

Whoever has ears, let them hear!

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Preacher: Sandy Fitton

[0 : 00] I feel like I'm being put in my high chair.

No? Michael? I was just saying to Alan, I feel like I'm being put in my high chair.

Sit down and behave yourself, Sandy. I can't promise that. I can't promise it. I've been given a microphone. That's the trouble that is. And I need my glasses. There they are.

Has anybody else got the problem of missing glasses? They're either on the top of your head or tucked in your top or just dropped anywhere in the house, and you have to go search for them everywhere. Anyway, so today I'm going to be speaking on the parable of the sower.

And I was really surprised when God gave me this because he gave me about three or four different sermons and eventually we ended up on this one. And I thought, where are you going with this, God?

[1 : 09] It's Christmas. Aren't we supposed to be talking about Christmas? He said, listen to me and I'll tell you. So I'm going to start by reading the parable of the sower from Matthew 13, 1.

And it starts like this. But before I begin, let me just pray. You know, Lord, it's very easy to just take off on a run and to get very excited about your word and very excited about what you want to say. But I need to just stop and breathe and again listen to you. And Holy Spirit, I invite you to come and speak on behalf of this. I'm not the one that's doing this.

I'm asking you to do it. In Jesus' precious name, sow your word into our hearts. Help us to respond, I pray. Amen. So, Matthew 13, 1.

That 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.

[2 : 11] 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.

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 that was sown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. Now, it was quite interesting that we were listening to Alan speak about fishing and choosing to accept Jesus into your heart.

But before you can actually choose to accept Jesus into your heart, you've got to understand who he is and what he's all about. And this is what the parable of the sower is all about.

[3 : 18] And it got me thinking about who believes in Jesus and who actually celebrates Christmas. And there was this YouGov, which is like a government thing, and they did a survey into how many people celebrate Christmas.

And it was only a very, very small survey, because there are millions of people in the UK, and they chose an audience of about four and a half thousand.

So it's a drop in the ocean of what really is happening in the country, in the whole of the UK. But nevertheless, in this survey of about four and a half thousand people, they discovered that 45% of those that they asked in this survey celebrated Christmas.

And out of that 45%, about the 18 to 34-year-olds, that the majority of those, actually, sorry, it was 89% that celebrated Christmas, which I think is a woo-hoo moment, don't you?

Woo-hoo? Woo-hoo? Oh, golly. We're post-Christmas, aren't we? But anyway, it is a woo-hoo moment, because there's 89% of the country that are celebrating Christmas in some form or another.

[4 : 35] 45% of them are the 18 to 34-year-olds, 35-year-olds. And they are the ones that are really looking forward to Christmas. They think it's all great. It's absolutely marvellous.

It drops considerably as we get older. And when we're between about 50 and 64, it drops to 28%, think Christmas is marvellous, and then 26% when you get to 65%.

So it turns out that if you're a pensioner, you're a bar mint humbug type of person. But anyway, we celebrate Christmas in the UK, and we do. But I do wonder what type of occasion we celebrate.

Now, as Christians, we know that we celebrate Christmas as Christ coming down from heaven to be with us. And it again made me think that there we have God sitting in heaven with Jesus.

I just imagined this. It's not quite like that, I'm sure. But imagine, if you will, that God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are all together in heaven. They're very happy, if you thank you, please. But then Jesus says, now I'm going to come down to earth, and I'm going to be with humans.

[5 : 43] I'm going to become human. I'm going to become flesh and blood and bone, and I'm going to just see what it's like to be there with them. He's the one that chose to leave heaven to come down to earth to save us from hell, in a nutshell.

So that's quite an awesome thing, isn't it? Is this? I'll do that. It's quite an awesome thing to think that Jesus was there in heaven, and he chose to come and be with us to save us from hell.

And we love the fact that we've got Jesus Emmanuel with us. We love the fact that he's come to be with us, but we also love the fact that we know that when he rose and went back to heaven, he promised to come back again.

