



HG15: The Parables Of Jesus 'The Parable Of The Sower'

Mark 4:1-20

Home Group Sermon Notes

14th June 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

1: The Context of the Parable 4:1-2, 10-12: *"Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables."* (Mark 4:1-2). Here we see Jesus teaching by the lakeside to a different crowd of people from usual, he had left the synagogue and was speaking to an entirely different audience and because it's a different mix of people He used a different teaching method, he chose to speak in parables in other words he made up a story by comparing something that we are familiar with here on earth and gave it a heavenly meaning. Jesus looks out over the crowd scans around and spots a farmer in a field sowing his seed, he points out and says "Look.... look over there and see the farmer."

2: The Meaning of the Parable 4:14-20: In this parable God is the farmer ,the seeds are the word and the soil the hearts of the recipients of the word of God .

A) Deaf Listeners: *"some people are like seed along the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it Satan comes along and takes away the word that was sown in them."* The birds in this first scenario are Satan who is always on the lookout to prevent anyone coming to faith in Christ. The hard paths represent people who receive the gospel message but are resistant to it and don't accept it...they are deaf to its message, the Christian truth just cannot break in and penetrate their hard hearts. They are not interested, they think the message is irrelevant, or else some are just not ready to receive it .Jesus makes it clear that these people are not saved but a seed is bursting with energy and it's aim is to survive and grow so don't give up on the deaf listeners. By showing love and continuing to pray for them they may in time respond to the message.

B) Superficial Listeners: *"others like the seeds that fall on rocky places hear the word and at once they receive it with joy but since they have no root they last only for a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away"* This person usually makes an excited and sometimes emotional response and a quick commitment to Christ but fails to think things out. The problem here is the lack of depth to enable roots to grow down deep and draw up nourishment. A well known evangelist once said that "We have learned that it takes about 5% effort to win a man to Christ and 95% to keep him growing into maturity in the church" So perhaps we need to take some responsibility here if we know of people who have fallen away because they have not been suitably cared for and nourished.

C) Distracted Listeners: *"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."* (Mark 4:18-19) We all have thorns in our lives with the very real potential to choke the life out of our commitment to Christ, maybe its work maybe its worry maybe its ambition. All these things can become like weeds and we all know what weeds do... they are fast growers, they take over and choke the good plants growing in our gardens. The weeds need to be raked out in order to give the good plant the chance to grow and take in nourishment, similarly we need to get our house in order, give God his rightful place and attend to Him instead of nudging him out, putting all manner of things before him and relegating him to as and when we manage to get to church on a Sunday.

D) Fruitful Listeners: *"Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."* (Mark 4:20). What a difference hearing and understanding God's word makes. As well as hearing and understanding we need to receive the word and act upon it, sometimes that's easy and we can notice the good changes in ourselves but sometimes the truth is hard to understand, the truth is hard to live by and sometimes the truth hurts, like unpleasant tasting medicine that has to be swallowed if we are to survive. But just as the seed that is sown in good soil produces a good crop so great growth in us is assured if we hear, accept and live by the word of God. So at the end of the day, although the farmer lost a lot of seed because of poor soil he still reaped a great harvest from the seed that fell on good ground and this should encourage us when we get disheartened if our efforts seem to produce little or no results.

It might feel that a lot of our hard work is a wasted effort, the friend we witnessed to may appear disinterested but this parable tells us to wait, be patient keep on sowing and leave the rest to God.

3: The Application of the Parable 4:9: *“He who has ears to hear let him hear”* Jesus started from something that everyone could see and understand in order to show the crowd something they couldn't see, something invisible something of the Kingdom of God everyone knew how farmers sowed seeds and so this was his starting point. Jesus always wanted his listeners to see that there was real connection between heaven and earth and if we only look around at the everyday and common things of life we can see God and at times see what he is trying to say to us.

Sir Christopher Wren is buried in St Paul's cathedral and on his tombstone is the simple inscription, “if you want to see his monument, look around you.” Jesus perhaps would have said, “if you want to see God, look around you.” The everyday things of life are a constant source for us to see God if we would only look.

Listening and understanding don't always go hand in hand and if we are gain spiritual understanding there is a deeper kind of listening that needs to be done with the heart as well as the mind.

Augustine said that a man who looks at beautiful writing in a foreign tongue can admire the calligraphy, but cannot appreciate the meaning. Just so, an unbeliever can admire aspects of Jesus' teaching, but cannot grasp the essential meaning (13:13). They hear but do not hear.

