse 5, Jesus begins to tell the parable, starting with the first kind of soil. He says,

> ESV Luke 8:5 "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."

I call this the hard soil. In Palestine, fields were commonly laid out in long, narrow strips divided by paths or roads. These paths were beaten down by foot traffic so that the surface of the soil was very hard and impenetrable by the seed. The seed that fell on the hard soil was taken away by birds before any germination occurred.

In ▶ verse 6, Jesus tells of the second kind of soil, saying,

> ESV Luke 8:6 “And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.”

I call this the shallow soil. In some places in Palestine there were beds or shelves of limestone rock hidden beneath a shallow layer of soil. This is the rock to which this verse refers. When seed was sown here, the shallow soil could not hold much moisture or nutrients, and there was no room for a normal root system. So, the seed would germinate and grow quickly, but would then fade and fall with adverse weather.

The third kind of soil is in ▶ verse 7, where Jesus says,

> ESV Luke 8:7 “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.”

I call this the divided soil. Farmers in Palestine struggled with weeds or thorns that grew among the crops. These weeds grew naturally and so vigorously they would choke the crop. They would rob the moisture and nutrients intended for the grain. The soil was divided in the sense that the roots of the primary plant and those of the choking thorns were competing for nutrients in the same soil.

The fourth and final soil is described in ▶ verse 8.

> ESV Luke 8:8 “And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” . . .

This is the good soil. The average yield in Palestine during the time of Jesus is estimated to be about ten times what was sown.[1] That is, there was an average of ten seeds harvested for every seed sown. So, the hundredfold yield in the parable is far greater than usual.

▶ Verse 8 caps off the parable saying,

> ESV Luke 8:8 . . . As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

This is Jesus’ invitation to reflect and seek to understand what he has just said in the parable about the four soils.

Jesus’ followers can’t figure it out on their own. They are stumped. But they do seek understanding. They ask Jesus privately what he meant by the parable.

Apparently, no one else asks.

In ▶ verses 9 and 10, Jesus explains why he uses parables.

> ESV Luke 8:9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”

Parables are Jesus’ way of simultaneously revealing the truth to those who are receptive and concealing it from those who are not. If one is

[1] Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary, 144.

receptive to the truth God has revealed, then God will reveal more truth to that person. It is progressive illumination.

Conversely, if someone rejects what God reveals, then he hardens himself and remains in the dark.

This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the ▶ last part of verse 10, where Jesus says, “seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand,” he is citing Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Old Testament, written about 700 years earlier.

The disciples in our text exemplify this concept of progressive illumination. God sheds light on some truth in a parable. The disciples are receptive and seek understanding. In response, the Lord provides further illumination by explaining the parable.

In contrast, those unreceptive to the initial light of the parable walk away and remain in darkness. Repeated rejection brings greater hardness as a form of judgment.

You may be wondering, “Why doesn’t Jesus come right out make everything obvious to everyone?

As the late theologian C.S. Lewis and others have argued, God draws us by giving us enough light to move toward him and, ultimately, to believe in him, such that all are without excuse. But he does not give us so much light that it would overwhelm our freedom to choose him and love him.

Beginning in ▶ verse 11, Jesus explains the parable to the followers who are receptive. He says,

> ESV Luke 8:11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”

The word of God is that which is spoken by the Lord in person and/or in Scripture. Earlier in the chapter, we saw that Jesus had been proclaiming the good news, also known as the gospel. What Jesus says in ▶ John 5:24 beautifully summarizes this good news. He says,

> ESV John 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

In the parable, the seed is the word of God, and the focal point of his word is this good news.

Now, Jesus begins to explain the various responses to the gospel from the parable. As we go through Jesus’ explanation of the different soils, I invite you to consider which one best describes you in this moment.

In ▶ verse 12, he begins with the hard soil, saying,

> ESV Luke 8:12 “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.”

Here we see that the hard soil represents a hard heart—one that is not receptive at all to the gospel. Indeed, throughout the parable, the different soils represent differing conditions of the heart.

In the case of the hard heart, there is no germination. There is no passing from spiritual death to new life. The impenetrable heart allows the devil to snatch away the word before there is belief that leads to salvation.

Then, in ▶ verse 13, Jesus explains the shallow soil.

> ESV Luke 8:13 “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.”

Jesus states plainly that those with a shallow heart ▶ believe. The issue is not the sincerity of their faith, but the duration of it.

