

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 13:1-9;18-23

Verses 1-9

**On that day Jesus went out and sat by the lake. Great crowds came to him so that he got into a boat to sit down and the throng of people stood at the shore. He told them many things in parables. He was saying, "Consider the sower who went out to broadcast the seed. When he sowed, the seeds that fell along the path, the birds came and ate them up. The seeds that fell on the stony ground where there was not much soil immediately sprang up yet there was not the depth of ground. When the sun rose, they were scorched and withered for they had no roots. Some seed fell amongst the thorns. The thorns grew and choked them. Other seeds fell on the good ground. They began to produce fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times [the amount sown]. Those who have ears let them hear."**

A number of villages resided on the shores of Lake Galilee but judging by the boat journey to Gennesaret (14:34), the house mentioned in verse one was probably Simon Peter's home in Capernaum, west of Bethsaida, in the northern region of the **lake**. The throng of people forced him to use one of Simon and John's **boats**, who were fishermen, with their brothers, respectively, Andrew and James.

Matthew is particularly interested in the teaching of Jesus and carefully noted that he taught using **parables** (34). When teaching the disciples, Jesus spoke more directly, though parables were sometimes used. Though parables were immediately accessible and the kingdom could be experienced by being drawn into the parable, faith was required to bring the benefit into the hearer's life, otherwise hearers risked losing what was given to them (13). Hence, Christ concluded the parable by calling on people to **hear with ears** tuned to faith (11:15). The ears Christ speaks of, are those that fulfill the prophecy of Isa 6:9 (13-15). He expected people would hear his message but most would eventually reject it.

Hence the parable about the different soils. That the farmer throws seed about indiscriminately was ridiculous and funny but a testimony to the generosity of God who gave his Son to the world (Jn 3:16). Only the seed that fell on **the good soil**, patches of deep earth that would respond with **fruit** or a crop, was the successful area for seed to land on. The problem of poor results over all could not be traced to poor seed or to poor farming practices. It is clearly identified as **the path, stony ground and thorns**. It is the soil that receives that is the problem. The good soil produces miraculously. It sits along side the other areas where seed was sown but unexpectedly, a wonderful crop of **a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times the amount sown**. The hearer's attention is drawn to this ground. The work of God takes place in this ground in special and unique way.

Verses 18,19

**Listen, you people, to the parable of the sower. Anyone who hears the word of the kingdom and never gains an insight, the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart. This is the seed that fell along the path.**

Jesus directs his explanation of the parable to his disciples (10). Already, the Lord has given the parable a title, **the parable of the sower** σπειραντος. It does not matter whether this came from the church or from our Lord's lips. Evidently, the parable meant a lot to those who followed him. The parable is about the sower despite the attention is given to the types of ground. Why does the sower choose the worst areas to plant his seed? He chooses a path, rocky ground and weedy soil. The nature of God is that he spreads his word wide and far, to all people even if they are unresponsive or fickle. This is a mark of his grace.

**The word of the kingdom** or **message of the kingdom** is an announcement of salvation, of the unrestrained love of God in Christ Jesus. It is the opportunity of a life time, to know the purpose of life, to understand God, to see into his heart, to learn of our condition and the efforts God has

made to turn the world around and give it a new course to follow. And the great tragedy is that many do not **gain these insights** μη συνιέντος. They catch a glimpse of this kingdom but they do not bring themselves to it, do not want to be aligned with God or give their lives to him.

One cannot blame the will of God for his intention is to sow and indeed, the seed **was sown in his heart**. Catholics have created an elaborate theology about the will of human beings cooperating with God's will. In the area of sanctification this is true but not in justification. It is the Spirit who does the work because he sows **in the heart**. The word of God is so powerful that none can resist it initially; it strikes home providing an initial flash of meaning, that God has come in Christ and we are in great need of his gift of love and holiness.

But **the evil one comes and snatches what was sown**. Human beings are responsible for rejecting the gospel but Satan is also at work urging a person to stay with what is comfortable, what one does not need to change, think about or act on. Today, a skepticism based on prejudice and ignorance keeps many from giving the Lord any further consideration. They have superior minds, so they imagine. The supposed greatness of the human mind and its visions of utopian futures blinds the thinking and the careful analysis of our precarious situation.

Verses 20,21

**The seed scattered on the stony ground, this is the one hearing the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root in himself and is ephemeral. When tribulation or persecution occurs because of the word, he quickly falls away.**

The problem with the person of stony ground is that **he has no root** ρίζαν **in himself and is ephemeral** πρόσκαιρος. The word did not go deep into his life, the Christian did not mature and develop inner spiritual strength. He saw God only as one who should bring benefits rather than understanding God in his nature through Christ; for Christ suffered setting us an example to follow. Thus **he quickly falls away** σκαθαρίζεται. A shock, coming from the scandal of the cross (1Cor. 1:23) passes through his system and he cannot remain loyal to Christ. He sees no advantage because all that counts is a comfortable survival, without any form of pain. Today, insults and slander are our lot and must be endured. But there is something even worse than **persecution or tribulation**.

Verse 22

**The seed sown amongst the thorny weeds is the person who hears the word but the cares of the world and the delight of riches choke the word and it is fruitless.**

**Thorn weeds** were a common weed that smothered the fresh grain plants. **The cares** μέριμνα **of the world and the delight** απόρτη **of riches** are an apt description of our situation. Riches and worldly cares have now dominated the modern culture, which has become a greed culture focused on hedonistic pleasure as an end in itself. Our Lord calls us to service, like the Lutheran church in Buderim that has each month a Service Saturday, on which the needy in the community are served. The word, in order to thrive, needs an uncluttered area, free of weeds. Distraction by busyness that occurs because of indulging oneself through endless activities that are focused on serving self, not only leads to exhaustion but spiritual barrenness and superficiality. If the trivia is the focus, we become trivial ourselves. We never experience the joy of forgetting self, dethroning the ego, and finding God in others. Though we do more and have more, our world has shrunk because we do not see the potential of God hidden in the other. Life is **choked**.

Verse 23

**But what was sown on the good ground is the person who hears the word and is taken up by it. Indeed, he produces fruit, making about 100, 80, or 60 times as much.**

A good example of this is Pastor August Fricke. The parable speaks of various conditions of soil but theologically the soil is all the same. God has not favoured some over others or given certain people a spiritual affinity and others none. All hear the word and all have the seed sown in them. But what happens next is the responsibility of the believer. The Spirit does the miraculous work

but only some cooperate and with the Spirit's help go about changing and developing as a Christian.

The successful Christians see their lives in God, that is, **they are taken up by the word** (the same word is used in verse 19). They are aware that God has come to them and understand that their entire lives have been spoken to. This means that fruit is being produced continuously in two ways: in the various situations of life, in work, in family, in education, in retirement and then in the range of fruit, such as, prayer, witness, forgiving, serving, building up the church, teaching, learning, giving etc.

Our Lord recognizes that no two Christians are the same. Each has a different starting point and is gifted differently but even the least producing Christian experiences a wonderful multiplying affect. Jesus spoke about fruitful trees in ch. 7 and also a wise and foolish builder, but he said these things in the context of the judgement and the final outcome of our lives. Here, he speaks of his amazing work and the power of the gospel. God is intensely interested in how we live. It is not only about allegiance or belief. Buddhism is about personal attainment. Islam is about submission and ritual practice. Christ is about the transmission of a gift, the gift of himself, of eternal love and acceptance, forgiveness, grace and redemption. This is such a phenomenal power that it begins a transformation, a fruit not for oneself as in Buddhism but fruit for the good of others and glory of God.