

The Parables of Jesus: The Sower

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our service for Sunday, April 25th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome this morning. As you're joining us, however you're joining us on Facebook Live this morning, or if you're tuning in later during the week, listening on our website, or any of the many different ways that you can connect with us.

If you'd like to know more about our church, visit our website at braemarbaptist.com. If you'd like to connect with us, you can email us at info at braemarbaptist.com, and we'd love to hear from you. So welcome as you're joining us this morning. Welcome to people who regularly connect with our church and consider Braemar their church home. And welcome to you as well if you're joining us this morning, perhaps for the first time, or if you've only ever interacted with us online during the pandemic, welcome here this morning.

Welcome wherever you're at, wherever you find yourself in your life, whether you're filled with joy this morning or whether you're struggling. God knows exactly where we're at, and he welcomes us regardless of our situation and circumstances.

[1 : 13] He loves us just the same, and he cares deeply for us. So welcome here this morning. Just a reminder that if you're connected with our church, you likely received a letter in the mail this week, letting you know about our new care group ministry.

And I encourage you, the letter that you received, as well as a list of contact people within your own care group, I want to encourage you to reach out to those people as part of your care group.

So it's a very manageable thing, and we're asking people to engage in intentional care for one another in our church. And this is not just a COVID thing, but it's something we're looking to do to intentionally change our culture and give us a culture of care in our church in a very formal kind of way.

Not formal as in, yes sir, yes ma'am, but formal as in giving people some guidelines for caring for one another and just making it as easy as possible.

So I encourage you to reach out to one another within your care group. Care for one another. Touch base. Check on one another. Celebrate things. Pray together. And build that smaller community within the larger community of our church.

[2 : 29] So you will, as I said, have received contact info in that letter. So I know I have heard a few people have reached out to the people in their care groups. I was actually visiting someone.

Their phone rang, and lo and behold, it was someone from their care group already calling them, and they had just received that letter. So God is already at work in this. I'm excited and encouraged by that.

And so please do engage and care for one another within your care groups. We're seeking to build, as I said, an intentionally caring culture within our church.

And you may think, well, churches just generally care for each other, don't they? Well, we have a tendency as human beings, I believe, to sit back. Sit back and either let someone else lead something or let someone else care for us rather than caring for others first.

So this care group ministry is a way to intentionally model caring for others first, and we'll care for one another within our church. And so we do need your help to make that happen.

[3 : 32] And as I said, I'm excited to see how God will work. I'm convinced God will work through this. So blessings on you as you engage in that. We're going to pray this morning, and our prayer this morning is a bit of a teaser about what we're going to be covering this morning.

So don't be surprised to hear that. Let's pray. Jesus, you sow yourself. The word of truth generally, generously.

The word of life graciously. Lord, defend us from the evil one who seeks to snatch us away. Fortify us for hard times and costly discipleship that we may endure.

Deliver us, Lord, from distraction, from worldly desires, and all that would lure us and choke us with false promises.

Lord, till us. Turn us. Enrich us with every blessing of your spirit that we may be good, good soil.

[4 : 48] Forever faithful and fruitful to you. Amen. Once there was a pastor who was younger than he looked, or perhaps older.

He faced a challenge to share insights and wisdom, the insights and wisdom of a great teacher, whose stories and truth had changed the lives of millions of people across two centuries.

Like a mountain climbers setting out from a base camp, he set out on a journey to share the truth of this teaching to a new audience, perhaps in a new way.

The journey ahead seemed intimidating and somewhat daunting, but also exciting and filled with promise. But just as a climber, he recognized he had a guide with him who would ultimately lead everyone who came along on that journey.

Would lead them to the ultimate truth that the guide himself wanted everyone to learn. Well, I thought I'd begin this morning with my somewhat rough attempt at telling a parable using a story of a climbing pastor to describe our sermon series exploring the parables.

[6 : 19] And so recognizing just how bad I am at telling parables will likely appreciate even more how good Jesus was at telling them. Perhaps that will be true for you this morning.

We're continuing in our sermon series the parables of Jesus this morning. And if you remember from our sermon last week, we recognize that approximately one-third of Jesus' teaching was done through parables.

More than 40 parables of various lengths are found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the Bible, in the New Testament. Throughout this series, we're going to revisit many of these familiar stories and some that may be less familiar or even relatively new to you.

We're going to do this and we're going to journey through this series on the parables together. May God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear the truth that is found in the parables of Jesus.

During our introduction last week, we talked a bit about the purpose of the parables. And I've had a few people reach out to me and say they will never think of the parables quite the same again after my terrible pastor-slash-dad pun that suggested, oh, I understand what parables means.

