

A couple of weeks ago (when we last met), we studied a Parable that's very familiar to many of us – the “Parable of the Sower”... But for the Bible reading, we read a lot more than that. It included:

- The **purpose** of the parables;
- The parable of the Lamp under a Basket;
- The parable of the Seed growing; and
- the Parable of the Mustard Seed...

And the reason we read all of those passages at once, is because, in the Gospel of Mark, they're **not** all separate lessons – one parable keeps building on the next. And that's why we read that whole section again today...

So, let's have a bit of a refresher, on where we got to last time:

A lot of people reckon that Jesus taught by using stories (parables), because the parables of Jesus, helped **more** people to understand what Jesus was teaching... **Not so!!!** In fact, Jesus used parables for exactly the opposite reason: He used parables, so that those who are on the **inside**, would 'get it', while those on the **outside**, would be left in the dark...

Have you ever wondered why 2 different people can hear the same Gospel message, and one person, will have a life-changing experience of God, and the other one, well they're not moved at all... And that's why. Those who are on the inside (that's those who are truly seeking God) 'get it'. But those who **aren't** really seeking God, don't.

And the parable of the sower, is all about **being** “good soil”...

What does that mean??? To be “good soil”, means to be spiritually responsive to the Word of God. Jesus said at another time, “Those who seek, find. Those who knock, the door will be opened.” ... And I think that’s really what He’s getting at here.

When some people hear the parables of Jesus, those who are truly seeking God – those who really want to know Him, **will** find Him. They’ll hear the word of God – they’ll wrestle with these parables, and they’ll think about them, until God opens their minds, to understand the truth – and not only to understand the truth, but to **respond** to the truth, and to **live** by the truth....

And so, the Parable of the Sower goes like this (and I’m only going to fly through this quickly, because this is just a refresher of what we talked about a couple of weeks ago):

- The seed that fell on the path, are those who hear the word of God, but they don’t even listen. They **hear** it, but they’re not really hearing it – they’re just not that interested in God.
- The seed that fell on the stony ground, are those who hear the word of God, and come to faith, but as soon as they cop a bit of persecution for being a Christian, they give up, because theirs, is a very shallow faith.
- The seed that fell on the weedy ground, are those who come to faith, but then the things of the world compete for their attention... And they **don’t** give their attention to God, because they’re distracted by all the things of the

world... And so they're not fruitful for God;

- But the **good** soil, are those who hear the Word of God, respond to the Word of God, and live out the word of God.

And, the most wonderful message of the Parable of the Sower, is we're not stuck as the soil type we once were... The **lesson** of that Parable is, "**Be good soil**". When you hear the word of God, respond to it. Live it out, and you'll be fruitful for God.

That's where we got to last week, and now we come to the other parables that build on it:

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus told us, He's speaking in parables, so that only **some** people would 'get it' – for some people, the true meaning would remain hidden. **But that can change...**

Jesus went on to say:

"Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

Alright, if when we hear the Word of God, we don't 'get it',,, well, **don't** give up. Seek God, and you **will** find Him.

The parables **may** serve to separate those who are on the inside from those who are on the outside, **but the ultimate purpose of the parables**, is to illuminate...

When we hear the word of God, some people don't want to get it – it's like we've got this light shining the wonderful truth about God – He's revealing Himself to us, and some of us would rather go on, in our own little world, and **not** have God revealed to us... It's like taking that light, and shoving it under a bed... But when we take that light, and put it on a stand – when we put the light in the place it's supposed to be, it illuminates...

And when we give our attention to God (When we stop ignoring God, and give our attention to Him), He **does** speak, and He does reveal Himself to us.

V24 **Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. ²⁵ For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."**

When it comes to our walk with God, we never remain the same...

- Our faith is either **growing**; or it's withering;
- We're either going **deeper** into God; or we're getting shallower;
- We're either becoming more **Godly**; or we're getting more worldly...

You know, it's interesting, the way the different Gospels, sometimes use the same parables, to teach us something different.

- In the Gospel of Matthew, The parable of the lamp under the Basket, is about us letting our light shine (We've got the Gospel [We've got the good news of Jesus] – Our job, is to share it with the world.) (Don't be a secret agent Christian)
- But in the Gospel of Mark, the lamp under the Basket, is about when we don't want the Word of God to be doing its work in us – we're happy with ourselves the way we are, and we don't want to hear the Word of God, because it might cost us,, And so we stick our fingers in our ears, and we go “La; La; La La”... We discard the Word of God, because we don't want to have to take notice of it...

But to put it up on the stand, is to seek God, and to let the Word of God, shine in our lives, and do its transformational work in our lives, so that we become, what He wants us to be.

Likewise, in Matthew and Luke, when Jesus talked about “what measure you use, it will be measured to you”, He was actually talking about “judging others”... But here, in the Gospel of Mark, we're being told something different – if we put a big measure into seeking the Word of God, we'll get a big measure out of it...

But if we **don't** seek to study, and take in the Word of God – if we **don't** desire it, we **won't** get much out of it...

When it comes to being a disciple of Jesus, we cannot remain the same – we're either going forwards, or we're going backwards. And essentially, whether we're getting **closer** to God, or whether we're getting more distant, it's up to us...