In addition, in the gospels, the concept of ▶ receiving the word is essentially synonymous with a salvation experience.[2] These people receive it. They are saved. In fact, they once took joy in their salvation. This is going to come into play later, so save it to your mental desktop.

It is also clear that those with a shallow heart have experienced new life. Back in ▶ verse 6 of the parable, Jesus states plainly that the seed grew. The reality of growth is not in question, only the duration of it. Seeds that grow have germinated and have life.

It is also significant to note that, while Luke says they have ▶ “no root,” the likely intent is to convey that they had no *firm* root, which is exactly how some English translations render it. The point is not the complete absence of roots, but the insufficiency of roots for stability and fruitfulness.

Those with a shallow heart wither and fall away because their roots are shallow. They have not become deeply rooted in God’s word. Their faith has no depth to weather adversity. They become disillusioned, doubtful, disappointed, and they drift away from the Lord.

In ▶ verse 14, Jesus explains the divided soil, saying,

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[2] Dillow, Joseph, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th ed. (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018), 534.

> ESV Luke 8:14 “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.”

Those with a divided heart have also believed, have new life, and have experienced some growth. This is clearly inferred by Jesus’ reference to ▶ “their fruit.” They have fruit. The presence of fruit presupposes life and growth. This issue is that the fruit doesn’t mature.

The reason for their lack of mature fruitfulness is their excessive preoccupation with worldly things. The competing priorities choke out fruitfulness. Jesus points to the choking influence of ▶ “the cares and riches and pleasures of life.”

In this case, “cares” describe a heart weighed down by worries or anxieties about one’s own welfare.

“Riches” describe a heart that is preoccupied with materialism and possessions.

“Pleasures” describe a heart fixated on the pursuit of comfort, entertainment, enjoyment, and the next dopamine hit.

There is nothing wrong with caring for ourselves or enjoying our possessions or pursuing pleasure. But when these become misplaced priorities that compete with the priority of God, then our fruitfulness is choked out.

In ▶ verse 15, Jesus finally explains the good soil, saying,

> ESV Luke 8:15 “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.”

Jesus presents three distinguishing descriptors of the people represented by the good soil.

First, they have ▶ "an honest and good heart." The terms "honest" and "good" are synonymous and broad. In the context of the parable, this honest and good heart may be defined as one that does not suffer from the problems of the other three hearts.

It is not hard, but receptive to God's word.

It is not shallow, but deeply rooted in God's word.

It is not divided, but prioritizes God and his word above all else.

Second, in reference to the word of God, they ▶ "hold it fast." This is a translation of the original Greek word, κατέχω (ka-TEK-oh). It means to listen, to hear, or to pay close attention to, with a view to responding in conformity. It is to heed.[3]

It is also in the present tense, suggesting that this is an ongoing process, not a one-time event.

Here, the entirely of God's word is in view, not just the gospel message.

The idea is the people with a good heart continually devour God's word and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, proactively apply it to their daily living as the only source of real transformation and fruitfulness.

Third, these people ▶ "bear fruit with patience."

[3] Logos, Sense.

The fruit in view is not specified, but in other places in Scripture it stands for Christlikeness, as in the case of Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul says,

> ESV Galatians 5:22 . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control . . .

Here in verse 15, the word for patience describes a steadfast endurance that withstands hardship or stress that inevitably comes with following Christ. It is not always easy.

We have now worked our way through the text. But before proceeding to personal application, we need to address some controversies about who is actually saved in the parable. This is important because it affects how we apply it.

There is no controversy about ▶ the hard soil. Pretty much everyone agrees that the hard soil represents those who have never believed in Jesus and therefore are not saved.

Neither is there disagreement about ▶ the good soil. Everybody thinks that these are genuine believers who are indeed saved.

Nevertheless, ▶ the soils in the middle—the shallow soil and the divided soil—are contested.

I don't have hard statistics, but I would say that the majority of Bible scholars and Christian traditions interpret the shallow and divided soils to represent people who are going to hell.

With all due respect, I think the majority view is wrong.

As a play on words, I was tempted to say that the interpretation of the majority is soiled. But that sounds a little too edgy, even though I said, "with all due respect," which, according to theologian, Ricky Bobby of Talladega Nights, gives you permission to say anything, according to the Geneva Convention.

Many interpret the shallow and divided soils to represent people who were once saved and then lost their salvation because they fell away or became unfruitful.