So we've got one eye, as Christians, on Christmas, and then the other eye on Christ coming again. And we're told in Revelation 1-7 that Jesus will actually come, and at that point, at the second coming, every eye shall see him.

Not just the shepherds, not just the magi, not just his family, but every eye shall see him. And get this, 1 Corinthians 15-52 says that every eye shall see him in a flash.

[7 : 03] It's a twinkling of an eye in the Bible. That means really fast to you and I. And I can't wait for that day. I really can't. But then you've got to think of what Christmas means to others that are not Bible-believing Christians.

And you may be sitting here today, and you don't believe in Jesus. You think God's some kind of, I don't know, big entity, but you're not really quite sure what he's all about. Well, I want you to listen to this sermon today, because it is for you, as it is for everyone that's sitting here.

And if we think about those that don't believe in Christmas, I always think that, well, we take Christ out of Christmas, don't we? And Kylie Minogue has made a fabulous new song, really, because she's got straight to number one with XMAS.

I don't like it. I love Kylie Minogue, and I love her songs, but I really don't like this song, because she's put an X where Christ is, and I don't like it. It's not right. It's Christmas, not XMAS, please. But most of us do celebrate the occasion with lots of lovely things, don't we? We have party games and fun. We have presents, giving and receiving. I particularly love giving. I really, really enjoy trying to choose a present that means something to the person I'm giving it to, and that will delight them, and they will use it.

[8 : 26] I love the Christmas dinner. I love a bit of turkey and a bit of gammon, and I even love the Brussels sprouts. And Brussels sprouts can be coming in all sorts of guises, can't they? We can have them friccazied and fried and put with chestnuts and put with lardons, but a Brussels is a Brussels is a Brussels.

And it is a Marmite thing. You either love it or you hate it. I love Christmas movies, too. And I finally got to watch the whole of It's a Wonderful Life this year.

Woo-hoo! I normally fall asleep through a Christmas movie. But this time I was wide awake because I was decorating the tree at the time. I was stood up so I couldn't fall asleep. I love the time with family and friends.

It's great, isn't it? The house full of people, and it's really sad when everybody leaves. But then again, it's really good because you're a bit done in by the noise and everything else.

And I don't know if you listen to the King's speech, but I tend to miss it and then catch up on it because I'm a bit busy on Christmas Day. But I do love the King's speech. It's usually a word of encouragement, and particularly the afternoon naps.

[9 : 34] And I know that somebody enjoyed an afternoon nap with a fez on his head this year. It's all good. Christmas is all good. It's a time to celebrate.

It's a time to eat. It's a time to have fun with family and friends. But what most people don't realize is that Christmas is a time of when we celebrate Jesus as the coming of light in an otherwise dark world.

And it is dark at this time of the year. It gets dark at all past three. It's a bit too dark for me at that time. I like it when it gets those light nights. But what we must remember is that Christmas is a seed scattered out to humanity every single year in the hope that where it is sown, the reality of Jesus, the reality of Christ in Christmas, is taken to heart.

So we're going to push away the tinsel of the trees and all the presents and everything like that. We're going to focus on the actual seeds that Jesus is talking about in his parable of the sower. And as he's talking about these seeds, he's actually talking about four types of people. Four different responses and four different outcomes. And he says this is for anybody with ears to hear. [10:50] So I presume that if you're listening today, you've got ears to hear. And if you're listening to this on the recording, then this is for you also. And I do pray that you get to know Jesus if you don't know him already and you truly hear what he's saying to you and perhaps recognize which seed, which person you are as I speak about these four types of person that Jesus is speaking about.

Next slide, Shelley. That's a new one. I know she's looking surprised. I never remember the next slide. But anyway, this is about the seed of not understanding.

And it says in Matthew 13, 3 to 4, Now, this isn't about Jesus not having a good aim and not being able to hit your heart.

This is about, because he knows where your heart is, by the way, this is about that Jesus has scattered the seed but the heart is too solid for it to get through. It's a barrier. You're not going to let it in.

