

The Parable of the Sower - The reality of the Kingdom message

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Date: 15 May 2022

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church family. As Alex said, we're going to read from Matthew chapter 13, the first 23 verses.

Starting at verse 1. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea, and great crowds gathered around him, so that he got into a boat and sat down.

And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying, Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

Then the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

[1 : 32] For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables.

Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says, You will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

[2 : 52] This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty.

Welcome, everyone. My name's Matt, if I haven't met you before. It's great to see you here. If you haven't seen me up the front, if you have only been here for a few months, you wouldn't have seen me up here before.

I'm from the congregation, and I'm not one of the ministers here, so Dave Bottencorner and Dave Calderwood would normally be the ones up here giving these sermons. But I and a couple of the guys in the congregation are going to be taking us through Matthew chapter 13, this coming few five weeks.

[4 : 16] So today I'm going to be doing the parable of the sower, and it's probably the most recognisable one out of the parables that you would see in this chapter. Adam is going to be taking us through the weeds in verse 24, and Simon is going to be taking us through the parable of the mustard seed in verse 31.

Now I'm going to pray and then we'll properly get into the actual parable. So let's pray. Dear God, thank you for the time that we can spend here together thinking through this parable. Thank you so much that for many of us here, you've given us minds and ears to understand and we have accepted your kingdom word. God, I pray that you would give me the words to speak and for those listening, clarity to hear and understand.

[10:44] Amen. Okay, first let's step back a bit. Let's zoom out and look at the context of Matthew. And Dave, both Dave's have been bringing us Matthew for a number of weeks now.

And really the way that Matthew works is Jesus comes to the world and he says, Okay, Israel, you've got the Old Testament. You've seen throughout the Old Testament that there's prophecies, there's people and things pointing towards this guy who's going to come and bring the kingdom. Your history shows that someone's going to come. And Jesus says, I am that person. I'm the one who's going to bring the kingdom to this world. And so we see that that happens.

And then we get to this point in verse 10 where he sends out his people into the world. He sends out his disciples into the world. He's been doing a lot of miracles and healing people.

And that's kind of the start of the kingdom coming. He sends them out into the world. And they go out and they say, Look, we're getting differing responses here.

[11:50] And you can see it coming out in different stories as we go through, not just in chapter 10 onwards, even beforehand. People respond very differently to the message of Jesus. And so we get to this point where they're starting to see rejection.

And in fact, if you look at the end of 13, which is the part that we're doing today, you can see that he goes to his own town, Nazareth. And people who have grown up with him since he was a baby, like this is not like society now where everyone just constantly moves cities, towns, whatever.

Move to Tamworth, Jimmy and Nilm. Very unusual. You often stay where you were. They all know him very well. So I don't know why I had to get Jimmy and Nilm there. That was not in my script. Sorry, Jimmy and Nilm. I can't even see where you are. You can hear Jimmy's laugh. But this is not like that. They all know him. And they still reject his message. And so we're going to see this common theme over the next five weeks where Jesus and his disciples explain his kingdom message to people.

But there's wildly different reactions to that message. And it's a message that divides people into people who hear and understand and those who don't.

[13:05] And a way of thinking like this is it's a bit like olives or blue cheese or oysters, maybe anchovies.

You either get it or you don't. It's very unusual that someone be in between. By the way, for the record, blue cheese is great. Oysters are great.

Olives and anchovies are disgusting. But again, very polarising. And so we come to chapter 13, verse 1. And we're met with this pretty unusual scene.

That's the context that we get up to in here. We get this unusual scene where all these people have come to see Jesus speak. Huge crowds. So much so that he gets on a boat and kind of goes a little bit out into the lake and everyone's on the shore standing around.

And he tells this odd story. Now they've all come to see him do miracles and maybe tell them some word about God. But he talks about this story about this guy who, a sower who goes out into the fields and he spreads seed around.

