

## Luke: 8:4–15

### From Catena Aurea:

4. And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:

5. A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

6. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

8. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

9. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

10. And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

12. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

15. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

THEOPHYLACT. That which David had foretold in the person of Christ, I will open my mouth in parables, (Ps. 78:2.) the Lord here fulfils; as it is said, And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable. But the Lord speaks by a parable, first indeed that He may make His hearers more attentive. For men were accustomed to exercise their minds on dark sayings, and to despise what was plain; and next, that the unworthy might not receive what was spoken mystically.

ORIGEN. And therefore it is significantly said, When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city. For not many but few there are who walk the strait road, and find the way which leadeth to life. Hence Matthew says, that He taught without the house by parables, but within the house explained the parable to His disciples. (Matt. 13:36.)

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 44. in Matt.) Now His going, Who is every where, was not local, but through the vail of the flesh He approached us. But Christ fitly denominates His advent, His going forth. For we were aliens from God, and cast out as criminals, and rebels to the king, but he who wishes to reconcile man, going out to them, speaks to them without, until having become meet for the royal presence, He brings them within; so also did Christ.

THEOPHYLACT. But He went out now, not to destroy the husbandmen, or to burn up the earth, but He went out to sow. For oftentimes the husbandman who sows, goes out for some other cause, not only to sow.

THEOPHYLACT. But the Son of God never ceases to sow in our hearts, for not only when teaching, but creating, He sows good seed in our hearts.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. But He went out to sow His seed, He receives not the word as borrowed, for He is by nature the Word of the living God. The seed is not then of Paul, or of John, but they have it because they have received it. Christ has His own seed, drawing forth His teaching from His own nature. Hence also the Jews said, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? (John 7:15.)

THEOPHYLACT. He said not that the sower threw some on the way side, but that it fell by the way side. For he who sows teaches the right word, but the word falls in different ways upon the hearers, so that some of them are called the way side: and it was trodden down, and the birds of the air devoured it.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For every way side is in some measure dry and uncultivated, because it is trodden down by all men, and no seed gains moisture on it. So the divine warning reaches not the unteachable heart, that it should bring forth the praise of virtue. These then are the ways frequented by unclean spirits.

There are again some who bear faith about them, as if it consisted in the nakedness of words; their faith is without root, of whom it is added, And some fell upon a rock, and as soon as it sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 44. in Matt.) For as the thorns do not let the seed grow up, but when it has been sown choke it by thickening round it, so the cares of this present life permit not the seed to bear fruit. But in things of sense the husbandman must be reprov'd who would sow amid thorns on a rock and the way side, for it is impossible that the rocks should become earth, the way not be a way, the thorns not be thorns. But in rational things it is otherwise. For it is possible that the rock should be converted into a fruitful soil, the way not be trodden down, the thorns dispersed.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Now the rich and fruitful ground is the honest and good hearts which receive deeply the seeds of the word, and retain them and cherish them. And whatever is added to this, And some fell upon good ground, and springing up, brought forth fruit an hundredfold. For when the divine word is poured into a soul free from all anxieties, then it strikes root deep, and sends forth as it were the ear, and in its due season comes to perfection.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But what the meaning of the parable is, let us hear from him who made it, as it follows, And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

BASIL. (Hom. in Princ. Prov.) Hearing has reference to the understanding. By this then our Lord stirs us up to listen attentively to the meaning of those things which are spoken.

ORIGEN. (in Prov. 1.) Now a parable is a narration of an action as done, yet not done according to the letter, though it might have been, representing certain things by means of others which are given in the parable. An enigma is a continued story of things which are spoken of as done, and yet have not been done, nor are possible to be done, but contains a concealed meaning, as that which is mentioned in the Book of Judges, that the trees went forth to anoint a king over them. (Judges 9:8.) But it was not literally a fact as is said, A sower went out to sow, like those facts related in history, yet it might have been so.

GREGORY NAZIANZEN. (ubi sup.) When you hear this you must not entertain the notion of different natures, as certain heretics do, who think that some men indeed are of a perishing nature, others of a saving nature, but that some are so constituted that their will leads them to better or worse. But add to the words, To you it is given, if willing and truly worthy.

