

Days like today, are the rare times I **don't** feel completely out of my depth. I'm a farmer (for Goodness sake) – My dad was a farmer (raised; trained as; worked as; trained farmers),,, What on Earth am I doing teaching you lot the Scriptures, when what I know is farming???

And so, the Parable of the Sower (or Seed & Soil types) – it's one of my favourites – simply because I do actually know about this stuff and I don't feel quite so out of my depth.

But before we get into it, let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank You for Your word.
And we thank You for the way Your Word speaks to us through everyday examples.

Lord today, as we encounter the sad fact that many who show interest in Jesus, do so at a very superficial level,,, we pray that You would help us to understand why this is, and that You would help us to **not** be superficial, but to be 'all-in' for Jesus, And to be fruitful in our faith, getting us through to the joyful harvest.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

“Bums on seats” (am I allowed to say that in church?) – that used to be the key indicator of how a church is going. If you had a lot of people turning up – All good...

But now in this day and age of podcasting and social media there's numbers of all different kinds:

- likes;
- downloads;
- views;
- finishes

Numbers... They may seem important, but much more important, are: faith; obedience; and endurance through to the harvest.

When the numbers grew for Jesus, we're told:

⁴ ... a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him,... – Jesus' response was to tell the Parable of the sower... And essentially the parable of the Sower is about how not everyone who comes to Jesus, will hold His Word true; nor will they stick with Him through to the end:

- some will come and hear Jesus' teaching, and reject it out-right;
- some will be very superficial and their faith will die;
- others will start out following Jesus but then they'll get distracted by worldly stuff, and so they don't get through

to the harvest;

- But then others will be good soil – they're the ones who:
 - not only hear the word of Jesus;
 - hold onto that word;
 - treasure that word;
 - patiently endure through suffering;

Basically they:

- not only hear the word of God – they do it and they live by it (through to the harvest).

Now, some folk, when they read this parable, might find themselves asking: “Is this type of person saved? and Is this type of person saved???” You know what: The parable isn't about “What it takes to scrape through” – to Jesus, that sort of thinking is a nonsense... There is only one soil-type that we should aspire to be. If I am a Disciples of Jesus, why would I ever contemplate “What could be the minimum commitment/standard/embracing of God's word, to make sure I will still “scrape through”?”

The Parable of the Sower is about “How one can be fully effective in their life as a Christian...” It's about: Will we be the people, that Jesus has saved us to be...

You see:

A farmer does not plant a seed, to produce something green, for him to admire while it's growing... The whole intent of planting a seed, is to get that seed growing, and to get it through to the harvest – it is to produce a crop – it is to grow right through to the end... In Agronomy, the term is to reach “physiological maturity” – It's to get the seed to become a plant, that gets right through to the completion...

The parable of the sower, is about becoming and **being** what Jesus has saved us to be... And what has Jesus saved us to be? He's saved us to be hearers and doers of God's word, clinging to Jesus (enduring) and clinging to His word, right through to the end.

Now, I'm going to take the reading a little bit out of order today, because to understand the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains, why He teaches with Parables in the first place. And so that's where we're going to begin.

*Over the years, I've been to lots of ministry training sessions. And often in those sessions, we'll be told, "You should be doing most of your teaching in stories. People remember stories; They love the stories; That's why **Jesus** used stories – because that's the best way to get people to understand what they're being taught..."*

The only problem with that piece of often-repeated advice: It's not true. In fact, Jesus **told** us why he used stories, and it's for exactly the **opposite** reason. It's so those who are on the inside, will get it (and do you know how Jesus' disciples got it? He would explain it to them clearly, after everyone else had gone home). And so those who are on the inside, understand it, while those who are on the outside will be left wondering "Huh? Remember that story,, I don't know what it was about."...

Jesus said to His disciples, “**To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God** but to others, it's in parables, so they'll see the same stuff you do, but they're not going to see; and when they hear it, they're not going to understand it. He was pretty-much quoting the Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah.