Jesus didn't teach in parable in order to hide the meaning of what he was saying instead he taught this way to bring his teachings to life but he saw in some people a dullness, they just didn't get it, something stopped them from understanding ... maybe prejudice, maybe laziness, perhaps they just couldn't be bothered to think about what he said, and so he quotes Isaiah, vs12: *“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding otherwise they might turn and be forgiven”* Isaiah said that although God had sent him to offer His message the people were so dull and stupid that you would have thought he'd been sent by God to shut their minds instead of opening them.

There are some people who are simply resistant but there are some people who don't understand the truth because they are not ready for it and so God reveals the truth when he knows that people will act on it and change their lives. You can't explain God's truths of the kingdom to someone who hasn't given his life to Christ and who does not accept the first requirement and principle which is ...that Jesus Christ is Lord and King. Jesus didn't quote Isaiah with anger, or resentment. God wants all people to come to Him and be saved but there were some who heard but were too lazy, too dull or just couldn't be bothered to work out what it was he was saying, they were interested only in the superficial and not in Jesus mission and therefore the meaning of the parable was hidden from them.

You can almost hear Jesus exasperation with the disciples when in v 13 he says - “what do you mean you don't understand, if you don't understand this one what hope is there for you.... are you stupid or something” (see also Matt 16 8 and 15 16 for similar instances). Jesus expects us to move on, to make the effort to understand in order for our faith to grow, and if our faith and understanding doesn't grow, we may expect him to be just as frustrated with us as he was with the disciples. Jesus wants and needs us to be teachable, He didn't hold back with his disciples....he challenged them, “what do you mean you don't understand?”... is God challenging you about this today?

We are all inconsistent.... we are all on a journey and our progress is never even, sometimes we seem to be in season and we bear much fruit and at other times we remain fruitless.... we all doubt, but doubt is for people who have faith, its not the opposite of faith. Alistair McGrath says “doubt is probably a permanent feature of the Christian life. Its like some kind of spiritual growing pain.”

The Holy Spirit lives in us and by trusting in Him, we will bear fruit again. We all get distracted by the world. Our work or family commitments overtake us at times but the unbeliever is different. He puts things off, he thinks he has all the time in the world, his priorities are different he says "I'll think about spiritual things when I am older, when I have time... I need to concentrate on my work just now.. I need to provide for myself and family" Then slowly the concerns of the world strangle every bit of concern for the things of God. The Christian may falter, but he/she will bear fruit again, there is always a way back for the believer, it is simplicity itself but for some the hardest thing to do, we need to say sorry to God, say sorry to Jesus for disregarding the price he paid which gives us the choice to be fruitful or not.. just say sorry, get back on track and then pray. Pray for the people who have not heard the message and ask God to show you ways to tell them. Christ is the Lord of the Harvest and the world is His harvest field, it is His work but amazingly He chooses to use people like us to sow His seed.

Today at this present time what kind of soil are you?



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Home Group Discussion Notes

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

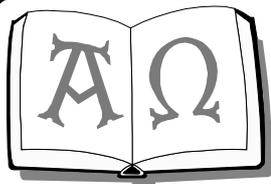
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

See below ...



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

Ice breaker: Krish Kandiah says in his book *Disciples* (I thoroughly recommend it) that *"its no wonder that our faith is dissatisfying if we are treating it like a McDonald's cheeseburger - where we want it, when we want it, how we want it, or our money back. Jesus will not pander to our petty attempts to rule the world. Satisfaction comes from knowing we are giving God the place and honour he deserves. We need a constant check on our perspective to ensure that our lives resolve around God and his priorities"*

Does living in a consumer society where we get things we want when we want mean that our expectations of God are unrealistic, expecting him to save us meet all our needs *and* make us happy and when he doesn't, does our faith become shallow ?

1) Jesus often accused the disciples of being dull. What do you think He would say about your level of understanding of the bible?

2) Are there people that you know who have made a rocky commitment only to lose focus on Jesus and fall away? What can you/we do to help, are you/we doing anything to help?

3) What things are most likely to distract you and how can you bring them under control?

4) What changes should we expect Jesus to make in us as we mature in the faith?

5) Was there a time when you felt that you were more fruitful?

6) Who are the people around you who you could tell the gospel to, and how could you go about doing that in a sensitive yet open way?

7) What kind of soil would you say you are at this moment in time?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

