

Knowing the Secrets of the Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of September 2002. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled Knowing the Secrets of the Kingdom and is based on Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 18.

We might want to leave your Bibles open as we look at this parable together tonight. Before we do so, let me pray for us. Dear Father, we thank you that you have chosen to reveal the secrets of the Kingdom of God to us in these parables.

Thanks for that. Please help us now to see the real meaning and truth of this parable. In Jesus' name, Amen. Darren joined a house church full of young people.

The leader of the church told him that he had the gift of interpreting tongues and giving prophecy. And he would interpret people giving tongues by saying that God was going to bless the house church, that God was going to do great things through it.

[1 : 1 1] And the leader of that church agreed that that was the purpose of God. Within about a year or two, the church was over. The leader had fled into state with all the money and had left these young people to sort out the mess.

I gave Darren some advice about winding up the church's operations. And during our conversations, I asked him whether he was going to find a new church. But sadly, he'd been so scarred by the whole experience that he didn't want to go to church anymore.

He had trusted this leader and now he felt like a fool. He blamed God for allowing it to happen. Sarah was a health science student.

She was studying nutrition and she was into health and beauty and sport and fitness. She also came to a decision that Jesus was really God's son that had died for her.

She had a Christian background, so in some ways it was easy for her to go along to church and do the Christian things and say the right things. She joined a good evangelical church and she started going to a small group.

[2 : 1 4] She even thought about how she could use nutrition overseas in a third world country on a mission. Then one day she met the guy of her dreams, rich, tall, dark and handsome.

She started going out with him and the problem was he wasn't a Christian. And for a while this wasn't a problem. She prayed for him and she trusted that God would make him a Christian.

But that didn't happen and rather than her influencing him, he influenced her. She stopped going to a small group. Then she stopped going to church. She started sleeping with him and then they moved in together.

He convinced her that Christianity and Christian views were outdated and irrelevant. And he believed her. Sorry, she believed him. Well, why did these people start out strong, professed to be believing Christians, yet because of testing of their faith or the attraction of material or physical pleasures, they just fell away?

Why is it that others might face similar sorts of testing or temptation in life but continue to follow Jesus as their number one priority and even grow through such experiences?

- [3 : 27] Well, on one level, of course, the answer is God's sovereign choice and predestination. But Jesus in this parable isn't talking about that. He shows us our responsibility.
- Jesus talks about human responses and reasons that people fall spiritually sick, fall away and die, and other reasons why there will be people who will persevere until the end.
- The main point of tonight's parable is Jesus teaching that the cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word.
- You might recall from our series in loop, we've sort of had a little bit of a break, but up until this point, Jesus has been preaching and performing miracles. He's raised a dead person to life.
- He's cured people of diseases, plagues, blindness and evil spirits. He's even forgiven sins. And people are starting to say, well, who is this man? Who is this man who is doing all these things?
- [4 : 27] So at this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus' mission is taking shape. We see in chapter 8, at the beginning, that he started going through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.
- And this is what Jesus came to do, to proclaim the good news. If you flip back just a couple of pages in your Bible, at the end of chapter 4, verse 43, Jesus himself tells us that he was sent for this purpose, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.
- And we see this again in the first verses of tonight's passage. Soon afterwards, he went on through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. So here they are on this mission together.
- Jesus, his disciples, some women and many others, providing for them out of their own resources. And what a great example for the church.
- Different and diverse people, responding in love and gratitude for what Jesus has done for them, and united together under Jesus and his mission to proclaim the good news and giving from their own resources to sustain the ministry.
- [5 : 34] Are you part of that mission at Holy Trinity Doncaster? Are you a genuine follower of Christ on his mission with him? Or are you just a face in the crowd, coming along to see what all the fuss is about?
- Well, Jesus is asking these same questions in this parable tonight. Jesus had become a popular preacher and healer and great crowds had gathered from everywhere to hear him and see him.
- that performing miracles and pulling a big crowd wasn't the purpose of his mission. He came to proclaim the good news. He didn't want to attract miracle hunters.
- He wanted genuine followers. So let's pick up the action again from verse 4. When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, a soul went out to sow his seed.
- And as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on. And the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it.
- [6 : 43] Some fell into good soil and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. As he said this, he called out, let anyone with ears to hear listen. So Jesus begins by giving us four examples of different types of ground.
- There's the path where the seed's trampled on and the birds of the air ate it up. There's the rocky ground where there's no moisture, there's no nourishment, the roots can't take control and the plant withers and dies.

