

# Parable Of The Sower

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[ 0 : 00 ] Here are some of the things you have to say to us through the scriptures, through conversation, one with another, and in the quiet of our own hearts. So we ask that you will speak to us now, and especially that you will prepare our hearts to hear what you have to say. In Christ's name, amen.

Amen. Now, just so that you know exactly what's happening, I want to tell you that this weekend I'm going to do three things.

I'm going to take a parable from Luke, which is the parable of the seed and the soil and the sower and those kinds of things, and that's what we're going to do this morning. And then this afternoon we're going to take from an allegory from John's gospel, which is the, I am the vine and you are the branches. And then tomorrow morning we're going to take from Paul's letter to the Galatians the fruit.

So we have the seed, the vine, and the fruit, and that's what we're going to be talking about. And we're thinking in terms of the whole parish of St. John's and what your responsibility is in order that you can be an effective minister in the congregation to which God has called you to be a minister. You know that, don't you? I mean, you understand that. And there's no question that you recognize the function that you have among us in that situation.

[ 1 : 34 ] So that's where we're going to go. And in order to do it, I want just to give you a brief introduction to this parable, which comes in the 8th chapter of Luke. And the 8th chapter of Luke is the beginning of something new in Christ's ministry, and that is that he's going out covering the countryside.

He's not sticking to Capernaum as his headquarters any longer. He starts to move around. So you find that chapter 8 of Luke begins, afterwards he went through cities and villages.

So now it wasn't just small groups of people who were all related to one another to whom he was speaking. It was a wide cross-section of people.

And one of the happy things about our gathering here this morning is that there is a wide cross-section of people. And, you know, I hope you'll get to know each other across this divide. Last night when I got to, I met one of the local prophets who lives in this part of the country, and who lives in Qualicum Beach.

[ 2 : 50 ] And he said, what's this group, do you know? And I said, well, we're all from a church. He said, it's funny, you know, generally I can pick up the vibes.

And then he went on to tell me that they look like quite ordinary people, really.

And he couldn't. So having told him that, he said, I said to him, well, maybe you can pick up the vibes as to what kind of a church they are. And he says, they don't look like religious people, because religious people mostly look miserable, unhappy, ungodly.

And so he thought that. The problem was he knew I was the minister. That's what unnerved me. But I am.

He had been through some bad experiences with religion. And they got to him early in life and got him converted and all excited about religion. And then he just found it was too much for him, and he didn't know how to take it.

[ 4 : 00 ] And he was caught. He said, for the most part, I can get along without it. But he said, I have this problem that I keep thinking about it now, because he says, one of the only ways you can handle it is just to say the whole thing is a lot of BS.

And he said, that gives you certain relief for a short time. But then you have to come back to it again. And so he said he might visit us and look us over during the weekend and see what he thought.

So that's, he's just one of the local prophets. And I guess he represents a point of view, and a lot of you represent different points of view.

And so that when Christ begins this ministry of going out to a whole lot of people, how do you speak to a whole lot of people? What do you say to them? When they, you know, they've got all their prejudices all worked out and all their arguments all worked out and all the things that they want to do.

They have that all worked out so that it's fairly hard to speak. And the job that he was on, if you look at it there, you find that he went preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

[ 5 : 10 ] And the trouble with the good news is when you first hear it, it sure doesn't look very good. And people get into trouble with it for that reason, that it looks almost anything but good.

And yet that's what it is, and that's what it's called. And it's the preaching and the good news of the kingdom. Now, when you hear good news, it says both that it was preached and that it was brought here.

Well, it was declared and it was proclaimed. It was like somebody standing up and saying, you know, that famous old statement, the king is dead, long live the king. Something is finished and over and something new is beginning.

That's what it is to proclaim. And so the thing that he was doing was proclaiming the good news. Something is now finished and something is now beginning.

And what's beginning is going to really grab you if you just understand it, because it's the announcement of the establishment of the kingdom of God.

[ 6 : 15 ] Now, a lot of people, I think, don't understand this. They think God's primarily interested in churches. And churches really aren't that important in the long run.

The kingdom is important. And the kingdom spills over. And all the churches represent is a kind of collected group where people hear and respond to the news of the kingdom.

But then they go out and tell the news of the kingdom from that central point. So they go out and then they come back and then they go out again. But it's the kingdom that is the essential result of the proclamation of the good news.

That's what Christ was saying. He was talking about a kingdom, not just about a church. And so he had the twelve with him. And then Luke tells a secret, which is a very interesting secret, because it doesn't come out anywhere nearly as clearly.

How did these twelve survive? And what kept them going? And there's a very interesting verse. There was the twelve, and then there were some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities.

