

Parable of the Sower

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 4th of February 2001.

The preacher is Jenny Mitchell. Her sermon is entitled Parable of the Sower and is from Matthew chapter 13 verses 1 to 23.

Hands up. Anybody who's got a pot plant? Anybody got a pot plant? Keep your hands up if you killed a pot plant or anybody who's killed a pot plant.

Oh, there's more hands for dead pot plants. Hands down. It's funny growing things, isn't it? Well, when I think of things being grown, I always think of the first place I went as a teacher.

From Sydney I drove to Griffith in the middle of New South Wales and to get there you drive across these flat, flat, dry, dry plains, the Riverina Plains and then suddenly you come to a valley.

[1 : 06] It's called the Hidden Valley. I don't know why, but anyway. You come to the Hidden Valley and it's green. It's sort of like you get to a line and you cross the line from the desert and there's vineyards and orchards and just green before your eyes.

One minute it's very hard to grow a crop in the desert and the next minute it seems like everything will grow because of all the irrigation. In this parable that we just had read to us, Jesus gives us pictures of things being grown.

The seed that he has sown in his word is sown very generously, but there's different outcomes of this seed that is explained by him.

And Vaughan's going to do me a bit of work on the overhead there and just explaining that as Jesus starts to tell this parable, he's not just telling it because it's a nice story.

It's actually coming at a time in his ministry when there's heaps of controversy. It's right in the middle of Matthew. It's Matthew 13 and people are starting to get really critical about who he is and what he's doing.

[2 : 21] In fact, you all know that it's the Pharisees that are getting really critical about who this guy is and what he's up to. And you see, people are hearing and seeing Jesus.

They're seeing that he has great authority. They're seeing that he has authority and he heals people, that he drives out demons. He has authority over nature and over people.

We also see this controversy, this rising animosity that's coming against him. Perhaps they're seeing this person, the greatest person that they've seen, and yet he claims to be more than a person because at the very beginning of Matthew, Matthew 1, Matthew opens by saying that Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, of Father Abraham.

And also the beginning of Matthew shows that Herod was afraid of this little baby that was born, this baby that was born King of the Jews. So this baby, even then, is seen as something more than a man.

And Matthew describes those who protected the law, the Pharisees, as just finding it really hard to believe the things that Jesus did, that he could do these things.

- [3 : 45] And they just don't really understand why and how he's doing it. Sometimes I think it's hard for us to understand and to see things that are right in front of us.
- A few weeks ago we were packing to go camping and my husband said to me, where's the Band-Aids? I said, well, they're right in the cupboard, just in the first aid kit, they're right on the top.
- A few minutes later, no, they're not there. They're not in the first aid kit at all. And I said, yes, they are, they're right on the top, just go back and forth. No, they're not there. So I went and I opened up the first aid kit and they were right there.
- What was right before his eyes, he could not see. I always remember when I was about eight years old, I asked my mother to find the scissors. It's all these mothers laughing because they know it's true.
- I asked my mother to find the scissors and she said, put your hand in the cupboard and it's right in the middle of the cupboard. And I went and I put my hand in the middle of the cupboard and it wasn't there. But of course she came and she found it straight away.
- [4 : 50] So what was right before me, I could not see. And in a way, I think that that's what it was like for the Pharisees. Because just before Jesus begins to speak in parables, and this one is the first parable, he heals the demon-possessed man.
- In chapter 12, that man, he was demon-possessed and he was blind and he was dumb. It was a pretty rough deal that he had, wasn't it?
- He can't have had much of a life. But Jesus healed this man. And yet the Pharisees say, give us a sign.
- If you're the son of man, if you're God's son, give us a sign. And yet he's healed a man who was demon-possessed, blind and dumb. And they still want more.
- They can't see what is right before them. And so Jesus begins to speak in parables, to speak into this tension of people seeing and yet not believing.
- [6 : 05] We were read from Isaiah just earlier and just later on in Isaiah 6, Isaiah talks about people seeing with their ears, hearing with their eyes and understanding with their hearts.
- In fact, he says, God says to him that people will not see and they will not hear and they will not understand. Before we go on to have a closer look at the parable, I just want to tell you a story about a person who we're going to be working with in Kazan.
- And I think that this story can help us to understand a bit about the parable as well. Vaughan's going to put a photo up of this woman. Her name is Fozia.
- She was born in Kenya. Her mother was from Yemen and her father from Pakistan. She's now married to an American guy. But her family was a Muslim family.
- Her twin brothers were quite a bit older than her and they had the great privilege of going to study in the States. While they were there, they read Christian books and they spoke to Christians and they came to know that Jesus was who he said he was and they came to faith in Jesus.
- [7 : 29] After their studies, they returned to work in the family business in Kenya and on their return, they told their parents that they'd become Christians.
- This wasn't well received at all and their parents felt that perhaps they shouldn't stay and that they weren't really welcome.
- However, they did persuade their parents. They said, look, we've come to be here with you. We've come to serve you in the business. Please let us stay and be part of the family.