The thorny ground where the thorns and weeds grow up with the plant and choke it. And by contrast with these other three, there's then the good soil where the plant will grow, multiply, and produce a harvest.

So the main point that we'll discover from this parable is that the cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word. But at this stage in the story, the crowds are looking on.

They might be a little bit confused and they're waiting for what Jesus might say next. But he finishes the story by saying, well, if you have ears to hear, you should use them. You can see the crowds looking at each other going, well, what does that mean?

[7 : 52] Looking around, what does he mean? And my ears are okay and there might be a bit of wax in them from time to time. But they're okay. They don't need healing. And I'm listening. It was a bit hard at the back.

But once I got up the front, it was okay. I've heard everything he said. What's he talking about? Oh, Jim, down the road. He's a little bit deaf. Of course. Jesus is saying, well, he's already healed the blind, raised the dead, cured diseases.

Now he's going to heal the deaf people. Fantastic. And these were farming people. Their fields were usually long, narrow strips with paths in between them that were right to weigh.

So the farmers would normally throw the seeds out all over the path and these fields randomly. And they would expect all full outcomes to happen, as Jesus describes, after sowing the seed.

So it might have been quite easy for the crowd to miss the point of what Jesus was saying. But Jesus cries out to the crowds anyway to hear and to listen. And this is a summons by Jesus to hear at a deeper level than how the story first appears.

[8 : 56] He's asking the crowd to hold, sorry, he's asking the crowd to take hold of the meaning of the parable and to apply it to themselves so that ultimately they can hear the good news and be saved.

Well, it seems that the disciples may have had problems understanding. They come to Jesus in verse 9 and they ask him what it's all about. Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant.

And Jesus replied, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but to others I speak in parables so that looking they may not perceive and listening they may not understand.

And if the disciples were a group of Australians they might have said at that point, well, what are you talking about? Just get on with it. Get to the point. But Jesus first takes the time to explain to the disciples why he is using the parables in the first place.

He explains that the disciples have been chosen to understand the truth, the secrets of the kingdom of God. But to others he uses parables so that even though they do see and hear with their eyes and ears they won't understand.

[10 : 02] Was Jesus deliberately hiding the truth from the crowds? Was he like a spy sending out signals that only those that had the special code could understand? Well, in some ways I do think that is what is happening.

In the early 1900s a group of archaeologists discovered a whole new library of hieroglyphics in Iran. But they weren't able to decipher a single word of them because they were written in this unused and unintelligible lost language.

Then one day in a town named Rosetta near the mouth of the Nile River a stone was discovered that was the key. On the stone was not only these same hieroglyphics that they found in Iran but translations of them in both Egyptian and Greek.

So the parables of Jesus are our Rosetta stone from God that open up the whole library of God's truth. The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are made clear through these simple stories where Jesus reveals the secrets of God to the world.

The secrets of the kingdom are truths that humans can't discover for themselves because they're revealed to us by God. It's not by our own intelligence or cleverness that we understand God's truth.

[11 : 19] Rather God's truth is revealed to us as and when we respond to God in faith. So Jesus contrasts the disciples who will understand with the others in verse 10 who won't understand.

He's separating the genuine sincere seekers with the careless casual observers that make up the crowd. It's not that Jesus doesn't want people to understand.

It's more that he knows people won't understand that they just won't bother or take the time to get it. So the parables both conceal and reveal truth. They reveal it to the genuine seeker who will take the trouble to dig deeper and discover the meaning.

