My name's Michael Brumpton. I'm a Pastor of Bush Disciples, a little church in St George, (about 6hrs west from here, and about 1:20 North of the Border.

Anyway, when I was asked to speak tonight, I was a bit like Moses. You know when God met Moses at the Burning Bush and told him he had a job to do, and Moses came up with all these excuses…

- Who am I?
- I think you'll find somebody much better than me;
- Why would they even listen to me?
  I've got nothing special to offer;
- I'm not much of a speaker…

That's a bit the way I feel, because I look at you lot, and I see:

- some theological heavyweights (I say that in a good way);
- some great preachers;

Some of you:

- are evangelists;
- with large, thriving churches…

And here I am, I'm an ex-farmer and an ex-Ag-College instructor, who's now a pastor of a little church out in the bush?

And I thought, "Well, maybe that's what I'll talk about"…
You see, Jesus used a lot of agricultural parables, and I hope I don't hurt anybody's feelings, but I reckon, in general, city folk tend to have a bit of trouble connecting with them.

Whenever I prepare a message, I always read a commentary or two written by some solid Biblical Scholars, but when it comes to the Agricultural parables, there's always something missing. These largely city-based academics, to me, don't seem to grasp the culture; or the agronomy/animal husbandry, that's playing out in these parables.

So for today, I thought I might pick one of the best-known agricultural parables – the Parable of the Sower, and unpack it.

Bible Reading: Mark 4:1-20 (25) (34)

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4 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. **2** And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. **5** Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. **6** And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. **8** And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

9 And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

11 And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of
the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in
parables, 12 so that

" 'they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.' "

13 And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable?
How then will you understand all the parables?

14 The sower sows the word.

15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is
sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and
takes away the word that is sown in them.

16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones
who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it
with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but
endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution
arises on account of the word, immediately they fall
away.

18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those
who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the
deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things
enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who
hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and
sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

21 And he said to them, "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." 24 And he said to them, "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."

Righto:

I want you to read the statement that's up on the screen…

In case anyone is listening to the recording, and can't see the statement, it says:

> *"There are 1,0 (10)types of people in the world:*
> *Those who understand binary, and those who don't."*

Put your hand up, if you 'get' that little geek joke…

Would I be right in saying, "Those with a mathematical mind 'get it' / those with a computer mind 'get it'?" And to everybody else, it's just a nonsense…

With a bit more explanation, a few more might get it … Let's give it a go…

- *Our number system is what's known as "the decimal system". Deci {meaning 10}, it is Base 10. We go through digits from 0 - 9, before we start back at 0 again,*

and put a 1 in front of it.

- *Base 5, goes through digits 0,4 , before it puts a 1 in front of it. So, we would go 1,2,3,4, before we put a 1-0, and so 1-0 would be the equivalent of a normal 5. 2,0=10.*

- *Binary, is Base 2. Computers are not very smart. They can only count to 2. It's brain, is basically a series of switches – it can only think in 2 ways – off or on, 0 or 1.*
  - *1 = 1*
  - *1,0 = 2*
  - *1,1 = 3*
  - *100 = 4*
  - *Therefore, to express the decimal number 10 as binary, it would be 1010*
  - *I'm 57 years old. But in Binary, I look a lot younger than I sound. In binary, I am 1,1,1,0,0,1*

So, do you now get it?

"There are 1,0 (10)types of people in the world: Those who understand binary, and those who don't."

Put your hand up if you get it now…

- *Some of you got it right at the beginning;*
- *When I explained it, maybe a few more of you caught up, and you now know what it's talking about;*
- *Some of you sort of know the point I'm **trying** to make, and that's enough for you, because you're not really interested; and*

- *Some of you are starting to think, "Michael's right. They should've got somebody else to speak, because this bloke's just speaking in riddles…*

Essentially, what I've just done, is I have divided us: Between those who are on the inside (those who get it), and those who are on the outside (those who don't get it)…

BTW, if you still don't get 'binary', that doesn't matter. Unless you're a mathematician, or a computer engineer or software engineer, who cares if you do or don't understand binary.