And the principal is: When God speaks, many are resistant to what God is clearly saying. And to those who are resistant to hearing the wisdom of God, the things of God will remain concealed...

And so, Jesus spoke in parables so that some folk will hear the nice story, but because they're resistant to the word of God, they just don't get it, nor do they search for it.

And so the “Parable of the Sower”; and the example “Lamp under a jar”; **and** Jesus' response when His Mother and Brothers come to visit Him, are all to do with “Hearing God's Word”, and “How we hear it”, and “How we respond **when** we hear it”.

“Hearing” is a key word through this whole section:

- Back when Jesus finished His sermon on the plain, He told the story of the Wise man and the Foolish-man. Those who hear the words of Jesus and **do** it, are like the wise man who dug down to a firm foundation on which to build his house. But those who hear the words of Jesus and **don't** do it, are like the foolish man who just plonked his house on the ground and the creek swept it

away.

- And Today, at the end of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
- When He gives the reason for the parables: It's so that in hearing they may not understand.'
- In the explanation of the Parable of the Sower, the Seed is the Word of God. And with each of the 3 failed soil-types: There's:
 - those who have heard;
 - those who, when they hear the word
 - those who hear

Alright, they all heard the word of God, but they all failed.

- And those who are the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast
- The whole point of the Lamp under the jar is: ¹⁸ Take care then how you hear
- And Jesus' response when His Mother and Brothers come to see Him: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

You see, it's **all** about hearing, and how we hear, and what we do with what we hear.

Often when we read the Parable of the Sower, we only think of “fruitfulness” in terms of “How much I can achieve for Jesus”... And feel free to take that message home with you (as well), because in the Parable itself, does talk about a yield of 100-fold. *BTW, that's a pretty good yield. If you plant your wheat at 45kg/ha, that's a yield of 4.5t/ha. Pretty good. In Jesus' day, that would be an astronomical yield with their farming methods and with their varieties...*

But in Jesus' explanation, “**hearing**” and how we respond to what we hear comes up over and over again, while “fruit” is only mentioned twice, and in the original Greek, only once. The Good soil **did** bear fruit. And even in that, it's more about getting through to the harvest – it's more about fruition than fruit.

So, let's get into the parable.

Today if we are planting row-crops, we **don't** usually use the word “sowing” – you **plant** a row-crop with a precision planter... But if you're planting a broadacre crop of wheat or barley you might still use the word “sow”, but the sowing we do today is more precise than it used to be. These days our planters will plant at a constant depth, with a row-spacing the farmer desires. And more often than not, there will be a press-wheel to firm up around the seed to improve the soil contact and thus improve its germination... Planting equipment's come a long way from the old Chamberlain combine I remember when I was a kid...

But of course, in Jesus' day, the seed was all hand-broadcast. It's the same method you might use to throw fertiliser out on

your lawn today. It's only about 2 years ago that I bought a little fertiliser spreader for fertilising the lawn – up until then I've always done it by carrying a cut-open RoundUp drum in one arm and throwing it out with the other...

And if you've ever done that, you know that some of the fertiliser will inevitably land on the concrete footpath or veranda; and some of it will end up going through the fence to the neighbours. Hand-broadcasting is not a precision application method...

And so Jesus told the story about a sower, hand-broadcasting the seed. But the emphasis isn't on the sower – the emphasis is on the soil-type – on which the seed lands.

- Some of it fell on the path.
It got walked over and the birds came and gobbled it up...
- Some of it fell on the rock
– either shallow soil with a shelf of rock under it, or rock with a crack that held a little bit of soil. But either way, there was enough moisture for the seed to germinate, but that sort of soil doesn't hold enough moisture for a crop to grow. And so it shrivelled up.
- Some of it fell among the thorns. And the thing with most 'problem weeds', is they're much more vigorous than the crop we're trying to grow, and they over-run it. And the term Jesus used is "They choked or strangled the crop".