And that's because you either don't understand the Bible or choose not to understand the Bible and the same about Jesus. Or, if you were like me, I took, until I was the age of 30, to actually click on that there was a God and there was a Jesus.

[12:16] I was happy in my own little head. I hadn't got a clue that God existed. I was just bumbling along in life. And then I happened to stumble into God and into Jesus.

And it was the best thing that ever happened to me. Quite sad that I had to wait till I was 30 before I woke up. But I'm so glad I did. So it isn't about what the inaccuracy of God being able to reach your heart.

It's about our heart being a block to him. And in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains what is happening to anyone who hears about him and dismisses him, which is practically every Christmas for some, in Matthew 13, verses 14 to 15.

It says this, Though seeing they do not see, though hearing they do not hear or understand, in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. You will be ever hearing, but never understanding.

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

[13:26] Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, and they might hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and in turn, I would heal them. That's quite a deep passage. And like Fiona said last week, if I preached on that alone, it would take me a few sermons.

You'll be very glad that I'm not going to speak the few sermons on them, too. But our misunderstanding, and therefore our disbelief in Jesus, can be for multiple reasons.

The classic ones are war. Why is war around if God is there? Why is there disease? Why is there death? And what is this all about?

It's just religion. You know, I could expand on these few points, and many, many more, of reasons why people don't believe in God.

But that isn't the purpose of this sermon. The purpose of this sermon is to let him pass to our understanding. What we understand about war, what we understand about disease, what we understand about death, and what we understand about religion.

[14:31] Get past that, and let the seed of doubt of what you understand and what you believe that makes you disbelieve God to give you a seed of thought to take home and perhaps even respond to today.

You see, you may be leaning on your own understanding or somebody else's. Very often I come across people who say, ah, yes, but this person said this about God, and so I believe it.

But yet they've never read the Bible. Hang on a minute. What does this person know about God more than the Bible does? So if this is you, can I give you a bit of a challenge?

Can I ask you to just pick up a Bible and pick up, I don't know, John's Gospel. That's in the New Testament. Pick up John's Gospel, start reading it, and see what God does with it.

I can assure you you'll do a lot more than you imagine. And in fact, Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 is one of my favorite proverbs and my favorite verses in the Bible. It says, do not lean on your own understanding.

[15 : 39] You see, that's the first step to hearing the truth about God. Not leaning on our own understanding. It says here, listen then in Matthew's parable, and Jesus' parable in Matthew, listen then to what the parable of the sower means.

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom of God and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. My plea to you today is if you do not believe in God, to give God a chance. Don't be the person that celebrates Christmas every year without Jesus in it, without Christ in it.

In fact, the whole of Proverbs says this, do not lean on your own understanding, but in all things, acknowledge God and he will direct your path.

So pick up that Bible. And that argument that you have against God may just mean nothing in the end because that is your own understanding and not the understanding you can receive from God.

[16 : 51] Next slide, Shelley. Jesus describes the person of the second seed as the seed with no root. Now, Matthew 13, 5 to 6 says this, some of the seed 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. So in Jesus, Jesus was saying in this person, this person accepts the truth about Jesus, they understand about God, and they have an expression of faith.

But then that faith is short-lived. It's exciting at the time, but when hardship comes along, they turn away and stop believing because it's just too hard to believe in God when trouble comes.

You know, in reality, quite honestly, no one escapes the hardship in life, not even Christians. And in fact, we've prayed for so many people this morning who are going through tough times.

None of us will escape it. And then Jesus didn't escape it either. In 1 Peter 2, 22, he says he faced all manner of awful things, but he never lied.

[18 : 14] He never retaliated. When he was hung up on that cross, he didn't say, oh my goodness, you lot can just be gone. He said, forgive them because for what they've done, they do not understand it.

He didn't retaliate against you and I when we sinned. He forgave us and he took that sin away from us if we repented of it. And he still does it today.

All that happened to Jesus wasn't fair, but he did that and he took the blame and the death for our wrongdoing and remained faithful to his mission right from the babe in the manger to the very end until he died on the cross and beyond.