[ 7 : 23 ] Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out. Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod, Stuart, and Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their means.

So this kind of practical company of people that was moving around the country included the twelve and a number of women who traveled with them. And who from their means supported this whole undertaking of proclaiming the kingdom.

So you have this group going out with the business of proclaiming the kingdom. And what does that mean? Well, wherever they went, they had a considerable impact and they aroused a good deal of curiosity.

So what happens is that there gathers around them, as you see in verse four, a great crowd of people who come from town after town.

And they came out to see him. Now, a crowd is by and large a fairly vicious piece of equipment. They have got to be entertained. They have got to be occupied.

[ 8 : 31 ] They've got to be focused because if they turn bad on you, you're in trouble once you've created a crowd. And so you find that somebody like the Rolling Stones, they gather a crowd of sort of 90,000 people together.

But then they take over. And with high-powered amplifiers and with lights and with all sorts of things to hypnotize and fascinate this group, they get to hold them in the palm of their hand so that they can control the crowd.

And they can make the crowd behave. And they can bring them to frenzy. And they can lower them again. All by the use of various crowd control methods that they have become very proficient in.

And during that experience, everybody in the crowd has an experience that they go away with and said, That was it. That was it. I have been there. And now I know. And so that kind of crowd

experience is something that's a dangerous thing to try and handle.

So Christ was confronted with a crowd that he had to deal with. And he had had some bad experiences, even in a small congregation. They'd taken him out to throw him off the cliff after one of his sermons hadn't really come up to their expectation of what he ought to say.

[ 9 : 45 ] And on another occasion, they picked up stones to throw at him because, again, they didn't like what he was saying. So he knew that crowds could be violent and crowds could be hurtful.

And what do you say to a whole crowd of people? Now, I like this particular point because I don't know what to say to you this morning. I don't know where you're coming from.

You know, I don't know what your secrets and your reservations and your experience is. I don't know where you're hurting or where you're frustrated or where you're disappointed or anything else. I don't know about that. And, of course, Christ had this tremendous crowd, so he said, This is how I'll deal with them. And that's when he gave them this parable.

He didn't want to say, Well, you know, that I'm a Catholic and they're all Protestants, so I can dismiss them on those grounds. Or I'm a fundamentalist and they're all liberals, so I can dismiss them on those grounds.

[ 10 : 48 ] He didn't want to do that kind of thing. Now, I'll show you what happens in a crowd situation. When you get a whole gang of people together, they are represented by this little guy here.

And there he is. Can you all see him? They are represented by this little guy down in the corner. Now, what happens is that God, whom we'll represent in that way, is speaking to us.

Now, this happens to be the personal dynamic of most people. They have some sense that God and them have an agreement and that God is talking to them, you know.

So that when they get through a red light without getting caught, they say, Thanks, God. I'm not sure whether he wants to take credit for that or not.

[ 11 : 58 ] But at some kind of basic level, they think that, you know. If they win at the racetrack, they have that understanding.

So that most people have this kind of communication going on all the time in their lives. They don't understand it and they don't work out too precise a theology of what this means.

But they have this general sense of God. And sometimes it's God giving them a bad time, too. But they know who to blame, even when that's happening. And it may be highly unformulated.

Well, then along comes the preacher. You see, this is him here. Now, while God speaks to him that way, the preacher speaks to him that way.

That is, he goes right over his head. And so that he never discovers that what's supposed to happen is that this preacher is supposed to talk to that point there and help him understand what is happening and what God is saying and how God is communicating to him.

[ 13 : 12 ] And that's the thing that has to be done. And, you know, and that's why, you know, preachers are fairly useless because of this fact that they don't really relate to this experience.

Well, that's how it works. And that's what Christ was trying to overcome so that he could speak to them where they live.

He wanted them to have something that they could take home with them. He wanted to have something that, well, he understood, you see, that the best way to deal with them was not to arouse their opposition.

He knew that there was a whole lot of built-in resistance. You know, when you get past talking about the man upstairs and stuff like that, you're in trouble because then you're beginning to define things a little too closely and people don't want them to define, you know.

Like lots of people say, well, I believe in that, but heaven and hell don't impress me very much. And they get very uptight when you begin to say what's involved in that relationship.

[ 14 : 32 ] So that Christ had to, in some way, put something in their minds and hearts that they could handle and they could take home with them and they could work on.

So he told them a parable. Now, the way a parable works is this. I, well, I don't know whether you want this, but I'll tell you.

The difference between a parable and a parabola, you know, that's a parabola, isn't it? You all know that, don't you? Don't you know that?

Well, now any of you who study geometry and that's a geometrical figure called a parabola and it has a point here and a point here by which you define that and that's called a parabola.

