

Luke 8:1-10

Sermon: **The four Seeds**

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THE INNER CIRCLE OF WOMEN

1. After the event in which an uninvited woman entered the house of Simon the Pharisee, we now come to a new scene where Jesus begins to speak in parables.

1.1 **(Luke 8:1)** Soon afterward, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

1.2 In this text, we read that Jesus went through every city and village to proclaim the good news. This was likely the second round of His ministry throughout the Galilean region. If you recall, in previous sermons I mentioned that the center of Jesus' ministry was in Capernaum. That means after each journey through the towns and villages, He would return to Capernaum — the place where He lived.

1.3 **(Luke 8:2–3)** The twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

1.4 We've already spoken about the Twelve in previous passages, but not about the women mentioned here. Now we'll take a closer look at the inner circle of women who faithfully followed Jesus throughout His ministry. The first one Luke names is Mary Magdalene. Mary came from a place called Magdala,¹ which is likely why she was called Mary Magdalene.

¹ Magdala was an ancient Jewish town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 5 km north of Tiberias. In the Babylonian Talmud, it is known as Magdala ("Tower of Fish"). It is believed to have been the birthplace of Mary Magdalene. Until the Arab–Israeli War of 1948, a small Palestinian Arab village called al-Majdal stood on the site of ancient Magdala, while the modern Israeli town of Migdal now occupies the area.

1.5 In the Gospels we read about the women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) who went to buy spices so they could anoint Jesus — who was in the tomb — with those fragrances. When they arrived, they saw that the stone that sealed the tomb — just as doors seal a house — had already been rolled away. As they entered, they saw a man who said to them that Jesus had risen and that they should go and tell His disciples. The women were afraid, fled, and at first said nothing to anyone.

1.6 In later accounts, we see that Jesus appeared first to Mary of Magdala.² Does that have special meaning? I don't know. But for some reason, Jesus chose to appear to Mary before anyone else — and from that we can assume that she belonged to His closer circle of female disciples.

1.7 All right, let's continue. Another known woman is Salome, the wife of Zebedee, the father of James and John. Salome was one of the women who witnessed the crucifixion of her Rabbi (Jesus), and afterward she went with Mary — the mother of Joseph and James — to buy spices so they could anoint Jesus' body in the tomb.³

GODLY COURAGE IS NOT WORLDLY COURAGE

2. Let's return to verse 2, which tells us that Jesus had healed these women of evil spirits and various diseases. In the same verse, it says that seven demons had gone out of Mary Magdalene. What does it mean that seven demons came out of her? How does someone even count the number of demons that left a person? Did Jesus perhaps tell the Twelve how many there were? Possibly. Or maybe the expression "seven demons" was a cultural way in Judaism to describe the extent of a person's spiritual oppression — something that could be recognized through their behavior, depending on how coherent or unstable they were throughout the day.

2.1 Of course, this is only my suggestion — nothing in the text directly supports that conclusion. In any case, I won't pretend to know more than I do. What I can conclude from the text is that Mary Magdalene suffered greatly in life because of her condition. And I am certain that after Jesus freed her from the power of those spirits, she was deeply grateful to God.

— The love and devotion she felt toward the man called Jesus were immense. —

2.2 Now that we know a bit more about the women who followed Jesus, we can conclude that they were remarkably brave, bold, and steadfast in faith. Their fruit made it clear to everyone that they loved God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Some of them were attacked, ridiculed, mocked, and rejected; they faced threats from the Jewish order (the Pharisees and priests), just as the men did — yet they did not waver in faith.

2.3 With that said, dear friends, I believe biblical courage (faith) is not measured by worldly standards — not by criteria such as: "We are men, we are physically stronger, therefore we are spiritually stronger, therefore we are intellectually stronger." No — godly courage does not rely on human assumptions. God's kind of courage is measured by the righteous acts we are willing to perform even

² Mark 16:1-13

³ Mark 15:40; 16:1

when our whole body and mind tell us to run away. And that kind of courage can be shown by a woman, by a man — even by a child.

HOW JESUS VIEWED DONATIONS

3. All right, let's continue with the text. "They were contributing to their support out of their private means." Throughout history, many biblical teachers have explained that the rabbis of that time had a custom of not accepting money to finance their careers as teachers of the Torah. They carried their title with pride and integrity. In other words, they believed that the Torah — the Word of Yahweh — should never be used as a tool for personal profit. To them, that would have been immoral. Instead, they often worked a trade to support themselves while teaching. However, even though they refused to take money as payment for their teaching, they gladly accepted gifts.

3.1 On the other hand, while most teachers held that conviction, there were always exceptions. Some teachers did make their living through their ministry as teachers of the Torah. In other words, they didn't consider it immoral to receive financial support for their work.

3.2 Whatever the case may have been at that time, we know from Scripture that Jesus responded positively when someone helped support His ministry financially. He even had a treasurer named Judas. If we look through ⁴the eyes of most teachers of that era, they would have said that Jesus was acting immorally, wouldn't they?

