

Good Seed

These are the notes on which Sandy based an address to the Christchurch Town and Country Navigators conference on August 5, 2000.

Read the passages: Matthew 13: 1-23 / 24-43. (Also found in Mark 4 and Luke 8.)

The phrase “Good seed” is found four times in the New Testament, every time coming from the mouth of Jesus Christ as he taught the Parables of the Kingdom.

What is a parable?

A parable is a teaching device whereby two truths are set side by side. Greek parabolle=likeness. The intention is to take the hearer from the known to the unknown by a direct comparison. Greek: para=alongside, ballo=to throw, which together mean “to throw alongside.” Christ did not invent the parable because it can be found in the Old Testament, but he was the only one in the New Testament to use it. Depending on your exact definition of a parable there are as many as 52 parables in the New Testament.

How to interpret a parable.

We western Christians with our logical approach to truth tend to over-analyse the parables. We want every item in the teaching to be filled with meaning, whereas often much of the parable is just supporting information to give a semblance of realism, to fill in the picture.

What we do have to take into account are things like the viewpoints of the teacher and the hearers, the culture of the day, what the teacher actually says (and not what we think he says) and where it fits into the rest of Christian doctrine.

Concerning this last point, we should

1. Determine the one **central truth** of the parable;
2. Take note of what the **teacher** of the parable **says it means**;
3. Look for clues in the **context** to find out what it means;
4. Try to understand the **comparison** being made.

Background:

Jesus was living at the time in Capernaum, and getting a hard time from the Jewish authorities—the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. All along they challenged him to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. Some of them did see his miracles, like his healing of the masses, and of

individuals, but they found reasons that to their way of thinking were valid, that Jesus was not who he indicated he was. He challenged them to look at the Scriptures, to do their homework, find out where he really came from, look up the Temple records. If they did that work properly they would discover that he was really the Messiah, and that legally, as a son of David, he should be on the throne of Israel as King, instead of Herod the Edomite. He appealed to them to believe in him on account of the things he did. But they would not.

Worse, they began attributing his miracles to the work of the devil. Here is the passage:

“ Then they brought to him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.’” (Matthew 12: 22-25).

They capped off their unbelief by a direct request for a proof-sign. Jesus rejected this appeal, and said that the only sign would be the Jonah-sign, which he explained this way:

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

The death, burial and resurrection of Christ would be the ultimate sign. Let’s never forget that Christianity is based on the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ. This is our authority for explaining the gospel. Without the resurrection, the gospel would be only an ingenious idea presented as a solution. Everyone we come into contact with must deal eventually with this truth. And I say the sooner they do the better.

So with this rejection by the nation’s leaders of Christ’s claims to be the Messiah, the Lord Jesus did what he taught his disciples, he refused any more to throw his pearls before pigs. He rejected them and excluded the unbelievers from the flow of truth. What the unbeliever got out of it would depend on what attitude they had. It was still possible for them to understand truth if they gave it some honest thought. But Jesus later explained everything (Mark 4:34) to his disciples.

Dwight Pentecost, the Bible teacher, says that this is the moment in Jesus' ministry when he realised that he would have to die for the nation and the world. It is an interesting conclusion, which flows from his dispensational viewpoint. Now, Jesus begins to explain to the people and his disciples the way it is all going to work from now on, and he undertakes to get his message across only to those whose hearts are with him. He begins to teach truth in parables, and to give seven pictures of the progress of the Kingdom of God.

The series of seven parables in Matthew 13

Name the parables —

The Parable of the Sower

The Parable of the Weeds in the Field.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The Parable of the Yeast

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

The Parable of the Pearl

The Parable of the Net (not the Internet)

The audience:

The people near Capernaum. Nearby is a very fertile plain on the north-west side of the lake where agriculture was practised. People who understood agriculture and the cycle of sowing and reaping.

Common themes in the first two: The farmer sows the seed, there are distractions and enemies, but the seed multiplies and is harvested. But the two parables are making **different points**.

A. The parable of the sower: Matthew 13: 1-23.

What does it say?

1. A farmer sows the seed
2. There is a variable harvest that is dependent on the state of the ground the seed falls into —
On the path, eaten by birds.
Rocky places, shallow soil, scorched by the sun.
Among thorns, which rose and choked the plants.
On good soil, producing a bountiful crop.
3. "Think about it."