Sorry you don't know it because the joke doesn't mean much if you don't know it. But I'll tell you that one. The difference between a parabola and a parable is that a parable has a point to it.

[15:40] What happens is if you're heading for here and your starting place is here, then the best way to get there is like that.

You all know that. But most people don't want to be too direct about it. And they can't understand it if you just say, well, all you've got to do is go straight there and you'll get there.

Most people know that that's an ideal way of doing it, but having known that, then they never get around to doing it. So what a parabola means is that it's a way alongside that way that will bring you to the same destination.

So that if you talk about heaven and hell and God and Christ and the kingdom and the cross and forgiveness and repentance and sin and all those things, people turn off because they don't like religious words that much anyway.

And they find that they're confusing. So the way Christ illustrates it is to use a parable which forces them to face the same reality, but in terms that they have experienced and in a picture that they, if they want to, can understand.

[17:07] And if they don't want to understand it, then it's just a story and that's all it is. And they haven't, their resistance hasn't been built up and they're not on guard particularly because it's just a story, it's just a parable.

And so Christ uses the parable to tell them what he wants to tell them so that they will all have something that they can take home with. And it becomes for them an invitation to examine their own experience of life and see if it says anything.

And so he gives them this parable. Now what you've got to remember is he's got a great crowd here in front of them. And you must recognize that in his terms it must have been a great opportunity. But if you look at it, he didn't say much to them. All he said to them was, Sue. That's this point if you're supposed to click on the machine.

And in front of everybody, they will see. This is all a matter of timing and getting things.

[18:18] Coordination. Well, instead of using, I guess, I guess somebody should turn the lights off.

Maybe these terms anyway, so that it may be a little bit. That's all he told them. This whole crowd of people. That a sower went out to sow his seed.

And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. Some fell on a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.

Some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit, and hundredfold.

And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And that was the end of the sermon. That's all he said.

[19:20] That's all that's recorded in Luke, of what he said. Now, what are you supposed to make of this? Supposing you have no background of church experience, and no background of theology, and no background of what you're supposed to believe, whether you believe it or not.

None of those things in your background. And somebody comes along and says this to you, what are you going to do with it? How are you going to understand it? What does it mean?

What can you identify with, in terms of this, that makes any sense? Just this. He has this peculiar statement at the end, and notice that he cried.

He raised his voice, and said, I want you to know, that if you have ears to hear, hear. Then he left them, as far as we know, and that's all they had to go on.

What did they have, when that's all they had? And you see, it doesn't talk about God, it doesn't have any religious cliches in it, particularly. All it has, is a simple description, of something, which some people say, he might even have been pointing to a man, on the hillside, actually sowing seeds.

[20:39] But that's all there was, and that's all he said. What are you going to do with it? Well, that's what our next exercise is.

And John, will you take everybody over, and divide them up, and then we're going to give you, a few minutes to work on, what you think, you would have learned, by simply hearing it.

What would you be thinking about, as you walked home, with nothing but this, to go from? Okay, we're going to divide it, into six groups, so the first three rows here, will be group number one, and

maybe the first four.

Again, just for a, a minute here. Okay. You will know that, well, perhaps you don't know, but when somebody like, Einstein, produces the, theory of relativity, and puts all the mathematics, for it on a board, that virtually nobody, can follow through, what he's done, or how he's done it.

But when they look at, the end result, of what he's done, virtually everybody, can understand it. And that's, was one of the theories, that really, was part of the whole, of his life, according to, one of his biographers.

[ 22 : 29 ] And that was, that the truth, when you arrived at it, was essentially, very simple. The process of arriving at it, may have been, extremely complex, and extremely difficult.

So that, he and other scientists, have said, that when you come to the point, of making a discovery, the discovery, is always, in the basis of, why didn't I think, of that before?

You know, that it all, fits together beautifully, somehow. Well, a lot of people, have spent a lot of time, wondering about, how, a God, who created, the universe, would communicate, to generation, after generation, of people, in all sorts, of different cultures, with all sorts, of different languages, different value systems, and, and, how would you, how would you do it?

I mean, what, how, and it's an enormously, complex task, and you wonder, how on earth, do you do it? Well, the New Testament, is very clear, about how you do it.

And, it's the essential, confounding, simplicity of it, that I think, makes, Christianity, very hard, for people.

[ 24 : 02 ] People, in their imagination, want, a, mountaintop experience, they want, they want, a, God, speaking, with a message, right across the skies.

