

Generally, our society values very much, things like fairness and equity, justice and even-handedness. And the hand of fate is seen as something which can be cruel and horrible. *Consider the boxing day tsunami of 2004, and the seemingly random nature of it. Those who happened to decide to go to the beach that day were lost, while those who just happened to be on higher ground at the time were spared.*

*Think also of the seemingly random nature in which some are struck down with disease, and others are not.....*

And yet, at the same time we're **intrigued** with the random nature of our world, and we seem to think we can come out on top, *and so tens of millions of dollars are spent every week, on gold lotto, in the belief that it's gunna be my turn. Queensland's 4<sup>th</sup> largest industry, is the racing industry<sup>i</sup>, and all the betting surrounding it, as punters across our state, are looking for their lucky break. Just this week, they announced that Queensland can have another 3 casinos (taking our total up to 7), each of these, of course filled with gamblers (and often those who can least afford it), hoping to beat the odds that are hopelessly stacked against them.*

And so we're a people of paradox. We value fairness and equity – we spurn the random acts of nature – and yet we long for a lucky break.

And today, the parable of the sower looks at the seemingly random way in which some people come to faith, and others don't.... Why in the gospels, does it seem that some are on the inside, and others are on the outside? Why do some people get it, and others don't? Why do some people believe, and others disbelieve?

It seems completely random. It doesn't follow the strata of society. Some of the most wealthy believe, while others don't. Some of the world's **poorest** believe, while others don't.... It's not distinguished by age or gender or position or education. It's not even always distinguished by upbringing or heritage or location... Why do some believe and others do not?

Well we find the answer to this, in one of Jesus' most famous parables. Jesus told a story about a man planting a crop. And it explains how the good news of Jesus Christ gets broadcast out in the world, and then, it explains what happens to that good news, once it gets to **our** ears.

Jesus is one of the world's great story tellers. Stories are a fantastic way of getting a point across... I often use stories to try and help **everyone** to understand what God is saying to us in the bible.... But Jesus told stories for a different reason. Jesus used stories, so that **some** will understand and others won't. And the parable of the sower, is evidence of that. The disciples obviously didn't know what the story meant, and so they asked Jesus "**Why** do you use these stories?"...

And Jesus said to them, "To **you**, the secrets (or the mysteries) of the Kingdom of Heaven are being revealed, but not to everyone. ... And then He quoted the prophet Isaiah:

" 'You will indeed hear but never understand,  
and you will indeed see but never perceive."

**15** For this people's heart has grown dull,

and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.'

And that's why Jesus used stories – if your heart is **not** dull – if your eyes are **not** closed to God – if you are **not** blocking up your ears,... you'll get it... When you hear a parable of Jesus, if you are open to God, you'll want to know what it means. You'll listen to it, you'll think about it, you'll pray about it, you'll talk to other Christians about it, until your eyes **are** opened, and you begin to understand. When your heart is not dull, you will seek God, and you will find God. The mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, will be revealed to whoever is truly seeking God.....

But... when your heart **is** dull, even when the gospel is very clearly and plainly explained – a dull heart will never accept Christ as Lord. A dull heart, will shut Christ out.

So Jesus told parables – not so everyone will understand, but so that those who are seeking God, would have their eyes opened to the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. And it's still true today – if you are seeking God, God+ will not hide Himself from you. But those who's hearts have grown dull, will never understand.

OK, so there was this division – some could see – others couldn't. Some could understand – others couldn't. And here is where we turn to the parable, to understand “Why”.

The seed that is sown, is the word of God.

Now I don't have to tell you people much about planting crops. I preached on this once, in Brisbane, and I had to do a fair bit of explanation on "farming practices", but I don't think I really need to do that here today.

If I were to visit any farm in St George today, I'd probably find a lovely maxemerge planter in the shed. Equipment designed to put seed in nice straight rows, at an equal depth, with an accurate seed spacing between each seed within the row. Things have come a long way since even my father's day.

There once was a time when sowing had to be done by hand, and it was by broadcasting –exactly the same way as many of us throw fertiliser out on our lawn today. You get a big hand full of seed and throw it out, trying to control the dispersal so that it's evenly scattered across the ground. It was mostly effective, but it certainly wasn't accurate.

And so the word of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, is planted out into the world. And when the word of God is planted, some of it lands on a hard path.