3.3 But I have a counterquestion for them — and for us: after hearing everything Jesus taught, can we honestly say that He didn't walk with integrity, courage, and boldness as He proclaimed God's Word? We cannot. Even though His ministry was financially supported by people whom He had helped, we see in His teaching that Jesus possessed the same characteristics as the prophets of the Old Testament — when He spoke, He spoke the truth of God, regardless of whether it pleased people or not. What mattered to Him was what His Father thought of Him, not what people thought. In other words, Jesus never charged for the miracles He performed, but He also didn't oppose those who, out of their free will and gratitude after being healed or hearing the good news, wanted to contribute to His ministry.

— Another important distinction between Jesus and other self-proclaimed teachers was this: Jesus knew He had only a short window of time to work among the people, and therefore His main focus was to go through cities, towns, and villages proclaiming the good news. —

FOCUS

4. With that said, I want to emphasize something, my dear friends: perspective plays a crucial role in a person's life. I know this from personal experience, having been close to death several times. Through those experiences, my perspective on time has completely changed — now I have no room for what is trivial or meaningless. My focus is on what truly matters — God. And so I live day by day, fully aware that today might be my last.

⁴ John 12:5-6

4.1 Many teachers throughout history have not shared that perspective — and why would they? Their lives unfolded much like the lives of most people who have ever lived on this planet we call home. In other words, most people reach old age. Because of that outlook on life, teachers worked, studied, and taught believing they still had plenty of time — living according to that assumption. And perhaps, shaped by that same perspective, they debated whether it was appropriate to receive financial support for their vocation as teachers of the Torah — or, in our context, teachers of the Bible.

4.2 But as I said earlier, Jesus' perspective was different. He didn't have much time, and that awareness shaped His decisions about what was best for His ministry. The best thing for Him was not to work other trades, but to trust in the sovereignty of His Father. One visible sign that the Father was caring for Him was that certain women of means chose to support His ministry financially.

4.3 Here's a question: why did these women choose to finance His ministry? We read in verse 3 that Luke emphasized that the women supported Jesus out of their own resources. Why did Luke highlight that? Surely there were men who gave as well. But was it customary for women to accompany a rabbi in his ministry and provide for him from their own means, as the text says? I don't know. Yet from the Gospels we can conclude that Jesus, unlike other rabbis, showed great respect for women. In other words, Jesus never behaved in a way that suggested men held spiritual superiority over women. He believed women were intellectually and spiritually equal to men.

4.4 And surely the women who followed Jesus recognized that truth — He treated them with dignity and respect. Motivated by that realization, they likely felt free to help Him in any way they could. I see no other reason why these women would have so strongly supported Jesus' ministry.

THE FOUR SEEDS

5. All right, let's continue with the text. **(Luke 8:4–10)** When a large crowd was gathering and people from every city were coming to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and when it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

5.1 Here we have a passage where Jesus speaks about four kinds of seed. Then, in verse 9, His closest disciples ask Him — likely confused — *"What does this parable mean?"*

5.2 Before I attempt to describe the condition of the heart represented by each of the four seeds, let's pause for a moment to look at what is happening between Jesus and His disciples.

THE CONFUSED TWELVE

6. **(Luke 8:9–10)** His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest they are told in parables, so that while seeing they may not see, and while hearing they may not understand."

6.1 Jesus answers His disciples' question: *"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest they are told in parables."* To you it has been granted... What is happening here? How should we understand this statement?

6.2 It's not an easy question to answer. One might quickly conclude that Jesus intentionally chose to hide the truth from others — that He deliberately avoided presenting the good news in the clearest possible way. In one sense that's true, but His motives are not, *"I'm tired of you; I've decided you will not enter the kingdom of God, so I'll speak to you in parables so that you won't come to Me and be saved."*

— If we think that way about Jesus, then we don't truly know Him. His motives are good, and I'll try to explain why I believe that. —

6.3 In Matthew 13:14–15, we have a fuller account of Jesus' answer to the same question: "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Jesus explains that through the people's rejection of His message, the prophecy of Isaiah 6 was being fulfilled.

6.4 In Matthew, Jesus essentially says: *"Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away," "The heart of this people has become dull," "Their ears are hard of hearing," "They have closed their eyes, lest they see and turn, and I heal them."*

AN ACT OF MERCY

7. Let's compare Jesus' words in Matthew with the passage in Isaiah.

7.1 **(Isaiah 6:8–10)** Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not understand; keep on looking, but do not gain knowledge.' Make the heart of this people dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes blind, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and return and be healed."

7.2 At the beginning of Isaiah 6, we find a symbolic vision — after Isaiah describes the Lord's throne, His power, and His holiness, Yahweh speaks to Isaiah and gives him a mission: to go to the people and proclaim the truth about God's plan that will come upon them if they do not return to Him. "Keep on listening, but do not understand," "Keep on looking, but do not perceive," "Make their hearts dull, close their eyes, so they will not turn and be healed."