What does it mean?

First the reason for the parable is explained: 11-17— because of their

hard heart and closed ears. The disciples' privileged position, better than that of many prophets and righteous men. He was explaining the "secrets" or mysteries of the Kingdom not revealed before in the Scriptures—just how the Messiah would achieve God's will.

Jesus' explained the parable in verses 18-23.

1. Seed that lands on the path — when the message about the Kingdom is not understood, the devil takes it away.
2. Seed on the rocky places that has no root — when the message is received but conquered by trouble or persecution.
3. Seed among thorns — choked by the *worries* of life and the deceitfulness of wealth, making it unfruitful. (Greek: '*distractions*')
4. Seed on good soil — finding its place in a heart that understands it (because of a good attitude, the antithesis of the attitude of the Jewish leaders).

When Dr Pentecost was in New Zealand in the late 1980s, he summarised this parable this way:

"In biblical times the farmer just burned off the soil, then cast the seed on the unprepared ground, then used a simple stick to scratch the ground.

"Footpaths at the edge of the field were iron hard.

"Stones were hidden just under the ground.

"What made the difference to the harvest? The state of the prepared soil.

"Throughout this age the good seed (the Word) will be sown by the sower, Christ and the Church. Varying responses will be evident according to the state of preparedness of the soil. One of the functions of the church is to be a preparer of the soil."

While these parables are specifically about the development of the Kingdom of God, (and we could explain the characteristics of the Kingdom of God in this age from them) there are timeless truths in them that are applicable to all believers. **All** Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness, said Paul. (Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow, a promise to claim?) In this case a sin to avoid and an example to follow.

What can I do about it? Let's look at the soils

1. On the path—no acceptance of the Word of God

God sows the Word and some of it falls on the iron-hard path, is eaten by birds and there is **no harvest**. I should hope there are no believers here with iron-hard hearts. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a **sinful, unbelieving heart** that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness' (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Is there some issue that you refuse to submit to God? Is there a Scriptural course of action you are resisting? Is there someone or some group of people that you need to forgive, even if they seem unrepentant? Is there some bitterness you have to deal with? Then deal with it before too many people around you become poisoned.

Some people get into this situation by becoming isolated. Leaders must watch out that none of the fellowship begin to be isolated. Isolation lets me and my ideas go unchallenged. I think I am right because I am being deceived by my sinful heart. But I can quickly become unbalanced — morally, socially and doctrinally. Put a man or woman with leadership on their own and you have the potential for a cult. The responsibility of the fellowship is to encourage one another daily to love and good works. To influence and to moderate. The antidote to a sinful, unbelieving heart is **repentance**.

2. On the rocky ground—superficial acceptance of the Word of God

God sows the Word and some of it falls on the rocky places where there is some, but not much soil. The sun is hot and the tender seedling is scorched to death. And there is **no harvest**. Jesus explains that in this case the trouble is that the believer, who had such joy at the start, falls away because of trouble and persecution.

Even while many Jews continued in their unbelief, John writes (12:42) that “many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”

If your Christian faith became an issue at your work, which would win? Ever since Darwin, the Church has been held in ridicule for its beliefs about origins. A few resisted, like the evangelist C.H. Spurgeon, but the majority of the intellectual leaders of the church have for about 120 of those years, compromised with what is called science or knowledge, making their faith even more contemptible. The reason for this backdown is because of trouble and persecution, however mild. The scientific establishment is underpinned by Darwinism and evolution. Their starting point is the assumption that God does not exist. How then

can we who believe the Bible and the word of the Lord Jesus compromise with such a position? In the end you must support one or the other. It may not happen to you, but the scientific careers of Bible-believers have been ruined because their starting point became known.

I cite the science-Creation issue as only one of many possibilities. The deacon Stephen did not compromise with the Sanhedrin, even when his life was clearly in danger. Not only did he not back down, he went into fast forward! And he died for it.

3. Among the thorns—the word of God choked

God sows the word and some of it falls among thorns, either full-grown or among ground containing seeds of the thornbushes. The thorns in this parable are the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth, which choke the seed plant.

