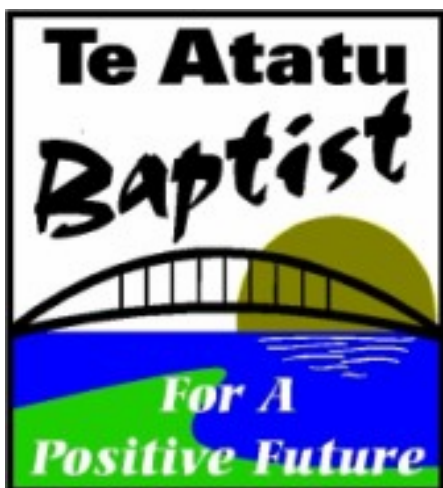


Pulling weeds, throwing rocks or chasing away those pesky birds!

Matthew 13:1-23 – The parable of the Sower



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Jesus once told the story of a farmer who sowed seed in four different types of soil.

The seed was the promises of heaven and the soil represented people's attitudes and responses.

Three out of the four types of soil were no good, and actually killed the seed that was meant to produce new life and fruit.

Out of these three expressions of people's hearts – either the weeds choked the seed, rocks ruined the harvest, or birds pecked away the seed from sending down roots and finding life-giving nourishment.

To be honest, that's still how it works today in *our* hearts and lives.

Either we spend all our lives pulling out weeds and getting frustrated with people and life, climbing over or removing the rocks that stand in our way, causing exhaustion and depression – or scaring off the birds that threaten to destroy our happiness by attacking our values and robbing us of our vision in life!

Well, I think God has something important to say to us today, to encourage and motivate us.

Let's open the Bible, and read from Matthew 13:1-23

- 1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and *sat* by the lake.
- 2 Such large crowds gathered round *Jesus* that he got into a boat and *sat* in it, while all the people *stood* on the shore.
- 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.
- 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
- 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

9 He who has ears, let him hear."

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

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

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would *heal* them.’

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

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

20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

You know, one of the most amazing things about this parable, unlike the others – is that Jesus actually gives us the *meaning* and the *explanation*.

And what we often don't realise, is that while Jesus had just *taught* this parable, He also had just *lived* it!

The essence of this parable is also about preserving with sowing, through opposition, temptation and the hardships of life.

You see, if we look at verse 1 – we see that 'on that same day' Jesus *taught* them many things.

Yet in the *morning*, the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of being the devil, tempting Him and trying to discredit his ministry!

Following that, His disciples came to Him with problems and distractions.

Yet in and through all these things, Jesus continued steadfastly to follow and obey the Father – and not be *distracted* or *discouraged* by the very things He was about to teach through this parable of the Sower.

Jesus lived what He taught, and He taught what He lived.

Earlier in the day Jesus was in the synagogue, wanting to plant seeds of faith into those present, but they rejected His message and in doing so, rejected God.

For the Pharisees *inside* the religious institution, the seed had fallen on the hardened path, and the devil immediately stole it away!

But here in the verses we just read, it is the multitudes of *common* people who gathered to hear and receive the Word of the Lord!

You know, sometimes God speaks to us in ways and places we least expect.

He plants seeds of faith in our lives - just as much in the church as He does sitting in a boat on a lake!

For you and for me, often our best and most important work for God and His kingdom is not within the four walls of this building, but out there – amongst the everyday people with whom we have contact.

And even the way Jesus *imparted* seeds of faith is important.

Notice how He spoke in parables – relating to everyday issues of the people to whom He taught!

He didn't quote Scriptures or examples from the Bible – but related in a manner that was *easily accepted* by the multitudes.

Look, even the disciples with Jesus couldn't understand this important point, and asked Him, '*Why do you speak to the people in parables?*'

There's some important keys here – especially for those Christians who think it necessary to 'Preach the Word brother!' and hit people over the head with the Bible at every chance they get.

Jesus, the very Word of God become flesh, didn't Bible bash, but spoke and related in a way that was acceptable and common to the people.

You feed people at the *level* and *maturity* they can receive.

Those who don't understand the gospel will have a seed planted, and those whose eyes are already opened will understand the deeper truth and also be fed.

When Jesus was speaking of those people *whose hearts were hardened* – He was referring to those in *the Synagogue*– in the religious gathering places of the day.

But, may it be said of OUR lives today, the same words our Loving Saviour spoke over 2000 years ago...

16 ...blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

Let's look briefly at the four types of soil, of hearts that Jesus taught about.

1. The first is the seed that fell amongst the hardened path.

"A farmer went out to sow his seed.

4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

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

The soil this represents are those people who hear, but do not understand – for their hearts are *already* hardened.

Hardened paths are not intended to be sown with seed.

These people have no interest at all in the gospel, *and it is of their own choosing*.

People in this state of mind are easy targets for the devil – who delights in stealing away good teaching and sermons that have the ability to save a sinner from the flames of hell and destruction.

If your heart is hardened, or beginning to be hardened to the Word and the Spirit of God this morning, you need to break it open and allow the hardness to be cracked.

The prophets of old cried out the words we need to hear this morning:

Isa 44:3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Isa 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

This morning, open your heart to the Spirit of God – begin to allow the seed of God's Word to fall into the cracks of your hardened heart.