He's still faithful to that mission because he's interceding on our behalf at the right hand of the Father. It's hard to understand the level of love that would die for you, isn't it?

I haven't had to die for anyone. I may have had to give up some things, but I've not had to die and I've not had to put my life on the line. Many persecuted Christians get that.

[19 : 21] They do know what it's like to put their life on the line. But when people and life seem unfair to us, we must remember to be like Jesus and not retaliate.

Jesus' persecution, trial and death demonstrated his faith and love for us. Our trials equally expose our faith and love for him.

And in this case, the person that Jesus was talking about was basically not rooted in his faith or her faith. And why is being rooted so important?

Well, just imagine, if you will, a great big sequoia tree, a redwood. They're huge. They're taller than this building. Can you imagine this tree if it didn't have a root?

Well, if it didn't have a root, it wouldn't be able to stay in the ground and it wouldn't be able to hold firm if any storm came along. And it wouldn't be able to nourish the tree and all its leaves would wither and die and it would have absolutely no use and fall over and basically be useless, become firewood.

[20 : 29] But a sequoia has got an amazing root and it stands in the most amazing storms because it's well-rooted.

Similarly, if our faith isn't rooted, we, and by that I mean we read and apply the Bible and we listen to what God says to us and we change our ways, then Christmas to us, the seed that was sown as Christ in Christmas, will always just be food, drink, holidays and tinsel.

It won't have any depth or meaning. Listen then to what the parable of the sower means by this. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall, the world, they fall away.

Now you may say, it can't happen to me and I've heard this said before, but I'm going to say, be on your guard, dear child of God. Be on your guard. Your faith is what Satan wants to take away.

[21 : 49] He wants it to be shallow. He wants it to be like a honeymoon period, sweet for a time, but when the trials of life come, he wants you to turn away from God.

Don't be that child. Every honeymoon period is short-lived, but an enduring relationship is rooted, nourished and strong and withstands the trials of life.

The writer of Psalm 1, 1 to 3 said this, blessed is the one who delights in the word of God and who thinks on it night and day. That person, bless you, is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever they do prospers. And I love that because I think of a great big sequoia that stood strong in the winter storm. I want to be a sequoia for God.

I want to be well-rooted. I don't want to be shallow, shallowly rooted. I want to be strong when my storms come, and they do. I want to turn to God in those times and not turn away from him.

[23 : 01] Next slide, Shelley, please. Jesus spoke of the third seed as the seed that was choked by thorns. Now, this is about a person that's got faith but it's choked by opulence and expectation and therefore doesn't have any evidence of that faith.

This is... So let me illustrate this by looking at the rich, young ruler. It's Matthew 19 again. It's 16 to 28 if you're looking in your Bibles.

It speaks of the rich, young ruler who came to Jesus and he was really perturbed, really worried. He had a real worry about his faith, a real worry about getting into heaven.

He had everything or he seemed to have everything and yet he still came to Jesus because he knew deep down in his heart something wasn't quite right and he said to Jesus, I'm worried, basically.

I'm paraphrasing a lot here and he said, what must I do? And Alan actually said, what must I do to get into heaven in his little start at the start of the day?

[24 : 08] Well, the rich ruler was saying, well, what do I do to secure my place in heaven? And Jesus said, well, keep... And he gave six of the ten commandments knowing that this ruler was keeping those commandments.

There's ten, by the way, as we said, but he only gave six. And the ruler said, yeah, I keep all of those. I'm good. Thank you. I'm really, really good. But I feel like I'm lacking.

What am I lacking to get into heaven? And Jesus said, there's two other commandments that you haven't thought of. And they are to love the Lord your God and love with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to give up all those riches and I want you to give them to the poor and to come and follow me. And that was the step too far for this ruler.

That was the step too far. His opulence and his wealth was the step that said, I can't let go of this. I can't let go of my bank balance and I can't give it all to the poor because when I become poor, who's going to look after me?