*Harvest time, more than any other is when pink and grey feathers litter the radiators of country cars... And you **know** why: Galahs flock to the roads and gorge themselves on any bit of grain that's been spilt, and with a full belly, they don't get airborne so quick, and so they end up in the grill of your car.*

And <sup>19</sup> **When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.**

The word of God, is freely dispersed. Everyone gets to hear it. But those who's hearts are dull... - well it's just like water off a duck's back – They don't think on it – they don't ask God for insight – their hearts are dull, and they don't want to understand, and so they won't.

And I've seen this. When you start sharing with somebody, the mysteries of God, and you see their eyes glaze over – that's what's going on - the word of God is seed being sown onto a hard road, and Satan's just snatching it away, before there's any chance of it taking root.

The second soil, is the stony ground. And the strange thing with stony ground, is sometimes you'll get a pretty good strike on stony ground. Sometimes it comes up faster than what it does on the good soil ... But it doesn't last.

When a paddock is stony, there is less soil and more rock. When the rain falls on rocky ground, the little bit of soil that is amongst the rock, actually gets wet quicker, because obviously rocks don't take **in** the moisture. And so the same amount of moisture goes into less soil, making what soil there is, all that much wetter. And the seed just seems to spring into life. It germinates quicker – it gets going, great guns.... But it will not last. As soon as the hot midday sun begins to beat down upon it, it withers. There is only a little soil there. The plant cannot get a root hold, and so it withers and dies.

Some people hear the word and at once receive it with joy. It's fantastic. It's what they've been waiting to hear for so long. It meets their needs at that time. But their faith is shallow. And as soon as their new faith is put to the test they quickly fall away. What is that test? V21 **when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.**

*The roll of the church, is not "to give people something to do". The roll of the church, is to make known our Lord, for whom we would die ...*

Persecution, is when you suffer, for following Jesus. We don't know what it's like, to suffer for our faith. But in places like North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan... Christians are being murdered, for being disciples of Jesus Christ.

The cost of discipleship... If my faith is shallow, as soon as there's any cost, I'll fall away.

*Edwin Louis Cole once said "When the pressure comes, preferences give way while convictions hold firm."ii*

And so the stony ground, are those who fall away from discipleship, when the pressure comes on.

Let's move on to the next soil type:

Weeds. All farmers hate weeds. One of the most important components of managing a crop, is weed control.

Crops don't compete very well with weeds. And thorns are perhaps the worst kind of weed. They are prolific seeders. Their seed is carried by the wind and animals and water, and so they pop up where you least expect them. And they're vigorous, and they choke out the crop. Their root system, is extensive, and they starve the crop of valuable water and nutrients. The crop will usually survive, but it'll yield nearly nothing.

**v22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**

2 things here, that choke the word of God. **cares of the world**, or as the NIV translates it worries of life.... And secondly, the deceitfulness of riches.

What sorts of things do **you** worry about in life? .. Some of us worry about way too much.

*The story is told of a woman, who was so certain that she had an incurable liver disease that she went to the doctor to find out about it. The doctor assured her she was alright. "You wouldn't know if you had this condition, because it causes no discomfort of any kind."*  
*"Oh, my goodness," gasped the lady. "Those are my symptoms exactly."<sup>iii</sup>*

Hopefully we're not worriers like that, but at some time everybody worries, and some people worry all the time,

unnecessarily on all sorts of issues. Anxiety has become a recognised disorder. It's called 'General Anxiety Disorder', and it can be absolutely crippling to those who have it.

But it's not only those who suffer anxiety, that we're talking about. It's not only those who suffer anxiety, who's Christian life gets choked out of them. .. We're talking about 'shifting focus'.

*Before the days of GPS, if you wanted to make a straight line in the paddock, you'd have to pick a point on the horizon, and steer straight towards it, and if it's a big paddock, you might keep ploughing, and keep your eyes fixed on that one point for 20 minutes, until you got through to the other end.*

*But if you let yourself get distracted – if your focus gets taken off that point on the horizon, it's guaranteed you're going to go off track...*

And our focus can get shifted off of Christ and eternity,.. onto things of the world...

A few months ago, we studied the sermon on the mount, and Jesus said, "Don't worry about your life. Don't worry about what you're going to eat or wear; Don't worry about your body. God looks after the animals. He looks after the flowers of the field. Don't you think He'll look after you? You don't need to worry about all that stuff."