[14:12] And he's not a particularly picky sower. He's not trying to pick which soil. It goes on every soil. So we've got the path, which is the first one, and the birds come and eat it up.

And then we have the rocky ground. The thorny ground is the third one. And then the fourth one is the good soil. And some of these plants grow and some don't.

In fact, it's only really the plants on the good soil that grow. And that's it. Now probably pretty fairly, a lot of people in the crowd at this point are going, what on earth is he talking about?

Jesus hasn't explained it at this point. Literally that's it. We have the context of what we've seen in the next coming verses, what he's talking about. But the people in the crowd, you know, like I'm a gardener.

Sorry, I'm not a gardener. I'm not very good at gardening. I can mow. I can whippersnaip and I can hedge. That's about it. Even I know that if you plant seeds, not in good soil, they won't grow.

[15:17] And imagine them back in the day. They knew a lot about farming. What on earth is Jesus talking about? In fact, it's not just the average Joe listening in the crowd who feels that way

either.

The disciples, his own disciples come to him and say, why are you speaking to them in parables? Just say it how it is. Why are you talking to them in this way? You see, after all, parables don't make a message that is difficult to understand, easier to understand.

If we said that, we would have to say that everything Jesus said up to this point is pretty inaccessible to the people he's teaching and somehow you need to have a parable to explain it. It's not like that at all.

And I'm going to illustrate that by telling you a parable of my own. Okay. A man once bought a Russian doll. Does everyone know what a Russian doll is?

It's one of those things you, like, break in half, a doll that you split in half and there's another doll inside. Keep going, there's more dolls inside each doll. Okay. A man had a Russian doll. It was made up of ten dolls.

[16:27] Okay. Now he hand-painted seven of the dolls. He did not hand-paint the third and the ninth doll. But the tenth doll, he smashed into eight pieces and buried it in the backyard.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, I would be very, very surprised and wonder how you'd read a copy of my sermon if you knew what I was talking about.

But I am, of course, talking about the 2019 Cricket World Cup where Australia had nine group matches, lost the third and the ninth match, got to the semi-final and spectacularly lost to England by eight wickets.

That's what my parable means. Yeah, at this point you're going, why do they let him up here? Now, the point of this is to illustrate that parables don't make a difficult message easier to understand.

And Jesus explains to his disciples in verse 11, if you've got chapter 13 open, verse 11, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

[17:43] But to them it has not been given. But to the one who has, more will be given and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In this section, Jesus is saying to the disciples and the believers who have been given the mind to understand and recognize Jesus' words and parables, he's showing them that this is a unique way of teaching them.

It helps them build a connection with what Jesus is saying in a way that telling it straight doesn't do it. Now, Dave Bott sent me a great quote, I think, that really summarizes this.

It's from a guy called Eugene Peterson in a book called *The Contemplative Pastor*. It says this, it says, parables sound absolutely ordinary, and I think we can agree that this one does.

Casual stories about soil and seeds, meals and coins and sheep, bandits and victims, farmers and merchants, and they are wholly secular, which means they're not religious.

[19:00] Of his 40 or so parables recorded in the Gospels, only one has its settings in church, and only a couple mention the name of God.

As people heard Jesus tell these stories, they saw at once that they weren't about God. So there was nothing in them threatening their own sovereignty. They relaxed their defenses.

They walked away perplexed, wondering what they meant. The stories lodged in their imaginations, and then like a time bomb, they would explode in their unprotected hearts.

An abyss opening up at their very feet. He was talking about God. They had been invaded. See, parables drop the defense of the listeners in a way that just saying it straight up does not do.

And what's also clear here is that Jesus is saying that the Gospel and the Kingdom message is not meant for everyone. It's not meant to be part of his plan that everyone hears a parable and hears the message, understands and accepts and believes.

[20:13] But God's plan for the Gospel is doing exactly what it is meant to do. You see, we're to expect rejection of the Gospel.