The worries (Gk: distractions) of this life are potentially all around us: What shall we eat or drink, or what shall we wear? — are the common questions. My career, my income, my standard of living, my pleasures. Jesus had already dealt with those in the Sermon on the Mount. God cares, and will look after us. Are you not more value than the sparrows, about whom God cares.

Are you worried about your children? Well, are they not also God's children? And if they fail to meet our expectations is that because they are failing or because our expectations are too high?

The deceitfulness of wealth. Wealth is thought to be a measure of “success” today, but all the success is that you have a few more zeros after the numbers. Wealth doesn't deal with our stature with God and our ability to communicate the love of Christ. Wealth doesn't round out our personality. It doesn't give us purpose or meaning to life.

Those who are wealthy think they can rule the world, and that applies to wealthy Christians— and they think they are above criticism. Rich people look to wealth as a shelter. Jesus said “Do not toil to acquire wealth,” James talks about “uncertain riches.” Paul said that “People who want to get rich fall into **temptation** and a **trap** and into **many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction**. For the love of money is the root of **all kinds of evil**. Some people, eager for money, have **wandered from the faith** and **pierced themselves with many griefs**” (1 Timothy 1:9).

Setting your mind on wealth is inimical to storing up for yourself treasures in heaven. If wealth is your god, then there will be **no harvest**.

4. The good soil—a commitment to the Word of God

Good soil is the heart of the person who “hears the word and understands it.” The result “**a crop**”, **perhaps a multiplication of 30 times, perhaps 60, or even 100 times.**

Since Jesus explains that the good seed is the word of God (verses 21, 22, 23) then a **multiplication of the word of God is the harvest.** You hear the word of God, but do you understand it? Maybe you need help. Maybe you need study. Maybe you need time to think about things.

Nicodemus produced a crop. He went away from his audience with Jesus that night and thought about it. When the Sanhedrin voted unanimously against Jesus to put him to death he wasn't present, knowing that one vote against Jesus would not count for anything. He showed up later and claimed the body of Jesus.

The chariot-riding Ethiopian official who was reading the book of Isaiah and gained an understanding from Philip produced a crop. He was baptised immediately and went back home to found the church in his country.

Saul the Pharisee finally heard and understood, and it is largely due to his obedience as Paul the apostle that we Gentiles are here today.

Can it be said of you that you are proliferating the word of God? However imperfectly, does your **life** demonstrate the word of God? Do your **words** communicate the word of God? Is your life's motivation to bring many to faith in Christ, who is the only way to be reconciled to God and secure a place in heaven? To you, Jesus promises that not only will you **understand**, you will be **given much more** (verse 12).

Note the parable of the seed in Mark 4. It looks like a parallel passage to Matthew 13, but the point made here is that the harvest is grown with no intervention from the sower. It all depends on the seed itself.

B. The parable of the weeds in the field Matthew 13: 24-43

There is the second parable Jesus interpreted (verses 36-43). Although his interpretations are not in every parable we know that “he explained everything to his disciples” (Mark 4:34). “**Good seed**” is found in verse 24.

What makes good seed? In farming, seed is not good if it doesn't make 92% or more germination.

So how does the New Zealand farmer know if what he has bought for sowing is good?

It has a certificate from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. They go and inspect the crop that is being grown for seed, and they test it.

If there are any foreign seeds in it they will not certify it. They look at the state of the plants growing the seed, and the weight of the seeds, which is a measure of their nutrient store and an indication of how robust they will be. If there are non-crop seeds, or foreigners of any kind, the certificate is downgraded, or no certificate is given at all.

Weeds—some are not allowed at all, and the farmer goes through the field grubbing the plants out before they germinate. You don't want the aromatic camomile seeds in wheat flour because they will taint it.

Some weeds are really nasty. Some will grow over the ground and smother the wheat plants. Others will climb up the wheat stems. Whatever the weed is it will be competing for moisture and nutrients.

No wonder, then, that the servants were anxious about the weeds planted by the enemy in this field.

1 What does it say? What happens in this parable?

Main characters: the owner of the land, the servants, the enemy, the harvesters.

The farmer sows the good wheat seed.

The enemy sows the weeds.

The seed multiplies and so do the weeds.

There is a harvest. The wheat is retrieved and the weeds are burned.

2. What does it mean?

Jesus interprets:

The sower is the Son of Man—Jesus (who sends people into the world).

