

## TALK IN THE OPEN

By

CHARLES COLSON

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The title for this sermon, *Talk in the Open*, comes directly from our lesson. Jesus was talking to a large crowd in the out of doors, specifically while sitting in a boat and the people were gathered on the beach. This morning we are in the out of doors, our annual out door worship service. I suspect that the people in Jesus day heard his talks more often out of doors than we hear sermons out of doors. Does it make a difference?

Before you answer, consider the content. It's a familiar parable, often going by the name, the parable of the sower. It's about a farmer sowing seed, the old fashion way, reaching his hand into a bag of seed and then throwing a handful onto the soil in front of him as he walked along.

So the question, *do you think it makes a difference?* is really about what it takes for us to immerse ourselves into the open. If we're sitting out doors can we grasp a parable about planting and harvesting crops better than if we were sitting inside in our sanctuary?

Sometimes this is called the parable of the soils or the parable of the different environments or the parable of the ways of responding. For as important as it is for the sower to get the

seed out of his bag, the parable is more about what happens to the seed when it hits the ground. Some hits the path and the birds eat it; some falls on the rocks and sprouts but withers quickly for lack of good roots, some grows up among weeds that ultimately choke the desired plant. Of course some falls on the good soil and produces an incredible harvest. So as important as the sower is, equally important is the environment into which the seeds land. That environment is you and me.

Jesus ended the parable by saying: let anyone with ears, listen! What he meant was: do you get the comparison? Parables are comparisons, you know. You realize, don't you, I'm not talking about literal seed? Can you make the leap from this agricultural image to your spiritual life? Apparently a lot of people couldn't do that; and from I hear today, their descendants are still among us.

The second part of our lesson is often called the explanation of the parable of the sower. It's actually an allegory, but it satisfies a good many. However, if we let the parable of the sower soak in as might a long soft rain on our garden, we'll learn that this "so called" explanation doesn't help us much for talk in the open.

Whether we are here in the out of doors or inside, talk in the open also means we keep no secrets, we're transparent. We proclaim the Good News of Christ publicly not privately, not in hushed tones, not in embarrassed whispers, not in obscure footnotes, not secretly for only a few.

Talk in the open is essentially what Jesus' ministry was all about. He proclaimed Good News to his disciples, to women, to Gentiles, to politicians, to religious leaders, to Roman Centurions, to the highly educated, to the common fisherman, to his friends, to his enemies. He didn't say one thing to one group and something else to another. His talk was in the open, and we might do well to meditate on how so many different kinds of people were changed by his words.

If we have committed ourselves to be followers of Jesus we need to talk in the open. What are some characteristics of talking in the open? This parable presents talking in the open. For example, if we think that the sower is equivalent to the one who gives sermons from a pulpit or missionaries who go to foreign lands to preach to the heathen, stop right there. The parable never requires that. In fact, because parables are comparisons they invite us, I dare say, command us, to jump inside and try out different positions.

If you are exercising your ears to hear the parable, then try being the sower yourself, then try being the hard-pan soil, then the rocky ground, then the briar patch, then the good soil. The parable is about planting seeds as well as seeds growing as well as seeds producing results. Talk in the open is about the loop of communication, and all of us are part of that loop. When it comes to conveying the Good News of Jesus Christ, are we helping the loop to function or to break down?

Characteristics of talk in the open have a front and back side. A front side might be to reduce holding back our words or

to cull our inhibitions. Thus, we would say hello to a stranger instead of passing the person in silence. We would say I'd like to talk with you about what you got out of the sermon this morning instead of holding back, keeping our question to ourselves, worrying about what the person might think of us if we initiated such a conversation. The front side gets a relationship underway. The back side is that by holding back we perpetuate secrets and privacy, thus the talk is not open.

The same would be true in being gracious with our words. It's our choice. We can choose the words that invite response or words that close off discussion. We can tailor our words to specific people because we know them well. We can choose other words because we want to draw people out into the open. Whether we identify ourselves as being hard-pan soil or rocky soil or thorn bushes, the back side of communication always restricts the harvest. It happens when we change the subject, become selectively deaf, ignore the speaker, feign lack of understanding, or look around for distractions.

In this short journey into the parable of the sower, I've tried to open it beyond the notion that it's just about ministers preaching sermons. The Good News about Jesus is to be on our lips and also in our heart. We're all to be both proclaimers and receivers. We'll grow in our faith if we can strive to be the good soil as well as the sharer of good words, the sharer of the Jesus Christ in our heart.

Nevertheless, having been a preacher for forty years, I have wondered from time to time what kind of soil my sermons

have landed in. Is the preacher responsible for more than merely sowing the seed? Surely the good farmer aims his seeds for the best growing environment.

That's why I think we're short sighted if we confine our view on proclaiming the gospel strictly to sermons from the pulpit or speaking here in the out of doors. I now want to take my own advice and try to be good soil and listen to all the ways you, the congregation, talk in the open and proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ.