Luke 8:1-15 – The Parable of the Soils Clint Le Page
Main point – The Gospel – Persevere in sharing it, believing it and producing fruit

It's hard to talk about Jesus with people when you know it might bring hard questions, or your rejection.-------
It's discouraging when someone, or person after person, rejects Jesus.(**SLIDE**)
It's hard when someone seemed to become a Christian, and then walks away.
It's really hard when someone we love, from church, or even a child, knows the Gospel and then walks away from trusting Jesus.
Or if they were a leader, their sin and abandoning of their faith, can make you question everything.----------
Expectations really matter.(**SLIDE**)----------
Last week we considered the challenge of unmet expectations.
Today we're asked to have realistic expectations.
Realistic expectations in evangelism, and others persevering in the faith.------
And we'll be encouraged to persevere and not give up.
I hope you'll leave encouraged to do that.----------

We're in this series in Luke's Gospel.(**SLIDE**)----------
Remember Jesus has been preaching the good news to the crowds.
He's healed many of demons, diseases and disabilities; even raised the dead.---
Last week in **Luke 7** we heard Jesus say that John the Baptist was a great one, who prepared people for him; God's arrival on earth.
But just as many rejected John, they reject Jesus, because he doesn't meet their expectations.----------
We're actually skipping vv36-50, because Andy covered that passage in our Meet Jesus Sunday on August 23rd.
Remember that was the sinful woman anointing Jesus' feet with her tears and perfume at the Pharisee's house.------
So the context of our passage is, many people, especially the Jewish leaders, are rejecting Jesus.
In **v50(SLIDE)** Jesus said to the woman,' Your faith has saved you'.
Her many sins were forgiven by her reliance on Jesus.
But many don't believe they need saving by Jesus, and aren't saved.--------

Which brings us to our passage and **Point 1, Responses to the Word(SLIDE)**
v1 - Jesus is travelling through towns & villages preaching & telling the good news, literally, evangelizing. Speaking the good news or Gospel, that God's rule has come in him.
And we'll come back to vv2&3, but skip down to **v4.**
He's teaching a large crowd, and he shares a parable.
A parable is a picture in words, often a story, which makes a comparison.---
This one is famously called the Parable of the Sower, but really, it's about seed and 4 soils.----
Luke's account is a condensed version of the story in Matt 13 and Mark 4.-----
Jesus says a sower went out to sow his seed.
Picture someone scattering seed by hand.(**SLIDE**)
And the seed falls on 4 different types of soil or ground.
Ground 1 – the **path**.
V5, some seed fell along the path, it was trampled on and the birds ate it up.-----
Jesus explains in **vv11-12,** the seed is the Word of God, which Jesus is even preaching right now.

Some people when they hear the good news about Jesus being Lord and Saviour, they don't accept it, they trample on it.[cf Matt 13.19]
And 'then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts'.
It's like what **2 Cor 4 says(SLIDE-v3-4) –** the god of this age, who is the devil, blinds people so they don't see the light of the gospel of Christ.-----[Eph 2.2; John 12.31]
So back in Lk 8.12, those with closed minds and hard hearts, like a path, don't believe and are not saved.
They don't commit to and put their trust in Jesus.------
This is like many leaders & others in Jesus' day, and most in our day.------

The second way people respond to God's word about Jesus, is like the seed that falls on the **rock**, **v6.(SLIDE)**
It grows up, but soon withers away.
And in **v13,** this represents people who hear the word and at first receive it with joy.
This might be like the majority of people in the crowd.
Physically following Jesus, wowed by his miracles, amazed by his teaching.
But will it last?----- No!
It's a shallow temporary response. It seems like genuine faith.
But they believe for a while and then fall away in a time of testing.
Matt 13 says(**SLIDE-13.21)** a time of distress or persecution because of the word, leads them to give up on Jesus.
A time of suffering reveals the reality.----------
Do you know anyone like this?----------
Maybe it's the person goes forward at an evangelistic meeting, who prays a prayer, and might even joyfully get baptized.
Maybe they do Christianity Explored and say that Jesus has saved them, but in months or years, they are no longer walking with the Lord.
They decide that Jesus isn't worth it – and they didn't sign up for this suffering.----------