But Jesus didn't only say "Don't". He also said, "do".

Jesus didn't only say "Don't worry", He also said "Do this instead".

**Matt 6:33** ... seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Keep your focus on God. Keep your focus on Christ. Keep your focus on eternity. Seek first, the Kingdom of God. Seek first, the righteousness of God... Keep your focus on these things, and you won't be distracted by the world... Keep your focus on these things, and you won't have your Christian life choked out of you... Keep your focus on these things, and you will be fruitful for God...

The second thing which chokes our relationship with God is the **deceitfulness of riches**".

And I suppose we could mention the quest for riches, the management of riches, and the responsibility of riches. These are all things which can prevent us from being fruitful for Christ.

So, how are riches deceitful, and how do riches prevent us from being fruitful Christians?

Well, riches are deceitful, like a mirage. "If I just had a little bit more, I'd be more comfortable. I'd be more secure. We'd have everything we need."

But when you get that little bit more, you realise you need some more. And as your income increases, so does your consumption, and so you need a little bit more.

The deceitfulness of riches, promises you you'll be happier, healthier, better life style, more time.... But it's not true. The more we get, the more we want...

And the whole time we strive for riches, we delay the service of God:

- I'll serve God as soon as I finish school – when I'm at uni, I'll be in a good position to serve God
- But then uni is all too busy and I've got to have the part time job and work all holidays so I can have some spending money, but when I finish uni, I'll be right.
- And then you leave uni and start your career – Oh, I've got to save up for a car
- I've got to save up for a house
- I'm getting married
- Kids are on their way – they're going to cost
- Got to save for retirement

And we cheat God out of our tithes and our offerings, and we cheat God out of the time we should be giving Him in His service... And we're a crop – the word of God has been sown in our lives – but we're being distracted from God, and focussing on the world, and we haven't yielded anything.

The cares of the world... The deceitfulness of riches... have choked the word of God, calling us to His service... And so we don't bear fruit.

Many Christians in our society today justify their accumulation of wealth as God's intended blessing for them. And sometimes God does bless people with wealth, but **not** for us to accumulate more, for our own self indulgence – If God blesses us with wealth, it is for the use of the building of His kingdom. But often, the richer we get, the less we give.

*Here's an example from my life.*

*As a starting point, I've always given a minimum of 10% of what I've earned. Now, when I was earning \$100/week, \$10 of that I could afford. I'd put \$10 on the plate, leaving me \$90, less tax, about \$80/week to spend (1<sup>st</sup> year station hand award was pretty low when I started work)... But by the time I was earning \$1000 per week, it was much harder to put \$100/week in the offering. But it still that left me \$900/week less tax, about \$700 a week to spend... But it seemed so much harder.*

Often the richer we get, the less we give... The deceitfulness of wealth. We convince ourselves, that we need it, and so we hold on to it, instead of being generous.

By human terms Jesus Christ was a failure. He died penniless and in disgrace. But in God's eyes, He was a success.

And so the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of wealth can choke our relationship with God, and the word proves unfruitful in us...

But now, hear the good news. : <sup>v23</sup> **As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He **indeed** bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."**

The message today is more about the soil type than the seed. God's word is always good. The question for us is "How good's the soil I'm **providing** for the word of God?" "What sort of a crop is being produced in my life?"

And V23, is the key. The good soil, **is the one who hears the word and understands it** . If you truly understand the gravity, of what God's word means, and its eternal consequences, you will seek Him. If you understand the word of God, you'll keep your eyes focused on Christ. If you truly understand the importance of word of God, you won't be so easily distracted by the concerns of the world, or by the deceitfulness of riches...

And with your eyes focused on God, Jesus says **He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.**

Everyone of us, has the potential, to be fruitful Christians<sup>iv</sup> - when we keep our eyes fixed on Him.

Questions????  
Bible studies.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2003/s883784.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Edwin Louis Cole in [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)

<sup>iii</sup> 1001 more humorous illustrations, Michael Hodgkin

<sup>iv</sup> Fruitful Christians: Fruit of the Spirit; fruit of spreading the word; fruit of sharing Christ; but what did it mean for Isaiah: Isaiah 6:8 obedience. Fruit isn't necessarily achievement.