[7 : 52] It's a pair of bulls. I'm sorry. I really am sorry. Pray for me and my tendency to pun. But we looked at why Jesus used parables as a teaching tool.

We considered that they were relatable stories told to reveal and conceal deeper spiritual truth. If you're familiar with what Jesus taught, you may know that one of the central focuses of his teaching was the idea of, the reality of, the kingdom of God.

It's a challenge to explain this concept briefly. And perhaps you're already familiar with it. You have a decent understanding of it, you believe.

It's so central to what it means, not only to our identity as Christians, but also to God's overall plan for creation. So I'll do my best to summarize it for us briefly this morning.

The kingdom of God refers to God's rule over all creation, his sovereign reign, not just at a fixed moment in time, but for all time.

[9 : 09] Perhaps you've heard of the idea of the kingdom of God being both already and not yet.

The already of the kingdom, the arrival and ministry of Jesus Christ and his revelation as the son of God was to announce that the kingdom had literally come.

It had come through Jesus, through what Jesus would accomplish, through his death and resurrection. But also that not yet part of God's kingdom reminds us that God's ultimate plan for all creation will not fully be realized until Jesus returns, until God's reign over his kingdom is fully realized.

Is that helpful? As I said, the kingdom of God, four words, seems like a basic enough concept, but it is deep, it is broad, it is rich, and perhaps one day we'll look at it in more detail together.

So my friends, the reality is that we are people of both, people of both already and not yet. We've been changed by what God has done through Jesus.

And yet we're also called to be partners with God in his ongoing change that's at work in the world already and not yet.

[10:50] The kingdom of God. So knowing this is a central theme of Jesus' teaching and his ministry, it's not too surprising that this concept factored into many of Jesus' parables.

He was trying, he was aiming to drive this point home to his listeners. Not only his listeners at the time, but through the centuries to this day.

As we begin to look more closely at specific parables this week, I thought we'd begin with one that's likely familiar to most of you. The parable of the sower.

As I suggested last week, let's be willing to let go of some of the preconceptions we may have about this parable from the past.

And that's not to say you viewed it or understood it perhaps incorrectly in the past, but that you may have learned, you may learn, sorry, that there's more to it than you thought previously.

[11:58] And I'm beginning with this parable not only because it may be familiar, but also because Jesus himself unpacks it for us after he tells it right in scripture.

So if you have your Bible handy, I'll be reading from Matthew 13 starting at verse 1 or you can just listen.

The same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables saying, A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up.

Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.

[13:04] Other seed fell among thorns which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. Now we come to a bit of a refresher from last week starting at verse 10.

The disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables? He replied, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God has been given to you but not to them.

Whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

This is why I speak to them in parables. Though seeing, they do not see. Though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

[14:15] In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus says. You will be ever hearing but never understanding.

You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear.

for truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

We considered the fact last week that Jesus used parables to both conceal and reveal truth. Do you remember that? For someone who is receptive to spiritual truth, the parables hold a deeper meaning.

[15:33] For someone who is eager to learn and understand that deeper meaning, parables engage the listener and they also encourage the listener to dig a bit for a deeper meaning.

But for someone who hears the parable and is too lazy or stubborn to hear the truth that lies beneath the surface, that deeper truth will likely remain concealed.

That's hard truth to hear but if we choose to close our hearts, close our ears, close our eyes to what is before us, what God is seeking to reveal to us, we won't hear it, we won't see it, we won't receive it.

For folks like that, parables may just remain as nice stories with no deeper meaning. Oh, that's a nice story Jesus told.

I don't get it but it was Jesus so it must be good somehow. As one commentator I read said, teaching through parables allowed Jesus to give spiritual food to those who hungered for it while

also preventing his enemies from trapping him sooner than they might otherwise have done.
[16:57] Teaching through parables allowed Jesus to give spiritual food to those who hungered for it while preventing his enemies from trapping him sooner than they might otherwise have done.

As we learned last week, Jesus used parables to convey one essential meaning unless he specified otherwise in scripture when he told a story.

And in this parable of the sower then, Jesus is completely up front with the disciples. The truth is here for all to find. Jesus used a concept and a situation that people in his rural agrarian audience would identify with.

A farmer sowing seed. The suggestion here is that this, the seed that Jesus speaks of, is good seed.

Seed that is healthy and will bear a good harvest if it is cared for properly. The truth of the kingdom of God, his plan for all creation and all humanity is good seed.

[18:15] Friends, it is good news. And as we seek to sow this seed by sharing the gospel with others, the results may not be what always what we expect.

Can you relate to that in your own life perhaps? But the yield is not up to us. The soil in which the seed lands, in which the good news lands, is not up to us.