The 3rd type of ground is the seed falling among the **thorns**, **v7,** which choke the plant.
v14, they hear the Gospel and seem to follow Jesus, joining the church.
But worries, riches and the pleasures of this life choke them, so they don't mature, they don't produce fruit. [Mk 4.19 says it becomes unfruitful]
Worries and caring more about other things, or desiring other things more than Christ, squashes any apparent faith out of the person.
Because they love and seek something else more – career, wealth, perfect family, perfect body, sexual pleasure, whatever.----------

Then the 4th type of soil is the **good ground**, **v8, v15.**
The Gospel seed falling on these people's ears, is received by honest & good hearts, which grows.
They hear the word, hold onto it, and 'by enduring produce fruit'.
By persevering in believing & trusting Christ, they produce fruit
Even a massive harvest – 100 times what was sown. [Mt 13 & Mk 4 speak of varying levels of fruit produced, 30, 60 or 100 times.]----------
I've really enjoyed the Amazon Prime series**, Clarkson's farm(SLIDE)**
And it's given me a new appreciation of the great challenges for farmers.
But Charlie, on the right there, noted that over 5 years Jeremy's farm gained an average yield of 7 tons per hectare.
I worked out that's about 35 times what was sown.----------
So producing 100 times, is a massive harvest.---------

God wants his word to really bear fruit in his people.----------

Let's think about **Your response to the word(SLIDE)**
Even today, the seed has been sown.
You've heard the word of God read, you're now hearing it explained & applied.
Are you listening?--------
That's the response Jesus calls for in **v8,** Did you see it there?
'Let anyone who has ears to hear listen'.
Andy will say more about it next week.-------
Jesus wants people then, and now, to really listen, actively listen.-------
But in **v9** people don't understand the parable, and Jesus' followers ask him what it means.
Mark 4.10 tells us there's others with the 12 who ask this.
So there's people who've listened and stayed around, keen to know more.
They want to understand, and are drawn to Jesus.
If that's you, that's exciting.----------
Then Jesus says, the secrets of the kingdom of God are given to you, but not to everyone.
Jesus explains that he **speaks in parables so that they will look and not see** and hear but not understand.----------
This might be confusing, or this might be confronting for you.----------
You might have thought Jesus taught in parables & told stories to make things clearer, like sharing a story in a sermon.
But Jesus is saying ''No.
Just like for the prophet Isaiah, we read about in **Isa 6.(SLIDE)**
He was sent to people who God knew would not truly listen & understand, not believe & be saved.
Both because of their sin & God's judgement.-----
Like that, Jesus is talking to people, who mostly have hard hearts and closed minds.----
In reality, **parables have a two-way function**.
They mediate God's judgement and his blessing.
People need to put in real effort to hear & understand.
Some will hear a parable, and be left confused, thinking, "I don't get it", "I'm not convinced", and walk away.
For most, the parables increase their distance from Jesus, and their distance from God & his salvation offer.
But for those who seek explanation & understanding, and really want to know more and come to Jesus, they can.
They seek and find.[**SLIDE**-Lk 11.9-11]----------
However, most don't really listen, and with closed hearts they reject it.
This is the reality.----------
Many are blinded by their own sin, and by the evil one too.
Friends, this is why we need to pray, and ask God to open hearts and save, as only He can.---[James 5.17-18; 1 Pet3.12; 2Cor4.6]
We'll come back to that.----------
But what about you?----------
If you're here today and Jesus is not yet your Saviour and Lord, where you're committed to him with everything you've got, don't walk away from Jesus.
Don't give up on trying to understand what is confusing.
Seek the truth in Jesus and his word.----------

Or are you like the seed sown on the **rock**.(**SLIDE**)