- But then some of it fell on good soil. And the Greek literally says "It made fruit". The focus isn't on the actual yield – the focus is that it made fruit – it got through to physiological maturity... And what a blessing that was – 100-fold.

As he said these things, he called out, "**He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**"

And the Disciples took that command very seriously, because when they heard the story, they didn't 'get it', and so they asked Jesus to please explain...

And Jesus began his explanation by telling them why He uses parables – It's so not everybody does 'get it'. But those who are on the inside, have opportunity to know the secret... And so, the Disciples gained understanding, because that's what they sought.

And this goes for us. When we read something in the Bible, we might not 'get it' straight away. But that's why God has gifted people as preachers and teachers, to explain God's word. And so when we hear God's word, if we don't understand it, study it some more. And if we still don't understand it, we look to the wisdom of Godly Bible teachers. And God **will** reveal His mysteries to those who genuinely seek understanding.

Righto: Back to the Parable and Jesus' explanation.

The seed is the Word of God. And the soil types are different types of people – people who hear the Word of God, but they respond differently when they hear it.

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12 The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

Whenever the Word of God is preached, a spiritual battle is being waged for one's soul. The Word of God, has the potential to save, and the Devil doesn't want people to be saved.

And those who reject God's Word, are willing participants. The seed is **trampled underfoot**. The Word of God is precious/something to be cherished... But many, when they hear it, they despise it – they feel it has no value to them. They hear it, but disregard it. That's the personal decision. The personal decision, is to reject the Word of God, and then the Devil does his bit. The Devil takes the word away from their hearts...

The next soil type: The soil on the rock.

That's those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

“Testing”, can be temptations to sin, but usually testing is about “persecution”... In other words, some will hear the word of God, and respond with a heap of joy and decide, “Yeah, I’ll become a Christian.” And they “believe” (for a while) / “have faith” for a while. But their commitment is short-lived.

As soon as they are persecuted for their faith, and as soon as they experience the **cost** of being a Disciples of Jesus, they fall away.

What does it mean to fall away? Well, if you believe in the human teaching of Once-Saved-Always-Saved, you’re not going to like what this is saying: They had faith for a while, but then they didn’t.

The Greek word literally indicates removing one’s-self from a particular relationship. They **did** have faith for a while – they were in relationship with Jesus... but then, in a time of testing, they rebelled – “That’s not the relationship for me”. And the image that Jesus uses, is a young plant, that’s used up all its moisture, and it’s completely shrivelled – it’s not going to make it through to the harvest.

Then comes the soil that has weeds growing on it. Ahh, weeds – the bane of a farmer's life...

Some of the seed **fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.**

The Thorns BTW are **the cares and riches and pleasures of life**

Do you notice, the thorns were there all along. The seed fell among the thorns. And the thorns grew up, with the faith that was trying to develop... Guess what won-out...

It's disastrous to try and grow a crop, unless you kill the weeds before you plant it, or as you plant it... A new crop **cannot** compete with established weeds. The weeds will just get bigger and bigger and the crop will be completely choked out...

And that's why there is no salvation without repentance. When you became a Christian, you were born again. You repented of sin (you didn't hold onto it) – the old man/woman was put to death, and you became a new creation in Christ...

To become a Disciples of Jesus means **the cares**; the **riches**; the **pleasures of life** (that means having a quest for luxury and decadence) is put to death... Those weeds are sprayed out so that our new life in Christ will flourish.

And Jesus said, that people who follow after **the cares**; the **riches**; the **pleasures of life** – **their fruit does not mature**. That's probably not the best translation. The Greek word doesn't actually mention "fruit". It's literally saying "It

didn't carry through to completion". In other words, the crop, choked out by the weeds didn't make it through to physiological maturity.

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But now we come to the good soil. On the good soil, the crop **does** make it through to physiological maturity – it **does** carry through to the harvest. And it produces a bountiful crop – 100-fold...