But once you are born again—once you have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life—you can't undo that. You can't become unborn. You can't take the "eternal" out of eternal life. Your spiritual adoption is not reversible.

Others believe the shallow and divided people are going to hell because they were never truly saved to begin with. The argument goes something like this: "Yes, Jesus said there was belief and life and growth and even some fruit. But what Jesus didn't say but actually meant is that it was all counterfeit. These people are fakes who are going to hell as evidenced by the fact that they are not faithful and fruitful, as all true Christians will certainly be to the very end." That's the argument.

But to me, this is a rootless argument unsupported by the text. Remember, I have already explained how these people are genuine believers, not fakes.

If the majority view is correct, then nobody is saved except those in the good-soil-with-hundredfold-fruit category. If that is true, we are all in jeopardy. And assurance is impossible because, even if you are fruitful now, you never know if and when your fruitfulness may drop to a level that disqualifies. And exactly where would that level be, and how long do you linger there before you're toast?

I hold a minority view that is out of step. I interpret the shallow and divided soils to represent genuine believers who are simply not fruitful in a particular season of life for the reasons Jesus explains.

Who of us has not had seasons of shallowness in our lives as believers? Who of us has not struggled with a divided heart?

Let me ask you an important question. My purpose is not to out you or condemn you, but to invite some honest, private introspection for your own well-being.

Which ▶ of the four soils best describes you right now?

Are you ▶ the hard soil? If so, I encourage you, as a matter of intellectual integrity, open your heart and be willing to follow where the light of evidence leads, even if it leads to faith in Jesus.

Are you ▶ the shallow soil? If so, I encourage you to pursue the spiritual disciplines that allow the word of God to become deeply rooted in your heart.

Are you ▶ the divided soil? If so, pull the weeds of misplaced priorities that are choking your fruitfulness.

Are you ▶ the good soil? If so, give thanks and keep holding fast to God's word with steadfast endurance.

As I thought about what the big idea might be from this text, a directive from another part of Scripture came to mind. Here it is: ▶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. That's the big idea. That's what this is about.

The parable is about receptivity to the word of God. Believers represented by the good soil let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. The others do not.

The hard soil does not let the word of Christ enter at all.

The shallow soil lets the word of Christ visit superficially, occasionally, compartmentally, maybe on Sundays. There is no rich, daily dwelling in every aspect of life.

The divided soil lets the word Christ in, but there is no room to dwell richly because there are so many other competing priorities that choke any possibility of richness.

The wording of the big idea comes from ▶ Colossians 3:16, where the apostle Paul says,

> ESV Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The word, ▶ “dwell” means to live in. The idea of dwelling suggests that the word of Christ lives with you and makes itself at home in everyday life, informing your thoughts, your motives, your attitudes, your decisions, your behavior throughout the day.

The word, ▶ “richly” means abundantly. The word of Christ is not to be confined to the medicine cabinet of your heart to pull it out only when you think you might need it. It is to be so abundantly present that it permeates every room in your heart, even the closet where dark secrets hide.

The pronoun, ▶ “you” is not singular. It is plural. Letting the word of Christ dwell in us is not just something we do alone; it is something we do together in community.

The rest of Colossians 3:16 helps us understand how we can cultivate good soil—how we can be receptive—how we can let the word of Christ dwell in us richly.

First, we can do it by ▶ “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.”

Notice this is a community effort. We are to teach and help *one another* to learn and live out the word of Christ. This engages our minds with logic, language, and rationality.

Second, Paul says we can let the word of Christ dwell in us richly by ▶ “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Again, this is something we do together. This engages our hearts with creativity, imagination, and emotion.

The picture is every one of us bringing every part of us so that we can let the word of Christ dwell in us richly together. When we do that, we are fruitful. And when we are fruitful, we bring life to the world.

How beautiful!

Where do you start?

You have a menu of options.

At Moon Valley, we have just published our Ministry Master Plan for the 26/27 ministry year that starts now. The Plan contains every single opportunity we offer to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Digital copies are available online and hard copies are available at the Connect Counter in the lobby. I invite you to grab one and review it with prayerful openness to where God may want you to get involved.

Someone will be at the Connect Counter to answer any questions you may have.

Remember the big idea: ▶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Let's pray.

Lord, please give us the wisdom and courage to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly so that we may bear fruit for you and bring life to the world. In particular, I pray that you would use the Ministry Master Plan to draw people to where they need to go to grow. Amen.