They want something, that comes out of, the Raiders of the Lost Ark, something, of that order, you know, something that just, boggles your imagination, and that every, and, they want some kind, of thing like that, and you know, how the Raiders of the Lost Ark, dealt with, with, God speaking, I, I sure, wouldn't hire them, as my publicity agent, if I was God.

But I, they, they do that kind of thing. But, what, you discover, is, that the way God, in fact, works, is, very simple.

And, this is what happens, in the next section, of this, chapter. chapter, his disciples, went and asked him, what does this parable, mean?

And, Christ said, this somewhat, confounding statement, to you, it has been given, to know, the secrets, of the kingdom, of God.

[ 25 : 27 ] But, for others, they are in parables, so that seeing, they may not see, and hearing, they may not, understand. Well, now, what it means, by this, is that, that, you, what, what, Christ is doing, to them, is saying this, to them.

Uh, unless you go, the whole way, you're not going, to discover, the secret. You're just not, going to know. And, uh, the only way, to discover, what, marriage is all about, is to get married.

Now, people try, all sorts of other ways, to fucking up. But, that remains, where the secret is. And, uh, that's what, has to happen. The commitment is made. And, a lot of people think, God's got the world backwards, when he does, things like that.

Uh, the only way, that you can experience, life, is to be born. There isn't any, sort of, observation platform, where you can look it over, and say, do I want to, or don't I?

Hey, it has to happen. And, essentially, the same thing is true, about, uh, the purpose of God, in Christ.

[ 26 : 51 ] You've got to experience it. There's no, halfway place. And, that's why, all sorts of people, have all sorts of, prejudices, by which they guard themselves, from the reality, of, Christian commitment.

They know people, who go to church on Sunday, and what they do, the rest of the week, is nobody's business. You know? And so, with that kind of an excuse, they stay away from church, for 50 years.

It doesn't seem, a big enough excuse, but they do it anyway. Uh, and they, they know a guy, who was a great preacher, but if you knew, what he did after hours. And on and on they go, finding reasons, why, they don't want to get involved.

But essentially, involvement means, uh, that, uh, that there is, a dynamic activity, takes place. And that's what, uh, what Christ is saying here, when he, when he tells you, when he tells the disciples, what this is all about.

Unless you're prepared, to really find out, you're not going to know, what it's all about. And then he says, now, this is the way it works. That the seed, is the word of God. And that's, how, the kingdom, is communicated.

[ 28 : 06 ] It's communicated, by, a, word. And, and words are very, ordinary things, as you know. But, God is a very, extraordinary God.

God. And the difference, between, him, and our world, is that, uh, in our world, we speak words, by the million.

And we don't expect, anybody to listen to them, and for the most part, people meet our expectations. You know, that, that, uh, that's what happens. And on and on we go, saying it in a hundred ways, and nobody paying that much attention.

But when God says something, what he says, he affects. In other words, he accomplishes what he says. That's the way his word works.

It does what, what it says. When he says light, the lights go on. When he says darkness, they go off. Just like that. When he says be, things do be.

[ 29 : 11 ] And when he says that's the end, that's the end. And that's what the word of God is. Now, if you look through the New Testament, you find that every congregation that's established, I mean, you can look at it.

It was established by the word being spoken, this word of God, and people hearing it, and responding to it. You know from this parable that they respond in different ways, but basically, the basic transaction is that the word is spoken, and people hear it, and respond to it.

And that's how the kingdom of God works. Very simple. And that's what he's talking about here, that this happens.

So that when you go to the Colossian letters, he talks about the word of truth, which was preached to you. When you go to Corinthians, he talks about the word of the cross, which was spoken to you. Then he talks about the word of peace, and always these words come in, and once they're in, they're kind of like a torpedo that comes into our life, and blows up, and transforms us spiritually by this word, which changes the whole of our life.

[ 30 : 31 ] So that it's essentially a terribly simple process. But it's a difficult process, too. Because this word, once it's been received, then in a sense it becomes a kind of touchstone word, against whichever your other word comes, and the truth or falsity is measured as it comes up against this word from God.

So that it's a very dangerous thing to admit the word of truth into your heart or life. Because once you've done that, then you either have to reject that, or else allow everything else in your life to come under the scrutiny of that word, and to be matched by it.

And that's really why we go on talking about Bible studies and discussion groups and reading your Bible and that kind of thing, just because this is the vital process by which God speaks to us.

This is what the whole of our parish depends upon. It depends upon the encounter with the word of God. You know, simply how, in a sense, the seed of the man and the seed of the woman come together and life begins.

So, in the same way, the seed of the word of God and the faith of man come together and life begins. And that's the whole principle of life on which the kingdom of God is established and on which the church of Christ is built.

[ 32 : 16 ] It's built on that interaction. If that doesn't happen... ..

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