THEOPHYLACT. But to those who are unworthy of such mysteries, they are obscurely spoken. Hence it follows, But to the rest in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. For they think they see, but see not, and hear indeed, but do not understand. For this reason Christ hides this from them, lest they should beget a greater prejudice against them, if after they had known the mysteries of Christ, they despised them. For he who understands and afterwards despises, shall be more severely punished.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. For when they enter the Church they gladly wait on the divine mysteries, but with infirmity of purpose. But when they leave the Church they forget the sacred discipline, and as long as Christians are undisturbed, their faith is lasting; but when persecution harasses, their heart fails them, for their faith was without root.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 44. in Matt.) And to sum up many things in a few words. Some indeed as careless hearers, some as weak, but others as the very slaves of pleasure and worldly things, hold aloof from what is good. The order of the way side, the rock, and the thorns is well, for we have first need of recollection and caution, next of fortitude, and then of contempt of things present. He therefore places the good ground in opposition to the way, the rock, and the thorns. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, &c. For they who are on the way side keep not the word, but the devil takes away their seed. But they who are on the rock sustain not patiently the assaults of temptation through weakness. But they who are among thorns bear no fruit, but are choked.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

#### **8:4–8 The Parable of the Sower**

##### **The Sower is Jesus.**

Cyril of Alexandria: He is truly the Sower of all that is good, and we are his farm. The whole harvest of spiritual fruits is by him and from him. He taught us this when he said, “Without me you can do nothing.”  
Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.

### **One Cultivator of the Soil.**

Clement of Alexandria: It is clear that the Greek preliminary education combined with philosophy itself has come from God to human beings not as an ultimate goal but rather as rainstorms bursting on fertile soil, manure heaps, and houses alike. Grass and wheat sprout alike. Fig trees and other, less respectable trees grow on top of graves. These growths emerge in the pattern of the genuine articles, because they enjoy the same power of the rain, but they do not have the same charm as those that grow in rich soil. They either wither or are torn up. Yes, the parable of the seed as explained by the Lord has its place here too. There is only one cultivator of the soil within human beings. It is the One who from the first, from the foundation of the universe, has been sowing the seeds with potential growth, who has produced rain on every appropriate occasion in the form of his sovereign Word. Differences arise from the times and places that receive the Word. Stromateis 1.7.1–2.

### **Seed that Grows Must Decay First.**

Clement of Rome: Let us consider, beloved, the resurrection: the night sleeps, and the day arises; the day departs, and night returns. Let us look at the crops to see how and in what manner the planting takes place. “The sower went forth” and cast each of the seeds into the ground, and they, falling on the ground dry and bare, decay. Then from their decay, the greatness of the Lord’s providence raises them up, and from one seed many grow up and bring forth fruit. 1 Clement 24.

### **Sowed on Jesus the Way.**

Origen: If we hear “the word” and from this hearing our earth “immediately” produces vegetation that “withers” before it comes to maturity or fruit, our earth will be called “rocky.” Those things that are said should press forward in our ears with deeper roots so that they both “bear fruit” of works and contain the seeds of future works. Then each one on our earth will truly bear fruit in accordance with its potential, “some a hundred fold,” some “sixty,” others “thirty.” We also considered it is necessary to admonish you that our fruit does not have “darnel” or “tares.” This is so that it is not “beside the way” but sown in the way that says, “I am the way,” so that the birds of heaven may not eat our fruits or our vine. Homilies on Genesis 1.4.

### **Ears Refer to the Inner Person.**

Basil the Great: What should we say concerning this: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”? It is evident that some possess ears better able to hear the words of God. What does he say to those who do not have those ears? “Hear, you deaf, and, you blind, behold.” All such expressions are used in reference to the inner man. Homily on Psalm 33.13.

### **8:9–10 The Meaning of Parables**

#### **Mysteries Revealed to the Faithful.**

Cyril of Alexandria: The word of the Savior, so to speak, is constantly hidden. The blessed psalmist has also brought him before us saying, “I will open my mouth in parables.” See what he spoke in olden times happened. “A large multitude was assembled round him of people from all Judea, and he spoke to them in parables.” Since they were not worthy to learn the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, he wrapped the word for them in darkness....

It was not granted to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but rather to us, who are more ready to embrace the faith. He has given us, since he is perfect wisdom, the ability to understand parables and the dark saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. Parables, we may say, are the images not of visible objects but rather spiritual and understandable by the intellect. The parable points out to the eyes of the mind what is impossible to see with the eyes of the body. It beautifully shapes out the subtlety of intellectual things by means of the things of sense and palpable to the touch. Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.

### **8:11–15 The Parable of the Sower Explained**

#### **The Devil Snatches Good Seed Off the Path.**

Cyril of Alexandria: The seed is the Word of God. Those on the way are they who have heard. Afterwards, the devil comes and takes away the Word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved. We see in a moment that the hardness of the ground causes the seed on the pathways to be snatched away. A pathway always is hard and untilled, because it is exposed to every one’s feet. It does not admit any seed into it, but it lies rather upon the surface, ready for any birds that will to snatch it away. All whose

minds are hard and unyielding, and so to speak, pressed together, do not receive the divine seed. The divine and sacred admonition does not find an entrance into them. They do not accept the words that would produce in them the fear of God and by means of which they could bring forth as fruits the glories of virtue. They have made themselves a beaten and trampled pathway for unclean demons, yes, for Satan himself, such as never can bear holy fruit. Let those who are awake, whose heart is sterile and unfruitful, open your mind, receive the sacred seed, be like productive and well-tilled soil, bring forth to God the fruits that will raise you to an incorruptible life. Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.

