

Hebrews 6:7-9

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.

Luke 8:4-15

4 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

5 "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.

6 Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant.

10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."

11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.

12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

13 Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

The Sower Luke 8: 4-15

This is the start of a series on the parables over the next couple of months. We're all in some way attracted by stories. We all tell each other stories, whether it's just in conversation, or jokes, or reading books, or watching films, or looking at art, or in songs.

They're *all* types of stories. Piers Morgan, who I pretty much never agree with, said this: 'if you don't have stories you don't have that ability to grab an audience'. So Jesus also was aware that stories were the best form of communication, and his teaching to people other than the disciples, was pretty much all in parables which were stories to make a point. The Greek word *parabole* means 'that which is tossed alongside', so it's a comparison or an illustration. C.H. Dodd in his book *The Parables of the Kingdom* wrote this: 'The parable [leaves] the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought'.

Parables start you thinking. Or they should.

We chose the Sower to start the series because in this passage there are big clues to what Jesus thought about parables. He tells the *disciples* the meaning, but he leaves the crowd to work it out for themselves. In Mark's version he says *Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? (4:13)*

Most of us are very familiar with the image of the sower sowing seed, but the first important thing in Jesus mind is that despite the deliberate act of the sower, exactly where the seed falls is a bit random. And the seed is the word of God.

This really the parable of the soils because it's how each one of us as individuals responds to the gospel. And we have 4 possibilities out of an infinity of possibilities 1. **Path.** Here there's *no chance* for the seed to grow. It's '**trampled upon then eaten by birds**'. For one reason or another the message has no chance to sink in. Maybe somebody told you it was rubbish, or the preacher was somebody you couldn't stand. Maybe there are much more interesting things to do with your life than get religion.

2. Rocky road. These are people who hear the message, and who are actually really enthusiastic about it, but there's nothing to help their faith grow roots. I've seen this happen – very often someone you think is really going for it just falls away. Jesus points to a time of testing as the cause. Following him is not an easy solution – enthusiasm wears off, there are hard times and hard questions with no answers, and if there is no heart desire for God and more importantly no root, there will be no trust that God will see you through it. The roots of our faith have to be protected and strongly established by constant exposure to the Holy Spirit through prayer.

3. Thorns. As these people *go on their way they're choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures.* Here it might be about the 'good things' of life which are more interesting than the big questions. How many things are there which take our attention away from God, or maybe from asking 'Is there a God?', or even from just thinking 'there must be more to life than this'.

What are the consequences of ignoring God? Jesus answer to this is in verse 14: you don't mature. You remain unable to engage with life with any sense of wisdom; you get stuck. You don't grow as a person.

4. Good soil The final example is how things might be. What quality does God look for? Notice not a perfect person, just a good heart, because as Jesus said none of us are good, only God is good. We use the phrase sometimes 'have you no heart'? If we're going to hear the word and retain it, we simply need an open heart. We will hang onto it as something of value. And persevere with it. So then the seed will produce a crop. Desire for God, trust in God, a more mature and loving person. So everyone who hears Jesus' message reacts to it in their own way. These are types of response, not types of personality. Nothing's set in stone, we change and grow and our rocky road or our thorns become good soil.

Now look again at this strange verse in the centre of this passage. When the disciples asked what it meant *10 Jesus said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."*

This is the prophetic element of this teaching.

Jesus is quoting the prophet Isaiah 6 v9 and this is the key to all the parables.

What he's saying here is that there's deliberately an element of concealment, because God wants to engage with our hearts as much as with our minds.

Don't forget this part is addressed to the disciples.

v10. *Knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom has been given to you.* So believing is just the start. Knowing is something more. You *know* in your heart, in your inmost being. So unless the desire of your heart is to know God and to want Him to be involved in your life, it will not happen. He will never force Himself on you. No one can have faith drummed into them, no one can make themselves believe, because **faith, knowledge of God, is a gift given by God.**

Now - talking about the crowd gathering, thinking what is he on about?

v10. *to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand. (Isaiah 6:9)'* I couldn't figure this out at first. He seems to say that God *doesn't want people to understand*. Well as I said before, parables give you something to chew on, they prod you into thinking for yourself, they challenge you to look for God.

We can't work our way to God, that's religion.

Of course God wants to reveal himself to us.

But do we really want to know? We need to ask, if we do

And the parables have to be interpreted for us by the Holy Spirit, by God himself.

Some people ask questions because they like asking questions, but they don't really want an answer.

Ask yourself how you came to know God? (If you do know God.) What happened? It wasn't down to your ability to figure out all the answers. Because you never will.

But we have hearts, and feelings and a passion for things.

And if we genuinely search for God we will find Him.

If you have a real faith, at some point you will have, deep down, wanted to know God. At which point He will have **revealed** himself to you. Don't ask me how – it just happens, and when it does, you know – we all only receive any real knowledge of God by the goodness of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. It's a supernatural thing.

Sometimes it happens in an instant, sometimes over a period of time, it depends on the person.

We're all unique and we all respond in a different way to the message. **This is what Jesus is saying in this parable.**

Jesus, remember, is speaking to a large crowd here,.

As he finishes, He shouts this out:

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

So the *crowd* don't hear the explanation.

Do they have ears to hear?

Do we have ears to hear?

I think God is happy to leave that to us to decide. Amen.