Start praying again, honest, simple prayers that invite God to journey with you along the path of life.

2. The second seed is that which fell among the stones.

5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

These people seem to preserve longer than those who simply aren't interested in God.

They have an interest in God and come along to church for a while, often a *lot* longer than those who simply aren't interested at all.

The trouble is, that while they go further than the seed that fell on the hardened path, their destiny and end result *is just the same*.

They fall short of entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

Notice how far they actually travel!

They hear the word, and are *inspired* by it.

“Great sermon you preached today, it really meant something to me!”

But all they do is hear, and it has little *affect* upon their hearts and lives.

They receive the message with *great joy* – and are often the most exuberant in worship and thanksgiving to the Lord!

But, as soon as the emotion passes, and the troubles of the world reappear – this person falls away – because their *roots* have not sunk deeply into the Soil of Life.

Jesus describes these people as having *no roots*.

They travel around a lot, perhaps from one church to another – chasing the latest anointing or excitement.

These people might be those who decide to wait until Sunday morning to decide how they ‘feel’ about coming to Church, or if the weather is too good to spend the morning stuck inside the four walls of a building.

These people are often offended by the Word and lack perseverance and commitment.

It is interesting that persecution and trouble in this parable is personified by the *scorching Sun*.

It is the same Sun that gives life giving energy and strength to the *good* soil, as it also *quenches* the seed sown in the *bad* soil.

Sometimes it all has to do with *our* attitudes and responses.

Reminds me of a quote found on a prison wall inside a concentration camp.

Two men sitting inside a prison cell – looking out the window at night. One man could only see bars, the other only stars.

3. But some fell amongst the thorny ground.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Once again, these people go further than the former two.

The seed has actually *planted* and *grown* in their lives.

They are doing well – for a season or two.

And, notice that it isn't just *persecution* that chokes out this person's love for the Lord, it is also prosperity!

The deceitfulness of wealth!

In our beloved country, we don't have to worry too much about *persecution*, but I tell you what – we'd better be worried out our possessions – and NOT that we don't have enough, but that we have too much!

An interesting point about these verses, is that no good farmer would sow seed amongst thorns!

Thorns were weeded out, and the only purpose or place they were used, were as *hedges* and *protection* around the edges of the fields.

I believe these verses refer to those Christians who are on the edges or the fringe of the church or Christianity.

With one foot on *each side* of the fence!

Now, I'd be the first to admit that I am biased. BUT – **I believe in the church!**

I believe the church is God's design and plan.

One of the first things that presents warning bells that a person is falling away from the Lord – is when they stop coming regularly to church.

And by regularly, I am *not* meaning every year at Easter and Christmas!

I mean weekly.

The times that this is most tempting, is:

- ✚ when a person leaves school and starts work,
- ✚ when they get married or start a new relationship,
- ✚ when they start a family,
- ✚ when they shift location,
- ✚ when they retire or
- ✚ when they loose a loved one through death.

And one other important time when the enemy will try and distract you from the Kingdom and attending church – is:

- ✚ when you have just stepped out in faith, trusting God in a new area of your life, a new experience, ministry or commitment!

Be careful of the deceitfulness of possessions – those things that take up all your time on the weekend so that there is not enough time to honor the Lord by coming to Church.

Those hire purchases or commitments that rob you and God of your tithes and offerings to the church.

The cares of this world are compared to thorns.

And there is a good reason for this.

Thorns are part of the curse.

They are a *counterfeit* for the real thing.

The cares of *this world* replace the care for the OTHER world, the unseen world, the world of the Kingdom of God.

They sap us of our energy and commitment to the Kingdom of God and the church, from fellowship, worship and prayer.

The worry of them drains our spiritual energy, and leaves us too exhausted or worried to trust God for His provision.

Notice that it is not the *attractions* of this world, but the deceitfulness of the attractions and cares of this world that destroy us.

Similar to the LOVE of money being the root of all evil, but not money itself.

4. Finally we have the good soil!

23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The ONE thing that sets the good soil apart from the bad soil – is fruitfulness!

Because, as the epistle of James says, faith *without works* – is dead!
(James 2:26)

This person UNDERSTANDS the word – they use their *intellect* and *reason* to wrestle with this *seed of faith* from God.

The fruit they produce is NOT necessarily talking about *winning souls* for the Kingdom!

It is talking about the fruit produced in the life of the person who received the seed.

It is talking about *changed* hearts and lives, of obey and outworking the Word of God in our lives.

It is talking about *repentance, holiness* and *grace*.

It is also talking about practical ministry within the church and community.

Each person is different.

Some are *more* fruitful than others.

Some of us will have the ability and the grace to endure and live *more* holy lives than others.

Some of us will be able to pray, worship and study God's Word *more* than others.

It is not for us to compare our spiritual lives with the person sitting next to us.

However, it is our responsibility to strive to be as productive and fruitful as possible – as long as we hold the two tensions of Holiness and Grace within our hearts and lives.

For we are truly under Grace and not the Law.

Jesus ends this parable with a solemn call to the multitudes and to each of us here today.

9 He who has ears, let him hear!

And I just wonder, if our hearts are to be truly good soil this morning, what fruit, what response, what actions and changes the Lord would require of you?

9 He who has ears, let him hear!