The more we spiritually respond to God's Word, the closer we'll get to God, and the more He'll reveal to us.

And sadly, the opposite of that's true as well: As we become **unresponsive** to God's word, we get further away from God, and spiritual insight, fades...

- The closer we walk with God, the more His word will draw us even closer;
- The more **distant** we get from God, the less relevant His word will seem.

Righto; are you keeping up with me? It's all very practical stuff, isn't it...

Let's move on to the Parable of the seed growing:

V 26 "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

....

As a preacher, it's my job, to sow the seed ... But what I **cannot** do, is make anyone grow... "Spiritual Growth", depends on what soil type we are. When we eagerly seek God – when we hear the Word of God; Accept it; and Live by it,, **that's** when we grow; **That's** when we become fruitful for God...

I once was in a church, where a particular person was getting really frustrated that (in their eyes), another particular person wasn't spiritually growing... And think the conclusion he came to, was "We must need a different preacher", because if Michael was giving that other person what he needed, they couldn't help but grow...

But I'm going to be really up-front... I know I'm not the best preacher in the world... But even the best preacher in the world, cannot make anyone grow... That's about us. What soil type we are; And "Are we seeking God?"...

And that's an important question, because in this parable, Jesus also introduces a warning.. Whenever Jesus talks about the time of harvest, and the sickle, we have to understand He's talking about the day of judgment... How we respond to God, **always** has eternal consequences... On the day of judgment, those who are the 'good soil' – those who seek God, and respond to God's Word, will be gathered in... And so we're left with the assessment, "Will I be among those, who are fruitful, and part of God's righteous harvest??? Or will I be discarded?"

How we respond to God, **always** has eternal consequences...

And so, we come to the parable of the Mustard Seed:

V 30 "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

That's a nice image, but what's the point?

Our personal response to God, is part of something which is much bigger...

As God's word, takes root in the lives of individuals, **something bigger than us**, is growing, and that's the Kingdom of God.

The story, of your faith, it's bigger than you... The story, of what God is doing through "Bush Disciples", it's bigger than us... The story, of what God is doing through FECA, is bigger than the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches of Australia – it's all a part of the larger story of God – the growth of the "Kingdom of God"...

You know, your personal faith – you might view it as being "seemingly insignificant"... In the scheme of everything that's going on in the world – so what – I'm insignificant.

You may feel, that how you respond to God, is insignificant...
How fruitful I am for God – Who cares???

But you know what? Every individual disciple of Jesus, is a part of something much bigger:

As the Word of God, hits good soil, Wow!, the Kingdom of God grows... It's growing here; and there!!! It's growing all over the world. Wherever a heart is seeking God, And wherever there's someone, (and there may be somebody here today), who is seeking God; And the Word of God is taking root in their life, right now... There, the Kingdom of God is growing... Isn't that exciting???

And the Kingdom of God, is more important than anything else in this world...

- It's more important than education;
- It's more important than having a good job; or
- a nice house
- It's more important than fitting in; or
- being popular.
- It's more important than being 'an achiever'
- It's even more important than family...

The Kingdom of God, has begun, and the Kingdom of God, continues into eternity...

In the eyes of the world, the Kingdom of God is pretty insignificant... But on the day that every single person who has ever lived, will bow before Jesus, well, the Kingdom of God, is the only thing that will matter...

And on that day, it's only those who were good soil, who can confidently stand on that day, because they're Disciples of Jesus Christ, and Citizens of His Kingdom...

V 9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

V 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

V 24 "Pay attention to what you hear...."

What do you think the message is? Be Good Soil.

Seek God.

Be Spiritually responsive to the Word of God.

And Do it.

If we've got ears, are we really listening to God????

I'm going to pray now:

And if you're here today, feeling that "Perhaps I'm somebody who's shoved the light of God's word under a basket, because I haven't really wanted to hear it" – You're not alone...

Even people who have been disciples of Jesus for years, rope-off areas of their life, because they don't really want to be confronted, and they don't really want to change...

Well, this prayer, is for you.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, You've given us ears,
but we've spent too long, not listening.
God, forgive us.

We've been too fixated on ourselves;
Too fixated on the world;
Too fixated on our immediate future,
And we haven't valued the Kingdom of God.

Lord, Open our eyes to truly see;
Open our hearts to receive Your word.
Help us to, not just hear it, but to receive it,
and act on it.

Lord, help us to be good Disciples of Jesus.

I want to thank you, that as I confess my sins,
the Blood of Jesus, washes them all away.
I want to thank you, that even today,
I can make a new, clean start, with You.

And Lord, this time, I want to be "good soil".
I don't want to be someone who starts out strong;
but doesn't have the depth of faith, to keep going.

I don't want to be somebody who starts following You,
but then gets distracted by things of the world...

Lord, help me to always fix my eyes on you;
And to grow.

I know I can't stay the same...

Every day, I'm either going to get a little bit closer to you;
or a little bit further away.

Lord, help me to grow stronger in you, every day.
May You be glorified in my life,
as I live for You.

May each of us individually,
and together as a church,
may we grow, and be part of the wonderful,
spreading branches of the Kingdom of God.

And Lord, help me to connect,
with my brothers and sisters in Christ,
to be the Kingdom of God together,

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.