So for two years, her brothers were able to stay with the family and in that time they went to visit a Christian man that they had known from years earlier. They wanted to ask him about a church and they went to him and said that they had become Christians and as they told him this, he began to cry and so they said to him, why are you crying?

And he explained that for 18 years he'd been praying for them that they would come to know who Jesus was and so with great joy he wept as they said that they had come to know the Lord.

[8 : 48] So this man, in the two years that they were there, disciplined them and cared for them because their father forbade them to go to a church.

Thanks, Dawn. So in this family, so far, I'm going to tell you the end of the story in a little while. In this family, we have a picture, a picture of a seed that's been sown.

The seed is the word of God and in these boys it's produced a crop in the brothers' lives. But it's also produced a division.

There's a division in the family of those who don't see, who don't hear and who don't understand the person of Jesus.

If you've got your Bibles there, we're going to look a little bit more closely at the parable and just see the explanation that Jesus gives and to ask the question that Vaughn's going to pop up for us.

[9 : 54] Ask the question, how does the parable help to explain people's response to Jesus? How does the parable explain people's response to Jesus?

Jesus told the parable and then he explained it to the disciples. So in verse 4 of chapter 13, he said that the seed fell on the path and was eaten by birds.

and then as he explained it to the disciples in verse 19, he says that the seed is when someone hears the message of the kingdom or this seed is when someone hears the message of the kingdom and does not understand it and the evil one has snatched it away.

This person hasn't understood, hasn't really understood in their heart what they have heard, what the word of God means. And this seed is wasted because it's not understood.

It's a real image of waste. This seed doesn't even make it into the soil. It doesn't have a chance. This precious seed, the word of God is snatched by the birds because this word is only heard.

[11 : 12] It's a non-starter. It's a real image of God's perhaps you can think of all the times that you might have heard stuff and thought, ah, that's a good idea but you've never done anything about it.

Maybe you've read one of those books about, you know, the easy guide to something or there's a million books out now, isn't there? Dummies Guide to Computers or whatever but you've read it and still done nothing about it.

You've really wasted your time and you've wasted that knowledge and that's what happened in this case but the sower, Jesus, he's a risk taker, isn't he?

And he continues to scatter this precious, precious seed and the second seed is verse 5 the seed that fell on rocky places without much soil.

It was scorched and withered in the sun and Jesus explains that in verse 20 and 21. This seed is the one who hears the word and receives it with joy but since it has no root it lasts only a short time and this seed is the situation of a person where trouble comes and the trouble comes not just because it's trouble, the trouble comes because of the word of God and this person quickly falls away.

[12 : 47] That wasn't the case with Fozzie's brothers despite the fact that their family persecuted them. They did not fall away but you may know somebody and it may be the case for somebody in your family or somebody in this church that wasn't prepared to stand up for God and this person is a bit like a hothouse plant.

I don't know if anybody knows anything about hothouses but if you grow a plant in a hothouse the roots are not very deep and you put that plant out into the garden and it withers very quickly it just doesn't have the perseverance so this seed has withered and not really understood enough to persevere.

The third seed has also a bad fate in verse 7 this is the seed that fell among the thorns and was choked by the plants and Jesus explained it in verse 22 this is the person who hears the word but then worries of his life the deceitfulness of wealth choke it making it unfruitful I think everything about living in our culture and in western culture pushes us to want more things to think that we need more things to eat more and to wear more or even maybe I went to a perfume party can you believe we had perfume parties to smell better all of these things kind of push in on us all the time don't they and they're things that can drive us away from the root the seed of God's word taking full impact on our lives and that means that

God cannot yield a crop in us in our lives in our churches so far these three seeds haven't done very well they really haven't grown and produced a crop so how do they answer the question or help to understand the question that how does the parable explain people's response to Jesus I think perhaps by saying that sometimes people don't understand the devil snatched it away sometimes people don't allow the word of God to go deep into their hearts and it is snatched away their lives are not changed and transformed and there's no crop there's no yield in a way the parable doesn't really tell us why however it is clear that some people don't respond to the word of