[25 : 20] He hadn't got that God is his carer. God is the one that will look after him. And if Jesus called him, Jesus was saying, well, I've got this and I've got you.

And he sadly went away with that horrible, horrible thought in his heart that he was still lacking. And isn't it really sad that he went away without getting the answer?

It wasn't the money, it was the love of money that got this man. It wasn't that he didn't love Jesus, he just didn't love Jesus. enough to give up everything for Jesus.

And it's a lesson to us. What are we holding on to? What is our wealth? What is our worry that is keeping us from giving our all to Jesus?

Perhaps this is a seed of thought for you this Christmas and this year. Let us give up all that hinders us. Let us run for that prize that race that will win us the prize and the prize is a life of abundance and an assuredness of a place in heaven.

[26 : 39] Jesus speaks of the fourth seed and that's the next slide please, Shelley, that gives us the hope. And by the way, all of these seeds, there's still hope.

Whether you don't believe, whether you believe shallowly, whether you believe that you can't give up these things, there is always hope in Jesus and there is always a way out.

But the seed that Jesus speaks finally is about the seed that sits in good soil. And by good soil, I mean a heart that's welcoming Jesus with all, all of its power, all of its might and all of its strength. And our church motto, which is on the walls too, is to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus and to do what Jesus did ultimately.

And ultimately, this is what the disciples did. And in a nutshell, this is what the good seed is. In being with Jesus, the disciples saw Jesus' passion.

[27 : 41] Jesus' passion was absolutely incredible from the day he created the earth and it's still going on strong now. He is and was passionate about us.

Can you believe you're his masterpiece? Look around you. Look at the person next to you. That's God's masterpiece. Sat right next to you. Isn't that incredible? I still look in the mirror and think, nah, I can't believe it.

But I have to believe it because the word tells me so. God tells me I'm his masterpiece. You're his masterpiece. Every one of you. And I know that there were disciples that were completely passionate about Jesus.

One of them lopped off an ear from a God that was going to try and take Jesus away. His faith was so passionate that he was determined to fight to the very end to make sure that he didn't lose his faith, lose his Jesus.

Now I'm not saying we have to lop off ears but what I am saying is that we need to have that passion that the disciples had. And we need to hold on to that passion that is our faith because it is so important.

[28 : 51] As somebody quite rightly said this morning, it is the most important gift you'll ever have no matter how many Christmases you get. And Jesus, it's told in Isaiah that the passion of heaven's armies will accomplish all that he's set out to do.

And isn't that true? But shouldn't we be holding on to that passion so that we can accomplish all that God has set out for us to do? I hope so. Being with Jesus, the disciples became like Jesus.

Now Jesus was compassionate. He was passionate but he was compassionate too. And he met people where they were and met them in their need. And we should do that too.

As a community, we should be reaching out to that community that we live in and meeting the need of those we mix with. Jesus said he mixes with sinners because it's the health the healthy don't need a doctor, it's the sick.

He always recognized when somebody was physically as well as spiritually sick. When you think of the woman that touched this cloak and we were reading in Revelation this morning the bottom of his cloak had scripture on the bottom of it.

[30 : 03] And it's significant that she touched the bottom of his cloak it was to be healed. And he turned around and he said to her, take heart daughter, your faith has healed you.

And she was instantly cured. We think of the leper that was instantly cured but this is what Jesus said about it, your faith has healed you. He's made you well.

Notice he said that your faith had healed them. He recognized their physical needs but he also recognized their spiritual needs. And they had swallowed their pride and come to the only healer that they knew would heal them completely.

Now I'm not saying that we need to do away with doctors. That's completely not right. We have doctors for a very good reason. And even Luke was a doctor. But listen to this.

Luke was called by God, called by Jesus to come and follow him and he did. Not like the rich young ruler. He couldn't give up. But Luke gave up and he walked with Jesus and he followed Jesus.

[31 : 08] That's a clear example of a good seed. And becoming like Jesus means that you and I will do what he did. Now Jesus came as a baby and we all know that he had to go through all of the

things that we do as a human.