We are called to faithfully sow the seed, plant the seed that we have been given. And I'm sure many of us have stories to share of how we have faithfully shared the truth of Jesus, the story of God's love.

And we may have been disappointed or underwhelmed by what we may perceive to have been a poor harvest, a poor reception, or at worst, someone laughing in our face.

But we need to remember, friends, that the harvest is not up to us. We're called to plant the seed of the gospel. God's Holy Spirit will take it from there.

[19:32] God is quite capable of taking the seed that we have been called to plant and growing it from there. As I said a bit earlier, in the parable of the sower, we're blessed to have Jesus himself to help us understand this deeper meaning that lies under the surface.

Turn to Matthew 13, chapter 13, beginning at verse 18, where Jesus says, listen then to what the parable of the sower means.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

This is the seed sown along the path. Do you hear those words of Jesus and think, well, that doesn't seem fair.

if someone doesn't truly understand the gospel, is it their fault? Should they miss out on an opportunity to receive salvation or to have a relationship with God?

[20:41] I do believe that we personally have a responsibility in situations where we may not understand what we've heard, particularly in relation to scripture.

We need to seek to understand more, to learn more. not just sit back and say, well, I don't get it, it must not be meant for me, or I don't get it, it may not have a current context in which I can understand it.

We need to put in the effort. I believe we do bear personal responsibility in situations where we haven't heard, we don't understand what we've heard.

and if someone learns about the gospel or an opportunity for a relationship with Jesus but doesn't actively seek to understand or learn more, I believe that's their own mistake and a missed opportunity with potentially eternal consequences.

I'm not saying that as followers of Christ we don't need to come alongside people to help them understand, I'm not saying that at all, but I am saying passive reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't get us very far.

[22:06] We need to engage, we need to seek to learn and understand. Jesus continues in verse 20, the one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy, but since he has no root, he lasts only a short time.

When trouble or persecution because of the word comes, he quickly falls away. Can you recognize the idea of a small gospel here?

An idea that the kingdom of God and God's plan somehow begins and ends with us? I believe that we can reflect on God's message of salvation and see it through a me-first kind of lens.

We focus on what God has done for us, but then when the going gets tough, our resolve and commitment may slip. It's in those times that we need to refocus on God and lean into him. It can be too easy for us to abandon our faith for short-term gain in some other area, or something that we perceive to be an easier road somehow than following Jesus.

[23 : 34] Jesus continues in verse 22, The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is a man who hears the word, but the worries of his life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

The worries of his life. Can we relate to that in these days? Friends, I believe it can be easy to gratefully accept, at least in principle, what the gospel of Jesus Christ has to offer us, and yet have our minds, our actions, our words, our lives not be renewed or transformed by this good seed, this good news that has been planted in our lives.

Jesus concludes his explanation in verse 23, reading there, but the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it.

He produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. time. We recognize here what the good seed, what happens when the good seed meets the good soil.

The bounty of that, the benefits of that, will be multiplied exponentially, thirty, sixty, a hundred times.

[25 : 18] When we receive the good news of Jesus Christ, when we actively seek to participate in what God is doing to make his kingdom come in our world, we become truly invested in a partnership that is unlike any other we can experience or imagine.

My friends, I have a question for each of you this morning. which soil that Jesus mentions in this parable describes you best?

What kind of soil describes the bed of your heart? Are you able to recognize that seed of God's truth that was planted in your life, perhaps never really took root?

or have you surrounded yourself with all the things that you believe it means to be a Christian, but have never truly grown in a relationship or even perhaps formed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the one whose name you claim?

Or perhaps you've been tending the seed of faith in your life, only to allow it to be choked out by anxieties or other priorities in your life that are ultimately temporary, if not completely meaningless.

[27 : 01] Friends, we can have good things in our lives that take our eyes off Jesus, and before we realize, the seed has begun to be choked.

friends, this seed of the kingdom of God has been sown, I hope, has been sown in your life.

If it hasn't been, reach out to us. If you know someone who is a strong, committed Christian in your life, ask them to mentor you, ask them to help you to grow and nurture what God has planted in you.

Seek the counsel of godly people in your life, so that you will continue to grow in your relationship with God.

God. And friends, we're not called to simply grow, but also to sow. We're called to work in partnership with God as disciples, so that the whole world can be changed by this good seed, this good news.

[28 : 25] Amen. Amen. Well, I'm going to do something a little bit different for our benediction this morning. I'm going to sing it over you. So, blessings on you.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace and give you peace and give you peace forever.

God bless you, my friends. Go in peace and have a great week. God bless you.