Jesus' parables won't become clear to everyone. But you see, I tend to want that to happen. I want everyone in the here and now to be swept off their feet, to instantly understand and believe.

I want every friend that I tell to just be weeping in gratitude for what I have shared with them, for every family member to come and see the great news and understand why I care about this so much.

But that's not God's plan. His plan is different to ours, and that includes allowing people to respond differently to the Gospel message.

And so after the disciples come to him and kind of ask, why on earth are you speaking to them in parables? Jesus explains, he then actually explains what this parable is about, the sower and the soils.

[21 : 21] And it turns out that the parable is actually talking about the same thing that he's just explained. So the parable presents four different receptions of the Gospel. And the kids talk, look, I nearly thought I'd get up here and just say, see kids talk and then sit back down, because it explains it so well.

The birds of the path, the rocky soil, the thorny soil and the good soil, they all represent different ways that people respond to the message of Jesus. And you can see on the outline, I've tried to do a bit of a fancy alliteration thing and summarise them into the responses driven by the devil, responses driven by difficulties, responses driven by distractions, and responses driven by desire. So Jesus explains, the sower goes out and he spreads the seed, we see that in verse 19, that it's the words of the kingdom, and it lands on different soils.

It's not selectively spread, it's spread everywhere. And the first place that we see the seeds land is on the path, and the birds come and they eat it up. And Jesus explains that this represents people who hear the message and immediately reject.

They're so prejudiced against the Gospel, they don't want to hear it. For whatever reason, their hearts are not open to the message of Jesus. And I think conceptually, this is probably a very easy one for us to understand in our society.

[22 : 51] We do see that we talk about Jesus to people and it's like, you can tell, there's just no chance that they're going to accept this message. There's so many things that prejudice them against that message.

The second is the rocky soil in verse 20. And these people initially hear the Gospel. They hear it and sometimes they're quite excited about it.

They think maybe they've found something. But then over time, difficulty comes in. Maybe it's suffering of some kind, maybe it's a death, maybe it's people making fun of them for maybe thinking about becoming a Christian.

And so difficulty pushes their hearts away from the message and they reject the Gospel. The third one is thorny soil.

And that's where people hear the Gospel again, pretty excited, thinking maybe this could be something that is actually the meaning of life. But then things start to get in the way and we know what these look like.

[23 : 51] I'm not going to go through an extensive list. We know things that tempt us away from the Gospel. And so slowly these things come along and the Gospel that once looked really attractive suddenly starts to turn into like a burden.

It's actually holding me back. I want to do all these great things. But I have this Christian thing and then it becomes an issue and our hearts are drawn away through temptation and through distractions.

Now these first three soils all say the same thing. It's about hearing the Gospel and rejecting the message. You see, I think we can be a little bit tempted to think about this like it's grades of hearing the Gospel and understanding where you go, you've got the path, don't want to be the path.

That's the far end of the spectrum. Look, if you have to be something and it's at least not the path, at least just try and be the rocky soil. And then, you know, thorny, you know, still not great but better.

And then at the end, good soil, fantastic, that's what you want to strive to be. It's not like that at all. These three fall into the same category. It's people who reject the Gospel and those three are in contrast to the fourth, the good soil.

[25 : 13] This is people in verse 23 where the Gospel is received with joy. It's heard, it's understood, it's accepted and becomes the truth in people's hearts.

You see, this parable explains that there will be different responses to the Gospel. And not only should we expect it, it's God's plan for the world.

God's Gospel is doing exactly what He intended. The Gospel has been given and understood to those who God chose for it to be given and to and understood by.

And so when we look around Australia or around our world and we see the Gospel not being received in the way that we might wish, we shouldn't despair and get this sense of feeling like the

Gospel is not doing what it's meant to do, that we as Christians are not representing it in the way that we should.

we should not worry that the Gospel is not a strong enough message, like somehow it's not persevering in the way that it used to or that somehow we need to change it so that it will reach people how it might have once upon a time.