Maybe you initially responded to Jesus with joy.
But is a time of testing, a time of suffering, making you doubt Jesus is worth it?-------
Is your suffering, or suffering for Jesus, making you think, it's easier if I walk away?------
If you're in danger of falling away, turning your back on Jesus, I plead with you to not give up. Don't give up.----------
If you do, you miss out on being forgiven, you miss out on salvation.
And as Scripture warns, there is no salvation outside of Jesus, but only judgement awaits.[Heb 2.1-2; 4.6-11; 6.1-11]
Sticking with Jesus will be worth it.--
Or are you relying too much on your feelings?
Wanting or seeking those feelings of joy, peace, or God's presence; when it is not feelings, but fruit you should be looking to?---------
Emotional responses alone are not enough.----------

Or are you responding like the 3rd soil.(**SLIDE**)
You became a Christians some time back, but if you're honest with yourself, other things are **choking** your faith, and your living for Jesus.----------
Are you like in **v14,** worrying – caring more about other things?-------
Are you honestly seeking riches more than seeking closeness with Christ?-----
Or lusting for wealth? Seeking the pleasures of this life?------
If so what pleasures are you seeking?-------
What's tempting you?----------
What's choking you from living 'All for Jesus'?----------
If we're honest with ourselves, this can be all of us at times.
But what do you need to do about it?----------
If left unchecked, if we don't do regular weeding in our own hearts and lives, we can be choked by thorns.----------
A couple of years ago, we had a **young man coming to 5pm**.
He'd been coming for a few months, and he and I met up a few times to talk about Jesus, we went through a Gospel outline, read God's word.
He said he believed and wanted to be baptised.
And then he just stopped responding to my messages; didn't want to meet up.
Eventually, when he responded, this is what he said:
"There's just other fun things I want to do"
Other fun things he wanted to do in life, and Jesus would hold him back from that, apparently.
Could that be you?----------
[This is partly why we don't rush to baptise people at Bundy. We want to ensure people are well taught, understand the Gospel and what they're committing to, and are displaying some fruit in their life first]
Are there desires for other things you should let go of, to you grab hold of Jesus, and sink your roots deeper into him?----------[like Moses in Heb 11.24-26]
For something better and longer lasting?----------
Following Jesus does mean costs.
But following Jesus is good, and soul-satisfying, and I can testify to that.----------

Are you like, or will you be like, the good ground **v15,(SLIDE)** who hears the word, absorbs it into your heart, and holds onto it?----------
Now the Bible says that only God can change the heart.[**SLIDE-Ezek 36.26**; 1Pet1.3;Eph2.1-10]----------
We need God to change our hearts.
So pray for that, for you and for others – heart transformation.----------

But what you and I need to do, is to hold onto the word, never let go of the Gospel.
And by enduring, by persevering, produce fruit.
Do you see it is by persevering in trusting the Gospel, in Jesus our died to for us, that is how we bear fruit.
We only bear fruit by remaining attached to the vine, Jesus (**SLIDE-Jn 15.5**).
Our trust in King Jesus will result in God's Spirit making us more like him.
We will produce the fruit of the Spirit (**SLIDE – Gal 5.22-23**).
Love, joy and peace, patience and kindness, goodness and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. How are you going at that?----------
What fruit do you need to produce more of?----------
Focus on Jesus and ask for the Spirit's help to be more fruitful.----------

Back at the start of Luke 8 we were given a wonderful example of perseverance & fruit.
Back in **v2,** we're told of some **women** who with Jesus.
They'd been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses.
They'd been rescued by Jesus and now responded to his grace.
3 of the women are named – Mary Magdalene, healed of 7 demons.
The wife of Herod's steward or manager, Joanna, and Susanna, whom we know nothing else about.
But think for a moment about these women.
Mary Magdalene for example – and I love that line from **The Chosen.(SLIDE)----------**
When the men abandoned Christ and left him to die on the cross, Mary and the women were there – persevering in faith and commitment to him (Mt 27.55f)
And in Lk **8.3**, they are supporting Jesus and his male disciples from their possessions.
They are serving Christ and his kingdom/ his mission, by their material gifts & finances.
It's wonderful!
These women are held up as wonderful examples for us.
Their gratitude leads to generosity, their faith leads to fruit.----------
Has Jesus saving you, led to fruit, in generosity to Jesus, his people, his mission?--------
Which soil represents you?----------

