

Sermon preached by Rev Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 8th November 2006. Reading: Mark 4:1-29
Topic: "The Parable of the Sower"

The power of prayer – must be Christian prayer to the Christian God

- or it is the work of the devil
- or it is the power of positive thinking
- or it is a work of God's generous grace

To have a better understanding of the way in which God works, we look at the parable of the Sower in Mark 4, the key to all the parables of the Lord Jesus.

1. JESUS TOLD A PARABLE **the setting** –

In Mark's gospel there are a variety of responses to Jesus

- there is opposition – people involved in theological and power struggles
- there is some level of interest – is this the Messiah, the Christ?
- There is a lot of self interest – crowds come to him for healing – and Jesus heals them all – this shows that he is the Messiah according to Isaiah – but it does not always mean that all those who were healed came to faith in Jesus
- There was a level of confusion – even some members of his family thought that he had gone mad.
- The question is hanging in the air as we read Mark's gospel: what do you think of Jesus?

Is he a nuisance, a teacher, a messenger from God, the promised King or a madman?

His purposes is to spread the seed and look for the harvest The point of this parable and most of the parables is this: The sower will be successful. There will be a great harvest. There will be a big tree, there will be a great treasure. The Kingdom of God will be established. That's the main thing. Then we are asked the question, by the parables: Are you in or are you out?

Are you on board with God's good purposes for his world, or are you against him?

The path - the sower is just feeding the birds, as the seed is scattered in this area, rocky ground. You can't always tell from looking at the surface of the ground, just how deep the good soil is. The layer of top soil in some places is very shallow. Then you hit solid rock. You can make a good start, the seed germinates, but then as it grows it goes beyond its nutrients and eventually shrivels up. **Among thorns** - in this case the plants make a good start, but there is no room to grow. The growing plant is strangled, choked and deprived of breathing space. **Good soil** - this is the main game, the overall purpose, the success story, the reason for the season of the planting of the time of the harvest. A good result. A great result. Bigger and better than you would ever have expected.

2. THE SECRET In verses 10-12 Jesus gives us an insight into the purposes of the parables. They have an overall message, but Jesus knows that not everyone is going to get the point. In verse 13 he says that this parable is the key to them all. The kingdom of God.

We can turn back to Mark 1:15 and see that Jesus came announcing the kingdom of God. Here Jesus is quoting from the book Isaiah. The prophet was told to speak the word of God to the people of God knowing that they would reject the message and reject the messenger. In that way they would bring God's judgement down on their own heads. And we know in the time of Jesus, that the Jews of Jesus's day did in fact reject Jesus. They would not accept him as their king, except in mockery. They nailed him to the cross. That is hardly taking on board his message.

In our day we need to recognise that left to our own devices we too would be out in the cold, in the dark and not understanding the code of the parables. It is only by the power of God's Holy Spirit breaking through our natural blindness that we are able to say that Jesus is Lord.

Excluding the rebels. Those who reject the Kingdom of God reject the King and confused by the parables. Mere stories without any message. A moral take without any substance. A fairy tale without any significance for my life. They do not make any sense to them. They do not like the challenge to their autonomy. They want to do things their way, not God's way.

3. JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLES

A master key. See verse 13 Parables are all about the Kingdom of God. Who is in and who is out. Those to be included and those who exclude themselves. The most encouraging thing for those of us who are on board with God's plans and God's king is that there is nothing in heaven or earth that can stop the success and the growth of the Kingdom of God. It will grow. It will produce a harvest. It is the most valuable and enduring thing in the world. The spiritual kingdom of God is more enduring than any other kingdom on earth. So come on board and stay on board. Gospel take away - Let's look at how Jesus spells it out for us.

The sower is spreading or scattering the word of God, telling people the gospel, proclaiming God's love and God's judgement in the one message. Satan is portrayed here as the one who comes and takes it away. He snatches it from people. They hear the message but it like water off a duck's back. Many of us will have seen it in our experience. We do our best to encourage someone to turn to God in the midst of their troubles, to come to church with us, to pray with us about their concerns. We tell them of God's great love for them, their value before him, his love expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. And what is the response? I'm too busy at the moment. I could not possibly fit that in with my sport, or my hobby or my work. I'm really not interested.

Remember that it is spiritual warfare – Satan has clouded people's minds – he takes away the message. **Pressure** See verse 16 Instant joy till tribulation or persecution come along – then just as quickly drop out and give up. For some people it can be a time of trial, or a sickness, an accident, at time of feeling picked on because they were a Christian, a sense of being a victim in the circumstances of life. Their faith was put to the test and they came up short. Their so-called faith in God flew out the window.