What **is** important for us, (and where there is **another** great divide) is for us to be able to 'get' the teachings of Jesus. It is to have a spiritually responsive attitude, to the word of God…. To understand it , receive/accept, and obey.

When I was going to Bible College, there was a real push on around that stage (at least in the denomination I was connected with) – "If you're preaching, you've got to use stories… People don't want to hear a sermon – they want to hear stories."

We were told: "Jesus used stories, because stories are the best way to communicate a message." And he told parables, because that would help people to understand things better…

But you know what: Jesus told parables for the exact opposite reason. He told parables, so that **some** people would 'get it', and everybody else wouldn't have a clue…

To His disciples, He said:

"**To you** has been given the secret of the kingdom of God,
but for those outside everything is in parables,
12 so that
" 'they may indeed see but **not** perceive,
and may indeed hear but **not** understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.' "

What's going on??? I'll tell you what's going on: Only those who are Spiritually Responsive to the Word of God, will understand, turn, and be forgiven…

Now, some people might be offended by this. I mean, why would God decide that some people are going to understand and others are not? Well, here in the Gospel of Mark, Mark doesn't explain it; He doesn't defend it – He merely records it, and accepts it as a given… It is God's divine choice, that some people 'get' it, and others don't…

What the parables do (you see), is they test the spiritual responsiveness of those who hear them.

The parables of Jesus, (as with any of the Word of God):

- have the power to save;
- the power to renew;
- the power to transform…

but only if our hearts respond in a Godly way…

And so, much more important than understanding binary, is having a heart, that seeks the word of God, and 'gets' the word of God… Because, whenever the word of God is preached, some people **will** 'get' it, and others won't. And that's what the Parable of the sower is about – it's about the spiritual responsiveness, of those who hear the Word of God…

Now, coming from a farming background, I 'get' this parable, and some of you do too.

BTW, Jesus didn't call it "the parable of the sower" – that's just how we know it. I reckon, a better title would've been "The Parable of the Soil types", because that's what it's about… And any farmer knows, just how critical good soil is, for cropping…

For Robyn & I to get here from St George,
we had to drive through some:

- *really good cattle country;*
- *good sheep country;*
- *what we call "goanna country" – it's only any good for growing trees & goannas, and some of it doesn't even grow good trees; and*

- *the Darling Downs, and around Norwin, where there is some of the best self-mulching clay, cropping country in the world; and*

- *the Lockyer Valley (the salad and vegetable bowl of Southern QLD)…*

We also camped for a week at Girraween National Park near Stanthorpe, where you will find Trap-Rock granite country – where some of the world's highest quality super-fine Merino wool is grown…

Soil-type means everything, for the crop you grow…

And so, when a farmer reads this parable, he knows it's about fruitfulness (It's not just about "existing" – it's about being fruitful. Farmers generally do not just plant a crop for it to exist. The crop is planted in anticipation for the harvest. It's very existence, is to bear fruit…)

And a farmer knows, that for his crop to bear fruit, depends mostly on the soil type. Yes, there will be seasonal variations, but overall, particular soil-types, will give a particular result.

Now: Is this parable, about the initial response of being saved? Yes it is. But it's **more** than that. It's **also** about our <u>ongoing</u> spiritual responsiveness to the Word of God, because God <u>continues</u> to speak daily, into our lives… And that's the beauty of a parable (you see) – they reveal a spiritual principle. And it's a spiritual principle that applies to us, no matter how long we've been walking with God…

So, let's get into it:

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

Now, farming practices have obviously come a long way since 1st century Galilee… If I was to visit any of the irrigation farms in St George today, I'd probably find a lovely Maxemerge planter in the shed (or the equivalent). Equipment designed to put seed in nice straight rows, at an equal depth, with a precision seed spacing between each seed…

Even our broadacre farmers are probably running parallelograms of some sort, so that they can plant at an even depth, fixed row spacings….