7.3 At first glance, when we read Isaiah 6, we might think: *"So God is the one who decided to blind their eyes so they couldn't see the truth."* And that's exactly what I would have thought too. But we need to see the bigger picture before drawing any conclusions about what Scripture teaches. Before Isaiah's time, Yahweh had already spoken to His people many times through His prophets — warning them of the blessings that awaited obedience and the curses that awaited disobedience.

7.4 Therefore, when Yahweh says to Isaiah, *"Go, tell this people,"* He is actually showing one final act of mercy toward a people whose hearts are already hardened. In other words, Isaiah's message itself

was not what hardened their hearts — their hearts were already hard toward God's truth. They had chosen not to follow Yahweh, their God.

7.5 Jesus, fully aware of this, tells His disciples that what happened throughout Israel's history is happening again in their own time: *"They are a people with hardened hearts toward the truth, and that's why I have chosen to speak to them in parables."*

7.6 Why does Jesus choose to do this now, at this particular point in His ministry? From the earlier chapters we know that Luke has repeatedly written: "Crowds followed Him," "Crowds listened to Him," "People came to Him from every town," "He went through every city and village preaching the kingdom of God." One reason Luke records this so carefully is to show us that, by this stage of His ministry, nearly every ear in Israel had already heard His teaching.

7.7 Knowing that, we can conclude this: Jesus realized that many people came to Him at first out of curiosity — some for healing — but when they later heard the truth about the kingdom of God and what was required to inherit it, their true hearts were revealed. They were just like the people Isaiah faced — hard-hearted and unrepentant. So Jesus, knowing this, decided to act mercifully: He began to speak to them in parables. He didn't want their hearts, already resistant to the truth, to harden even further. He didn't want their judgment on the "Day of the Lord"⁵ to be even greater than it already would be.

7.8 In other words, Jesus wanted to minimize the consequences of the coming judgment on those who refused to listen to God's truth. And how did He do that? By speaking in parables. After someone heard a parable, there were only two possible reactions:

1. *"What is this man talking about? He's crazy; I don't understand a word. I'm leaving."*
2. *"Why is Jesus speaking in parables? I really want to know what He means — I'll go and ask Him!"*

7.9 The second reaction is exactly what happened with His disciples — they asked Him.⁶

7.10 And afterward, Jesus answers them: *"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God."*

Let's take that slowly: Jesus knows, by their reaction, that they have been given the desire to understand. He knows that God the Father has blessed them with the longing to know. And how does He know? Because, of their own free will, they came to Him and asked, *"What does this parable mean?"*

⁵ Malachi 3:1–5

⁶ Luke 8:9

7.11 With that said, no one can decide for us whether we will desire the truth or not. Jesus Himself could appear on earth today, and we could hear the pure, uncorrupted gospel straight from His mouth — and still not be saved. We are not saved by having a perfect understanding of the gospel, nor by hearing the most flawless teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot base our salvation on the claim, *“I have heard the pure gospel of my Lord, therefore I am saved.”*

No, my friends — that is not the truth. The text shows us clearly that many heard Him, yet still went away to their destruction. The only ones who can save you or me — are we ourselves.

If we, in our own free will, do not personally commit to seeking the truth — no matter the cost — just as the disciples in this passage did, then we are not His. We remain people with hardened hearts.

HOW TO PRACTICE “THE ACT OF MERCY” WITH THOSE CLOSEST TO US

8. To conclude, how can we apply Jesus’ idea of an act of mercy to our own lives?

First, we must acknowledge — we are not Jesus. By that, I mean that God the Father has not called us to go throughout the entire world proclaiming His truth; He has not endowed us with the power to perform miracles, nor has He spoken to us directly, commanding us to do this or that.

8.1 Nevertheless, we are called — and obligated — to live and speak according to Jesus’ commandments right where we are.

For example, some of us, after being “born from above,” may have felt a strong desire to share the truth of the Gospel with those closest to us. Perhaps we did so passionately, courageously, and boldly — just like the Lord Himself — and while some showed genuine interest, most probably rejected what we tried to convey.

8.2 And since these people are our closest, over time we’ve noticed that the more persistently we speak the truth, the more indifferent they become. Yet, they are still our closest; we cannot run from them — we live among them, in the same community.

8.3 From personal experience, I can say this: like Jesus, I decided to communicate with my people — with my closest — through parables.

What does that mean in practice? It means I no longer speak biblical truths to them directly or openly. Instead, I use everyday examples to express how I understand or interpret certain things. And quite often — I simply say nothing at all. From past experience, I know that sometimes silence is the wisest response.

8.4 Yet even when I’m silent, my life, my actions, and the fruit I bear are a testimony that Christ’s Spirit is alive and working in me.

Just as Jesus, after speaking in parables, waited for someone to approach Him with a question, so I too wait for someone to ask me, *“Why are you like this, Daniel? You’re different. What happened to you?”*