My final point is, Expectations when you share it.(SLIDE)
Remember Jesus' words in **vv9-10**.
Parables and God's word will not draw most people to Jesus. Not everyone who hears the Gospel will believe it and be saved.
And as hard as this is to hear, people are responsible for this.-----
But also, God is sovereign over this.------
As I mentioned earlier, we need to **pray** for ourselves and pray for others, for only God can change hearts.
Salvation is actually a work of God's sovereign grace.-------
As Jesus said in **John 6.44(SLIDE)**

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws[i] him,[or her] and I will raise him up on the last day.

God will open his people's hearts to respond to the Gospel.----------
If you're wanting to think more about this, I recommend this book(**SLIDE**-Packer's, **Evangelism & sovereignty of God**. [Eph 1.3-6;Rom 8.29-30;9.14-24]
But knowing that God's word will be rejected by some and draw others, it should help us have **realistic expectations** in our evangelism.
Realistic expectations when we talk about Jesus with others.
Lots will be like the seed on the path, rejecting Christ.
Some will respond initially with apparent belief, and joyful emotions.

But it doesn't take root & doesn't last.-------
Some, and this is maybe the most heart-breaking, will respond and change in some way, even seem Christian for some time.
But they don't produce mature fruit, and key point – they don't persevere.--------
Jesus is telling us, not everyone who says they're Christian n' comes to church, will persevere.
I believe in the Perseverance of the saints, but only time will tell the reality for individuals.----
And as I said at the start, people walking away from Jesus is really hard.----------

But, but, we can also expect, and have confident expectation that the Word of God will save.
The good news, momentous news, of forgiveness and life forever by reliance on Christ, it will bear fruit.
People will believe it and be saved, be transformed and fruitful.---
Let's be expectant(**SLIDE**) - that God will save this Christmas, through C. Expl & GSF.
Through us speaking to our friends, after we've listened lots and loved them well.
Let's pray and expect God's word to save people, and bear fruit.----------
Don't put your confidence in your ability to convince people of the truth.
Don't put your confidence in your Gospel outline or technique.
And don't stay silent because you think you're inadequate.----------
Put your confidence in the word of God, to save.
As Paul said,(**SLIDE-1 Cor3.6**), 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.'-----
That's why we speak.----------
Dave Jensen grew up in a house full of Christians.(**SLIDE**) His father was the Anglican Archbishop of the Sydney. As a teen he identified as a Christian but he wasn't. He was a constant liar and his Mum knew it.
He got pregnant with his girlfriend but his parents loving and gracious response had a lasting effect on Dave.(Their fruit made a difference)
He joined the army, became a drinker and fighter, and porn addict.
Then he woke up one day and watched John Piper's 'Don't waste your life' sermon.
And he got convicted, and came to realise that no matter what he'd done, and how much he'd rejected God, the cross of Christ was for me.
Knowing his life was a waste and he was going to hell, he confessed to a chaplain friend that he was a 'whoring, womanizing piece-of-work, and asked, 'What do I do?'----------
And Dave that night got on his knees and cried out in tears for forgiveness.----
He awoke the next morning with a great sense of being loved and forgiven.
After 28 years of growing up listening to the Bible he was no longer blind and deaf.
God removed the scales from his eyes.------
And eventually he began to change, really change.-----
And he started inviting people to church and talking to people about Jesus.-------
So Don't give up praying for the people you know and love.
I'm sure Dave's parents didn't stop praying.---
Don't give up your confidence in the powerful Gospel to save and change people, in God's time.----------

We've been asked by the Lord Jesus today, to Listen, really listen.
His parable has taught us to not give up or turn away from him, in hard times or temptations.
We have been encouraged to persevere, persevere in trusting Christ & producing fruit.-----
The message is, Don't give up, don't get choked, don't be fruitless.
And don't stop speaking about Jesus who is powerful to save.-------- Let's pray