But there once was a time when sowing had to be done by hand, - exactly the way I fertilise my lawn today… You get a big hand full of seed and throw it out, and a practised hand can well control its dispersal so that it's evenly scattered across the ground. And it's mostly effective, but it's certainly not accurate.

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

Now, for those who live in grain production areas, harvest time, is a time of year, more than any other when pink and grey feathers litter the radiators of country cars...

Why? because the trucks that are carting the grain, sometimes their tail-gate isn't sealed that well, and they dribble a little bit of grain on the road. Now, Galahs love a

free feed, so they flock to the roads and gorge themselves on any bit of grain they can find.

And with a full belly, it takes them a little longer than usual to get airborne. The car however, is travelling the same speed as normal. Or if he's a harvesting contractor chasing spare parts, he's probably going a lot faster than normal. Galah fails to attain elevation; Galah meets radiator grill..

Anyway, some people, are like that hard road… When the word of God is preached, everyone gets to hear it. But for some people, it doesn't go in. It's like water off a duck's back:

- They hear the word, but they don't hear it…
- They don't think on it
- they certainly don't pray and ask God for insight
- their hearts are dull; and
- they do not want to understand, and so they will not understand.

- Or they might know what it means, but they don't like what they hear, so they reject it.

And I've seen this. When you start sharing with somebody, the mysteries of God, and you can see it in their eyes – they just glaze over… The word of God is seed being sown **onto** a hard road.

And Satan is snatching the Word of God away, before there's any chance of it taking root. But let's be clear: the root cause of the crop failing to germinate, isn't so much Satan (the birds eating the seed). It's the hard road…

And so the first soil type – is a hard heart – a heart that is closed off to God – a heart that has zero intent to understand or receive the Word of God.…

The **second** soil type, is the stony ground. Looks can be deceptive.

The strange thing with stony ground, is sometimes you'll get a pretty good strike on stony ground (germinates & emerges). And some people find this hard to believe, but I've experienced it. Did you notice Jesus said: immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. – it emerged quicker because it was stony ground. A crop can sometimes come up faster in stony soil, than it does in good soil, and I'll tell you why.

When a paddock has a lot of rocks in it, there is less soil and more rock. When the rain falls on stony ground, the little bit of soil that ***is*** *amongst the rock, actually gets wet quicker, because obviously rocks don't absorb much moisture. And so the same amount of rain, falls onto 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 doesn't last. The hot sun beats down on it, and it withers. There's only a little bit of soil there. The plant can't get a root hold, and so it withers and dies.

And some people hear the word of God, and they immediately receive it with joy but their faith is short-

lived… It is because they were shallow, that they accepted it so quickly… But now in their shallowness, they will not endure. when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

Now, is the "falling away" because of the tribulation and persecution? Alright, is it the fault of the hot weather that the crop withers??? No. It's normal for there to be hot weather. It is the stony soil that is the problem. In good soil, the crop can get a root-hold and persevere through the hot weather…

For farmers, periods of hot weather, are a normal part of life. And for a Christian, periods of Tribulation and persecution, are a normal part of the Christian life… There is a cost to being a Disciple of Jesus.

You know, the evangelical message that Jesus proclaimed, is very different to the message being proclaimed in a lot of churches today.
In many churches, it's a message of:

- salvation without repentance;
- blessing without suffering;
- reward without commitment.

I mean, Jesus used to say outlandish things like:

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33 …. any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

How often do we make an altar-call, and make those statements clear in the invitation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ…

You see: *In places like*

- *North Korea;*
- *Somalia;*
- *Yemen;*
- *Sudan;*
- *Eritrea; …*

Christians are being targeted and murdered, for simply being disciples of Jesus.