Jesus said: **they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.**

Who wants to be “good soil” – someone who will carry the seed that God planted in your heart, through to the harvest? – being what Jesus has saved us to be...

Well, the three characteristics of being good soil are:

1. Not only hearing the Word, but holding it fast - like a ship steering a course to a set destination. We:

- Hear the Word of God;
- Receive the Word of God; and
- Continue to hold fast to the Word of God.

2. The second characteristic of being good soil, is having the right kind of heart:

- an honest heart;

- a good heart

This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. None of us are good, but we've got an image here of a heart truly submitted to God, and by His Holy Spirit, He transforms us to be what He's saved us to be.

3. And the third characteristic of being good soil, is endurance/patience/perseverance... – it's sticking it out until the end.

To use the agronomy term: When the crop reaches physiological maturity, it's ready for the harvest.

The parable of the sower, is about becoming and **being** and **continuing** to be, what Jesus has saved us to be... And what has Jesus saved us to be? He's saved us to be hearers and doers of God's word, clinging to Jesus (enduring) and clinging to His word, right through to the end.

And Jesus immediately backs this parable up, with another one – a story about putting a lamp under a jar — what an insane thing to do... If you light a lamp, you want it to be a lamp.

Now, to understand what Jesus is saying about the lamp under the jar, we need to be aware of something: The lesson that Jesus is giving here in Luke, is a **different** lesson to what we

get taught in the Gospel of Matthew. (Similar story – 2 different lessons).

In the Gospel of Matthew, it's about being a witness for Jesus – let your light shine – let your good works be seen, and that will glorify God, so don't cover it up...

But here in Luke, Jesus is using the story of a light under a jar in a different way. It's about the Word of God – it's about the teachings of Jesus, and what we do with what we hear. God's Word is a light. It illuminates. It shows us the way...

Are we going to let the light of God's word shine? Or do we put it out-of-sight, out-of-mind?? To hear the Word of God, and to not do it – to not abide by it, is like the 3 failed soil types in the Parable of the Sower. But ignoring God's Word – ignoring the preaching of Jesus, doesn't end well.

Not only does light illuminate – light also exposes...

I've lived through a number of mouse plagues (horrible things). And in a mouse plague, you come to a shed at night time, and in the dark, you can hear the mice scurrying around and gnawing,, but when you flick the light switch on, they're exposed, and they're out of there.

And God's word does the same thing. It illuminates the way for Godly living. And for those who are Godly, the Word of God is like putting the light on a light stand, and "Wow, I can see – I know what's good and evil – I can know how God intends us to live."

But others put God's Word out of sight, out of mind.

But that's only temporary. There will come a day when nothing is hidden. When Jesus returns, and on the day of judgment, all will be exposed... And so Jesus says: ¹⁸ **Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."**

It's the same lesson as the Parable of the Sower: Those who hold firm to the Word of God and endure, will be blessed... But those who **don't** endure and **don't** hold firm to the Word of God, what they think they have, will be taken away.

And the final lesson, is when Jesus' family turn up. They want to reach Jesus, but because of the crowds, they can't get to Him. And Jesus uses this as another object-lesson – We're given a picture of them standing on the outside, and He says: **"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."**

This wasn't having a dig at His family – it's a lesson that those who are on the **inside**, hear the Word of God, and do it.

Each one of these stories, are all teaching us the one lesson: They're about becoming and **being** what Jesus has saved us to be... You and I, have been saved be hearers and doers of God's word, clinging to Jesus (enduring) and clinging to His word, right through to the end.

God has planted the seed in our heart, with the express intent,
for us to grow through (endure) through to the harvest.

And my prayer,

is that each one of us here,
would endure;

That we would hold fast to the faith we have;
That we would mature to the day of harvest,

holding on to the Word of God,
and being hearers and doers of God's word.

Amen.