The field is the world.

The good seed are the children of the Kingdom (that's you and me).

The weeds are the children of the devil.

The enemy is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age.

The harvesters are angels.

(Angels are intimately involved in the victory of Christ as he returns to judge the world. The voice of the archangel and the (last) trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17 and Revelation 11:15) . What does the angel say? At first thought it might be a shout of victory and warning. And so it is. He says, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever." So it needn't be a mystery. It is a profitable study to line up the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the gospels, the teaching of the apostles in the letters, and the events of the book of Revelation.)

Dr Pentecost summarises the parable in this way:

“The tare is a grass weed that so looks like the wheat plant that it can’t be distinguished until harvest. The members of the kingdom of darkness continually sow false doctrine, religion, morals and ethics, and false salvation. Satan’s masterpiece of deception is the upright moral person who produces other than that which produces repentance and salvation. Satan’s purpose is to crowd out the true disciples. The tares are outside, not in the kingdom.”

3. What can I do about it?

We can agree to be sown in the world as good seed. “As my father has sent me, so I send you,” said the resurrected Jesus in John 20:21. We should expect the sons of the evil one to try to frustrate our activities. We can expect God to sort it all out at the end, so we don’t have to fret.

Jesus later likened himself to good seed (John 12:24).

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

It is a mysterious statement that seems unconnected with the occasion, a request from some Greeks to talk with Jesus. But the context indicates that even before Jesus’ death and resurrection, word had got out into the Gentile world about a world Saviour, and this was another indication to Jesus that things were coming to a head, and that the way to evangelise the Gentiles was to go through with God’s programme for him, to die for the sins of the world. Christ died and rose again, validating the principle of fruitfulness following death.

Growth is the theme that underpins four of the seven Parables of the Kingdom. The multiplication of seeds is at the heart of agriculture. Reproduction is a defining mark of all living things. Spiritual multiplication is at the heart of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission:

Found in Matthew 28: 18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24: 46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:8

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The emphasis: “*make disciples*” the sole imperative, that is, the main thing is making disciples. Going, teaching and baptising are less important. Ironically, we are good at the three activities of lesser importance and poor at the major one. So we could read it, “Make disciples, as you are going, teaching and baptising.” This way we keep the main thing the main thing!

Teaching all Jesus’ commands. That includes this one to make disciples. The seed will reproduce. It is fertile. It means generations. This is at the heart of the Navigator work. It is what makes me tick. It is power!

So how did Jesus demonstrate this process?

Jesus’ model of ministry:

1. He recruited a few.
2. He ministered widely.
3. He developed the few. (Personal conversation, explanations, tests, guided experience.)
4. He gave them power and commissioned them with a clear task. Matthew: “make disciples”. Restated “You shall be my witnesses. . . to the end of the earth, and I am with you always.”
5. He expected much fruitfulness. John 15 — “bear fruit” “bear more fruit” “bear much fruit”

Paul’s model of ministry:

1. He pioneered the nurture of individuals among his converts. 1 Thessalonians 2:11
2. Paul modelled and taught the concept of spiritual multiplication, the safeguarding of doctrine and the transmission of truth from heart to heart, from life to life. 2 Timothy 2: 1-7.
3. 2 Timothy 2:3-7 Preached commitment to the task. Rules for the soldier, athlete, farmer.

From my experience, if you want an evangelistic and disciple making ministry there are only three things to do:

- 1. Start small**
- 2. Go deep**
- 3. Watch God work**

Those unwilling to commit themselves to the task will offer a variety of excuses.

1. I’m not gifted for that.

2. God will convert the heathen without evangelism, a doctrinal extreme of the Reformed variety.
3. I'm too busy.
4. I'm too worried.
5. No excuse, just absent without excuse.

I have been committed to the concept of world evangelisation by any and all means from my conversion in 1966. I have been committed to the concept of spiritual multiplication for almost as long. I have seen it work, and have been awed by its power.

I am convinced that young people are the future of the Church and the hope of the God of the Great Commission, and I urge you to lead from the front, lead people to Christ, follow them up and mentor them until they lead others to Christ, and **do this until you drop dead.**

You may care to ask yourself these questions:

1. Who is my mentor?
 2. Whom I mentoring?
 3. What am I doing about telling the gospel?
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