Meanwhile, in **our** land, people are rarely killed, for their faith in Jesus,… But if we publicly hold to the word of God, do not be surprised when we are:

- criticised;
- ridiculed;
- humiliated; and even
- prosecuted in a court of law…

In recent years, Christians are becoming increasingly targeted for publicly holding to the Word of God, especially on issues of sexuality and marriage. The various anti-discrimination acts across the states, have been designed, precisely, to

prevent Christians from proclaiming the whole word of God.…

1 Peter 4: (ESV)

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Be under no illusion – there is a cost to being a disciple of Jesus (even in Australia today)… And those who have no root in themselves – those who's faith is shallow, will quickly fall away… It is a picture of "apostacy under pressure" [i]

So, that's the stony ground.

The next soil type: **Weeds**.
All farmers hate weeds. One of the most important crop management decisions, is weed control.

Crops do not compete very well with weeds:

- They're 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.

Now, a crop will usually exist, but its yield can become negligible.

I see this soil-type as discipleship that survives, but is unproductive…

Listed here, are 3 things that choke out the word of God.

1. cares of the world ,
2. deceitfulness of riches, and
3. desires for other things.

Now, at this point, it's becoming pretty clear, that this parable **isn't** just about our initial response to the gospel, and it's not just about whether we're saved or not – it's about **fruitfulness**… Jesus' intent, is for His disciples, to be fruitful. We're not meant to just exist – we're meant to be fruitful. And so, this is about how we spiritually respond, to **all** of God's word…

You see, as disciples of Jesus, the Word of God, continually points us to focus on God and on His Eternal Kingdom… Obedience to Jesus, means living for eternity…

It is only when we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, and it's only when we spiritually respond to the Word of God, that we will continue to be fruitful… In fact, fruitfulness **is**, spiritually responding to the Word of God…

The Fruit of the Spirit (Love; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Goodness; Faithfulness; Gentleness; Self-control….), this is Holy Spirit in us, transforming us to become more like Christ…

But things of the world, are the weeds that choke the work of the Spirit in our lives.

You see, the world has its priorities (as temporary as they are), and the world judges us by them. It tells us that we're crazy for focusing on eternity…. And we ourselves, are so ingrained into this whole world system (that we call our culture), it's hard to break free of it… It's so easy to get distracted by:

cares of the world (or NIV the worries of this life)
The deceitfulness of riches .
And desires for other things
All sorts of stuff compete for our attention…
They enter in, and choke the word…

And we become unfruitful…

You see, Jesus calls us, as His disciples, to be radically **different** to the world. But, when it comes to things of the world, how different are we?

When we let the desires of the world in,,, they seem to tone-down our response to God, don't they..…

In farming, weed control is critical …

I was in my early teens, when after we'd mustered a paddock and got the sheep to the yards, Dad said "Come with me". And he went an grabbed a bunch of old wheat bags and we went back, deep into the scrub of the paddock we'd just mustered. You see, as we mustered that paddock, Dad came upon a weed that we did not have on our farm (Datura Stramonium; Prickly Apple; Thorny Apple; Castor Oil Bush)..

There was a patch of it there. There must've been one plant there (the year before), that went to seed. We pulled up every one of them and shoved them into the bags, to take them to the fire… And Dad marked that spot (in the middle of about a 500 acre paddock), and over the next 5 years, we went back there, to pull up any of those weeds that may have germinated…

You see, a farmer understands how critical it is, to not just control weeds, but to eradicate them… There are some weeds that are so prolific/invasive, that if we do not eradicate them, the land becomes unfruitful…

- cares of the world
- The deceitfulness of riches .
- desires for other things

These things are invasive. They enter in, and choke the word…

We know what the Word of God says, but our worldly desires are more vigorous than our love of God's word, and they choke the Word.

Now, for the good soil:
V20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and **accept** it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

The type of soil we are, will determine how fruitful we are, in the way we spiritually respond to God's word…

Now, here's the thing:
Jesus' parables, always call for a response. We could look at this and go "Well, I am what I am." "That's just how I am."