[26 : 36] We shouldn't feel the need to dress it up, to add things to it, to make it better or maybe the opposite end, to take things away. You know, there's some things like, you're telling me I'm a sinner and then I've got a problem with God.

I mean, that's pretty offensive. We don't need to take things away from the Gospel. You see, in everything, everything that happens with God's message is His plan.

I want it all now. I want to see it sweep through our world right now. But that's not God's plan. God's plan is to choose His soil and to see an abundant harvest come from that soil as we see in verse 23.

See, in everything, we can have faith that the outcome is exactly what God wants. See, when we tell others the Gospel and they reject it, we don't need to feel shame that somehow we've done something wrong.

That was God's plan. When we see people accept the Gospel, I don't need to be surprised that somehow someone this message got through in our society.

[27 : 58] That's God's plan. That's exactly what He wanted to happen. And in fact, if you're a Christian, God chose your ears to hear.

He chose your eyes to see. If you're a Christian, God chose your heart to hear and understand. He chose you to turn to Him.

He chose you to be the good soil and how much can we rejoice that we are on the right side of God's plan? God's plan. See, it's about what God has done for us.

This parable is not about shooing away the birds or trying to filter out the rocks or weed up the thorns. It's not about us trying to be a good soil. This is about what God has done for us.

And yes, we have difficulties. Yes, things get in the way and distract us. But if you believe the message that Jesus came and died and rose again so that we could be restored in relationship with Him, then you're the good soil.

[29 : 21] If you don't yet call yourself a Christian here today, then hear the seed of the gospel now. We are God's creation. creation. We chose, we chose to rebel against Him.

We rejected Him and decided we didn't want to live with God as our King and our Ruler. We wanted to do it our own way and our state before God was helpless. We were rebels. We lived as enemies of God.

We wanted to live our own way but our actions, those actions are leading us to eternal death and separation from God forever.

You see, our hearts, we don't turn to Him. We don't turn to Him on our own and the punishment for that is too great for us to handle.

So God sent Jesus. This is the amazing thing is that we didn't do something for this. The problem was our making but God took it on Himself to fix it.

[30 : 25] He took the punishment for our rebellion, our rejection, our hate for Him. Jesus died an agonizing death with nails in His hands and in His feet, keeping Him to a wooden cross.

God's own Son and He didn't deserve that death. His heart was solely for God. but in doing so He took our punishment and where that punishment for us would have meant death forever, an eternal separation from God.

Jesus beat death. He took that punishment and paid it in full and He came back alive. And it shows that that punishment has been completely taken for us.

Our relationship with our Creator and King is restored and we have Him as our ruler if only you choose to let Him take that punishment for you.

Because there is a choice. You don't have to let Him take it for you. Do you accept and believe the message that is given to us by Jesus?

[31 : 47] If you do, then you are a good soil. You are the good soil that He talks about in this parable. And if not, then your rejection of Jesus will mean that you rightfully take the punishment that you deserved anyway.

But either way, regardless of everyone in this room and how we respond, regardless of how anyone in our society and the world responds to the gospel, it's exactly what God meant for it to do.

I'm going to pray for us. Dear God, I just want to thank you so much for sending your son Jesus.

Thank you that he is the one by which we can be saved. Thank you that you didn't leave us to our rejection and rebellion of you, that you didn't leave us to an eternal death.

Thank you that you sent Jesus to take that punishment for us. Thank you that because of you we can be good soil, that we can have a relationship with you, that we can be your children.

[33 : 03] God, I just pray for us here today. I pray that we would take encouragement from what you have done for us. I pray that you'd help us to remember just how much we can be thankful for what you have done by sending Jesus.

Thank you so much that regardless of what happens in our world, that you have planned each and everything. Thank you that our people respond regardless of the responses that the gospel makes happen in our world.

Thank you so much that it's all in your plan. Thank you that we can take comfort from that. Thank you that when we tell our friends and family, we know that no matter what happens, it's in your hand.

Amen.