God perhaps in the conversation that Jesus has between the parable and between the explanation there's a little bit in the middle there in verse 15 and perhaps in a way this best explains people's non-response to Jesus in verse 15 it says 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 and understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them some hearts are hardened and people cannot see and hear some seed does not grow and there is no crop we might be asking the question where does that leave me where does that leave people who don't hear and who can't find it hard to understand and what do we do if we don't understand well I think that we can do two things we can ask we can ask God to give us understanding if we don't understand we can say hey God can you help me understand just working back a little bit in the

[17 : 27] Bible it's a bit confusing to go back but verse 11 actually says that the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven is given to you so if you want to be given the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven then ask God say give me understanding understanding I know that in my life I wish that I'd asked God a lot earlier to give me understanding I had about 10 years of my life when I didn't understand and I was very stubborn I thought that I was okay and I didn't need God I suppose I had 10 years when I was really an atheist that I thought God had no impact on my life and I had no need of him and they were wasted years in many ways I had many broken friendships and relationships and I think that there's many people today that are like this they might look okay on the outside but inside it's wasted they think you might think they're okay but they're not it's a bit like we think we're going along okay like a turtle on four legs and yet

I think I was like a turtle on its back you know how a turtle's on its back and stuck in the shell and it can't put itself right well I was like that turtle I was stuck on my back and I couldn't put myself right until I lost my pride enough to ask God to help me and to give me understanding so we can ask the hard questions we can ask Jesus who he is and ask him how he can deal with our sin so I don't know if you have Christianity explained in church here or Alpha or something like that those are the kinds of places that you can really ask the hard questions ask Paul Barker all the hard questions about what it means I'm sure he can give you lots of answers the second question what if we have friends or family who don't understand well I think we can be like that man in Fozzie's family who prayed he prayed for 18 years that those guys would come to faith and he was privileged to see that that happened we can pray that

God will plant and nourish the seed of his words in those who don't know him we can pray and ask God to give people eyes to hear and ears eyes to see and ears to hear and we can persevere in those relationships the end of Fozzie's story kind of fits in with the parable a bit as well because the seed the last seed in verse 8 it fell on good soil and it produced a crop and Jesus explains it in verse 23 it's the one who hears and understands the word and produces a crop the seed the seed is sown and produces a crop in the lives of those who understand and this yield of this crop is beyond all expectation it's a wonderful yield it doesn't frizzle out or die off like the other seeds fozzie herself was nine years younger than her brothers and she was fortunate that her dad believed in equal education for women and she also was sent to the states and where she met

Christian students and they explained who Jesus was to her and she fell in love with him and she understood she also went home and worked in the family business with her brothers not that long after that their father died and they continued to live with their mother who did not know and understand who Jesus was a number of years later the children actually all moved then to the states they heard that Muslims were coming to faith in Jesus coming to faith by dreams and visions that God was somehow giving them dreams and visions so they asked their friends and their church to pray with them and to pray that their mother would have a dream and a vision of God and in his grace and mercy not long before her mother died she had a vision she had a vision of

Jesus standing in her room and he looked at her and asked her to follow him she responded to this and she came to faith and the children were able to come home and in great joy they prayed with her and they knew that she understood who Jesus was now Fozia and her husband live and work in Kazan the city where we're going to work they're committed to working amongst Muslim people and explaining to them who God is it's great to know that we're going to be working with them and that we have someone that really understands what it means to be a Muslim and what it means to become a Christian as well so just to finish off if we do understand who Jesus is who that person is like Fozia and Jonathan if we understand like that old man who prayed for 18 years perhaps we have some responsibilities and hopes as well

[23 : 31] I think we can expect that we ought to persevere in relationships with people we ought to persevere that Jesus can have a crop can have a great yield for his word and we ought to be able to explain to people clearly who God is I think that's part of our responsibility so the parable explains people's response to Jesus by saying that some will not respond to him but that some will respond and some will know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven heaven and if you know that like I know that you can have great joy that you know the secret of the kingdom of heaven and that's a great privilege that we have and we can share so as we go to Kazan with that great privilege and as you work here in Doncaster with that great privilege let's pray that we can be good seeds and hear the word of God and that understanding will go deep in our lives and that it will bear fruit for the gospel

I just finish by praying God thank you that you have called us to yourself that you love and adore us and that you have given us the privilege of receiving your seed and knowing who you are Lord help us to be faithful with this seed and to be gracious to those around us in telling them who you are in Jesus name we pray Amen for following