But at the end of this parable (V9), Jesus says: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Now, when Jesus says that, He's not talking about mere audio-processing… **It's a demand for a response**… **BE GOOD SOIL !!!** What he's saying is "Allow the word of God to be fruitful in you"…

It's not just about recognising:

- how broken the world is;
- "how unfruitful I am"; or
- how worldly I am; or
- how faithless I am…

This is a demand for a response "Allow the word of God to be fruitful in you"…

Alright, Jesus is talking in parables, so some people don't get it… Some are impervious to the Word of God… But that can

change… The parable of the Lamp under a Basket that follows this – that's what it's about.

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." 24 And he said
to them, "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."

The message is clear. Listen to the Word of God. Take it in. A soil type can change…

This is what the Spirit of God does… To use the analogy of a farmer, God can get a dirty great big set of rippers and rip up that hard road… And so, what was hard soil yesterday, might be a fully prepared seedbed today….

This parable, has a message for us all:

- If when the Word of God is proclaimed, your eyes glaze over, God's word to you today, is to allow Him, to soften your heart. It is not by accident that you're hearing this parable today. Allow the Word of God to take root in <u>you</u>.

  Allow **every** teaching of God, to take root – even the ones that challenge us to the depth of our being. Only then, will we understand, turn, and be forgiven.

- Some of us might be like the stony ground, where faith is very shallow. Nobody's ever told you to expect persecutions, and so you're along for the ride while things are easy, but when things get tough, it just becomes another phase you went through…

  God's word to you today, is to go deep… Come to Jesus, with your eyes wide-open, knowing that the life of a disciple of Jesus, is no path to popularity. At times it's going to be tough, but because you've got depth to your faith, you'll endure.

- Some of us might be like the thorny ground, and we believe in Jesus, but we get diverted from the narrow path of following Jesus by all sorts of worldly attractions:
  - The worries of life – striving to achieve something that has no lasting significance;
  - the deceitfulness of riches – the lie that you'll be so much more blessed if you can acquire a bit more wealth;
  - the desire for other things – things that are not compatible with being a Disciple of Jesus…;
    Why do some:
    - who claim to be Christians, shack up together before they're married?
    - lie on their tax return, to get a bigger refund?
    - read the Bible with a pair of scissors in their hand, cutting out the bits they don't like?
    - preachers adjust their message, to remove the offence???

> This is the desire for other things, that strangles the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit…
>
> All of this stuff hinders one's response to God and chokes the fruitfulness from our lives…

God's word to us today, would be:
Fix your eyes on Jesus… Throw off everything else that's going to hider you, and don't grow weary or fainthearted…

Be good soil…

V20 is the key: the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

In cropping terms, that's impressive. On the Darling Downs, a planting rate wouldn't normally go above 50kg/ha. 100 fold increase = 5t/Ha. (that is a bumper crop).

"Fruitfulness", is something that **God** does. A farmer cannot make a plant bear fruit. God does that… But the challenge of this parable, is to "be good soil".
the good soil are the ones who hear the word; and accept it; and bear fruit

Let's pray:
Heavenly Father,

We thank You,
that You are the one who Sows Your Word;
And You are the One who grows the fruit.

Lord, we pray that You would till the soil,
where we preach.

That You would reveal the rocks and stones
that result in faithlessness.
That You would deepen the soil
that we would remain faithful and fruitful
through every persecution (for Your Glory).

We pray that You would uproot the weeds
that stifle our fruitfulness.
Lord, lead us to repentance,
and help us to focus our eyes on You.

that we would not be distracted
by things of this world,
and that we would bear fruit for Your Kingdom.

And when we pray for fruitfulness,
we are praying for the fruit of the Spirit
to be evident and abundant in ourselves
and in our churches,
and we also pray for the fruitfulness of replication…

That Your Word would be sown,
and that that seed would strike,
and that there would be another generation
of fruitful Disciples of Jesus
for Your great harvest.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

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[i] "Here the focus is not on sin but on apostasy under pressure. The occurrence of σκανδαλίζομαι in 14:27, 29 for the disciples' desertion of Jesus under pressure well illustrates the point, though in their case the desertion was temporary; Mark does not suggest that he is thinking here of only temporary failure."
France, R.T., 2002. *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.