And I was looking at my little granddaughters the other day, two little four-year-olds, running around free and happy and innocent and playing and they were just full of the delight of Christmas.

It was gorgeous to see. Can you imagine Jesus doing that? Can you imagine him as a toddler? It's hard to believe, isn't it? It's hard to think of but he did. He was a toddler.

He laughed and giggled and played with his toys and probably his dad made his toys for him. But then he grew up and we've got a 13-year-old granddaughter called Macy Grace and she's growing up.

And she's growing up into the purpose that God has given for her. And what is incredible about this young girl is that at the age of 13 she's brought two people to Christ.

[32 : 10] Two of her friends. She's brought them to church and she's brought them to Christ. Isn't that incredible? I'm not saying she's wonderful but she's recognized the purpose of her life and that is the purpose of all of our lives really.

All of us have got to reach out into the world to save one heart at a time. Jesus lived for his mission. He grew up into his mission and when he grew up into his mission he saved he did everything to save every single life that was born onto this earth.

Should they choose him? Should we choose him? The seed of faith that is sown and rooted in a fertile well nourished and well weeded soil is the seed that produces fruit.

Are we producing fruit? Are we well nourished? Are we rooted in God? You see the fruit is the evidence of faith in our heart and the actions of what we do.

We want to be with Jesus. We want to become like Jesus and we want to do what Jesus did. We want to go out and tell the world that they have hope. A hope of an assurance in heaven.

[33 : 26] Jesus didn't come down to earth from heaven to save us from hell for nothing. Let us hold on to that and remember what he did as we go out and speak the truth into people's lives.

So listen then to what the parable of the sower means. The seed of falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.

This is the one who produces a crop yielding 160 or 30 times what was sown. This person sees Jesus coming as a baby as the seed of royalty that was sown into this world from heaven.

He was born a king and if you believe in Christ as your saviour you saw it. You see it. And this is what Jesus says to you in Matthew 13 16 to 17.

He says this You see God wants and longs for us all to truly believe and see Christ in Christmas and to take Christ in Christmas with us for the rest of the year.

[34 : 53] And Alan said something this morning is that every sermon over the Christmas period has brought that in. Why? Because it's the truth. God so loved the world that's you and me folks that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever that means everyone who believes who listens in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

To close the seed is always the same. The seed never changes. It's Jesus. The seed that is sown into hearts whether they be stony whether they be a bit fragile whether they be reluctant or whether they be full on it's always the same.

It's Jesus. Every Christmas the seed that is scattered for all to hear and all to see is Jesus. Some won't hear or even listen and therefore will have no faith and will never understand or know the joy it is to know Christ in Christmas.

Some will hear and listen and therefore accept Jesus as the babe in the manger but a flash in the pan faith yields no fruit and no nourishments and you never get past the nativity.

some will listen and hear but allow the busyness and life and worries and wealth steal the joy that is given to you in the beginning and some will listen.

[36 : 29] Is that you? I pray that every heart in here takes the seed that is Jesus through Christmas holds it in our hearts and brings it to fruition that we nurture and nourish and root ourselves in the word that is in the Bible that we take Jesus into our heart not just for Christmas but for life.

Amen. Let's pray as the band come up. Heavenly Father it's very hard to believe if you've got nothing to hold on to or you've got no background to hold on to but I pray that today there is a seed of doubt in self-belief and a seed of hope in listening to the words that is being given and for anybody that is in a rocky boat that is not quite understanding not quite rooted in God not quite ready to give up wealth or worries that Lord you will meet them in their place and you will help them understand it's easier to give up than to fight all that time and I pray

Lord for anybody here that has truly taken Jesus into their heart that this the most precious gift of all is treasured treasured and held tight and protected and that much fruit will be yielded a hundred sixty thirty times and that each and every one of us will in our hearts think of who we can bring into church to hear the gospel truth that is Jesus the Christ that was brought into the world to save us from our sin to get down from heaven to save us from hell amen you