They thought that they would be better off by themselves. They took as their theme song: "I did it my way". Perhaps you know someone who used to be in a church, or the leader of the school ISCF or the Crusader group or the EU. Now they no longer darken the door of a church and never pray or read their bibles or claim the name of Christ. I met one man who used to be a leader on a Beach Mission team. I asked him: Bruce, how is your faith? He told me: "Well Christ, it is no longer saving faith" He remembered what it should have been, and he knew it wasn't that anymore. Sadly this is true for many people. At times it can be very discouraging.

Instead of learning to depend on God more and more they learn to live more and more with despair and helplessness and hopelessness.

Pleasure. We look at verse 18-19. The thorns represent the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things. This is the focus on the material world, neglecting the spiritual world. This is believing the lie that says: what you see is what you get. Or if you can't touch it and feel it, it can't be real. This is not so much that people are under pressure to give up their faith as much as drawn away from the faith by the temptation of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Sometimes the very blessings of God: affluence, good health, fun and relaxation can so distract people from the more important things in life that faith just evaporates through a lack of use. Self confidence replaces God dependence. People develop an attitude of self congratulations rather than thankfulness to God for all his blessings. **Acceptance** - In verse 20 we have the whole point of the parable. Will the kingdom of God prosper? Will it be successful? Who is going to be in the kingdom of God? Will anybody be there? Yes by the grace of God, there will be a tremendous result – an abundant crop – bigger and better than you have ever seen or imagined.

It is made up of the people who have made the threefold response:

1. First of all they have heard it: the gospel is a message that needs to be proclaimed. It needs to be spoken and written and shared. Our lives must certainly not contradict the message we speak, but actions alone are ambiguous. Those who come to put their faith in the Lord Jesus have to first learn about him, and hear the message.
2. Secondly, they need to take it on board, to accept it, believe it and make Jesus their Saviour and their Lord. They and we must turn around, and leave our life of self centred sinfulness. WE have to give it up, nail it to the cross and trust in Jesus as the one who died in our place. ON that basis we can know that God forgives us and welcomes us into his family. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us enabling us to have faith in God and serve him in the context of the wider Christian family.
3. Thirdly when we take it in, we have to live it out. WE bear fruit that befits repentance. If we are people of faith we will be people of faithfulness. If we are people who know the love of God we should be people who show the love of God to one another. If we claim to know the God of power we should also display the power of God in our lives and in our prayers.

4. LISTEN CAREFULLY Pay attention

Look with me at verse 24. This is a great call to pay attention to all that Jesus is saying to us. The more we invest in listening to Jesus the greater the returns will be for us. If you invest only a little of your time, or your faith or your trust or your obedience in the words of Jesus, then you can't expect to see much of a return for your efforts, for your investment. If you put a great deal of time and prayer and meditation into what Jesus says and into God's word, who knows how you will grow and be blessed in the things of God. **Gospel growth** Here in verses 26-29 is another parable. Now that we have the master key, what point is it making for us? It is going over the same ground as the parable of the sower. So we can see it as a summary parable. The kingdom of God is the main theme. It is a growing thing. It grows through the spread of the seed, which is the gospel message. It is God's business to see that the message goes forth. And it will produce a harvest. It will be a successful project. What is the new element in this summary parable? Look with me at verse 27. "he knows not how" God will determine the growth. The time that each seed produces its growth. God will determine who it is that goes all the way to the harvest. Therefore trust in God for that coming harvest. Play your part whatever that is and leave the rest to God. At one level it means that we should all be asking ourselves, what sort of response have I made to God in my life? And what can I do to make it better? Please do not feel that up till now you have made a poor response outlined in the first three instances of the failed crops. If that has described your current situation, under God, you

can make a change, you can make a difference. You are not locked in. Take the parable as a warning. Make the move. Come to “full on faith” in Jesus. Recognise your failure and make the necessary repairs. In a few moments I am going to pray the prayer on the back of our outline, for people to come to Christ for the first time, or to rededicate their lives to Christ. But just before that what about those who are committed Christians? How are we going in the area of bearing fruit. As Christians, how is God working in our lives? How is our prayer life? Do we pray with confidence, the prayer of faith, believing prayer. Are we living out the faith we profess? Are we loving the people who are hard to love? Are we bringing healing to relationships where there is brokenness and pain? Are we showing the forgiveness to others, on the basis that God has forgiven us for all our sins? Are we involved in God’s work of spreading the seed of the gospel by our words and our deeds? Are we just as committed to kingdom growth as God is?