### **The Devil Removes the Word of Catechesis.**

Symeon the New Theologian: When you come out of the church, do not begin to be distracted toward empty and useless matters, lest the devil come and find you occupied with them. It is like when a crow finds on the plain a grain of wheat, before it has been covered with earth, and picks it up and flies off. The devil removes the memory of these words of catechetical lectures from your hearts, and you find yourselves empty and deprived of beneficial teaching. Discourse 30.1.

### **The Ungrateful Soul a Public Highway for Evil.**

Ephrem the Syrian: "For it fell on the edge of the path." This is an image of the ungrateful soul, like the one who received one talent despised the goodness of him who gave it. Because this ground was tardy in receiving its seed, it became a public highway for all evil. Consequently there was no place in its ground for the Teacher to penetrate into it like a laborer, break up its hardness and sow his seed there. The Lord described the evil one in the imagery of a bird who snatches it away. He made known that the evil one does not forcefully snatch away from the heart the teaching entrusted to it. In the parable's imagery, he revealed the voice of the gospel standing at the door of the ears like the grain of wheat on the surface of the ground that has not hidden in its womb the seed which fell upon it. The birds were not permitted to penetrate the earth in search of the seed that the earth hid under its wings. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 11.13.

### **Persecution Causes Confusion and Loss of Faith.**

Cyril of Alexandria: Let us consider those others of whom Christ said, "And those upon the rock are they who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and they have no root. These believe for a while and in time of temptation depart away." There are men whose faith has not been proved. They depend simply

on words and do not apply their minds to examining the mystery. Their piety is sapless and without root. When they enter the churches, they feel pleasure often in seeing so many assembled. They joyfully receive instruction in the mysteries from him whose business it is to teach and laud him with praises. They do this without discretion or judgment, but with unpurified wills. When they go out of the churches, at once they forget the sacred doctrines and go about in their customary course, not having stored up within themselves any thing for their future benefit. If the affairs of Christians go on peacefully and no trial disturbs them, even then they scarcely maintain the faith, and that, so to speak, in a confused and tottering state. When persecution troubles them and the enemies of the truth attack the churches of the Savior, their heart does not love the battle, and their mind throws away the shield and flees. Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.

#### **A Hard Word Finds No Place on Hard Ground.**

Ephrem the Syrian: "That which fell on the rock ..." The good Lord revealed his mercy. Although the hardness of the ground was not cultivated, he did not withhold its seed from it. This ground represents those who turn away from his teaching like those who said, "This word is hard; who can listen to it?" It is like Judas, who heard his word and flourished through his signs but was without fruit in the moment of testing. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 11.14.

#### **Worldly Cares Choke the Seed.**

Cyril of Alexandria: "Those that fell among the thorns are they who have heard, and go, and are choked by cares and wealth and pleasures of the world, and yield no fruit." The Savior scatters the seed that acquired a firm hold in the souls that received it. It already shot up and just began to be visible when worldly cares choke it and it dries up, being overgrown by empty occupations. The prophet Jeremiah said, "It becomes a handful, that can produce no meal." In these things, we must be like skillful farmers who patiently cleared away the thorns and uprooted whatever is hurtful, and then we scatter the seed in clean furrows. One can say with confidence that doubtless "they will come with joy, bearing their sheaves." If a person scatters seed in ground that is fertile in thorns, fruitful in briars and densely covered with useless stubble, he sustains a double loss. First, he loses his seed, and second, his work. In order that the divine seed may blossom well in us, let us first cast out of the mind worldly cares and the unprofitable anxiety which makes us seek to be rich. Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.



### **Good Seed Yields Good Fruit in Degrees.**

Cyril of Alexandria: This good seed is worthy of admiration. Rich and well-productive land brings forth fruit a hundredfold. They say that the best soils sometimes under cultivation produce a hundredfold, so this is a mark of every fertile and productive spot. One of the holy prophets said from the mouth of God, "And all nations shall congratulate you, because you are a desirable land." When the divine word falls upon a pure mind skillful in cleansing itself from things hurtful, it fixes its root deeply and shoots up like an ear of corn. It brings its fruit to perfection being strong in blade and beautifully flowered. Commentary on Luke, Homily 41.