But they conceal the truth from those who are content to simply sit back and listen. luckily for us we don't have to guess at the meaning of this parable.

Jesus explains that the parable of the sower is clearly an illustration of people's different responses to God to hearing God's word and that the cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word.

[12 : 25] So he begins his explanation with the seed in verse 11. He says, now the parable is this, the seed is the word of God. So what is the seed that is planted? What is it that makes people grow?

The answer is the word of God. We shouldn't be surprised that the seed is the word of God. After all, we've already seen that this is the purpose of Jesus, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

But it seems that some people today think that growing as Christians involves ignoring God's word. People who say that the Bible is no longer relevant or has to be reinterpreted according to the values of society or that they're only seeking a spiritual or an emotional experience from God.

These people are ignoring the very thing that is essential to Christian growth and maturity and that's the seed, that is the word of God. Without this seed working in you, there can't be any spiritual growth.

The Apostle Paul is clear about the power of God's word. He says that he's constantly giving thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as what it really is, God's word which is also at work in you believers.

[13 : 38] And the disciple Peter, he would have been there listening to this story and he writes later on that he's obviously learnt the lesson of the parable. He says, you have been born again, not of perishable, but of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God.

That word is the good news that was announced to you. So this is the seed that is being sown. This is the seed that is being preached, the word of God, the good news of salvation, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus through his death on the cross and his resurrection.

Jesus defeats sin and death so that fallen humans can be forgiven for their rebellion against God. Our broken relationship with God can be restored so that we can live as God's children as he intended.

it. And this is the good news of the kingdom of God. This is the seed that is planted. So Jesus then explains the meaning of the different responses to hearing this good news.

And so firstly in verse 12 is the seed that falls on the path. The ones on the path are those that have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved.

[14 : 48] Now if you think of like a well-trodden path, it's usually smooth and beaten down. And so it's not intended to receive seed. The seed can't penetrate the surface or it's crushed by people walking on it or it sits up on the path and so the birds, you know, it's easy feed for the birds flying past.

Well think of a busy street in the city at the train station or a path at your university or between lectures or at school. People go rushing by hour after hour.

There's never a moment's rest. And people who are like this, who are always on the go, will never provide good soil in which the seed can grow. The hard path represents the shut mind, the hardened heart, the mind that will not or has no time to take in God's word.

The busyness of their lives gives Satan plenty of opportunity to take away any seed within them that might be trying to grow. And the crushing of the seed under foot reflects the contempt and the ridicule that these people with hardened hearts often have for the gospel and God's word.

And to really understand this first response we've got to be totally clear that it's not only hardened apathetic hearts that result in God's word failing to take root, but it's also because there are other forces at work that destroy the seed and prevent it from growing.

[16 : 09] And those forces are the birds of the air that eat the seed. And Jesus explains that this is the devil who comes and takes away the seed so they may not believe and be saved. Jesus is reminding us here that God's word doesn't only fight against people's contempt or their apathy or ignorance, but the fight is against the principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of evil in the world that are dedicated to devouring any seed that is sown and to rob people of their faith.

Martin Luther said, we can't stop the birds flying over our heads, but we must take heed lest they build their nests in our hair. So to combat this we must guard our quiet times and take real time out to pray and study God's word, to be still before God and to realign our thoughts and actions with his.

We can't just shoot off an email to God and expect to fight the prowling devil and the birds of temptation that fly around us. We must take real time out of our busy schedules to examine ourselves before God, to pray and to think about and apply God's word to our lives.

Only then can we do battle with these other forces and give the fragile seed in our hearts the care and the protection that it needs to grow. Well, second is the seed falling in the rocks in verse 13.

The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root. They believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. Well, this illustration of a shallow response to the gospel represents those who accept the good news but who never really think it out or realise its consequences and so they collapse when suffering or testing comes.

[17 : 56] These people might talk about being converted or becoming a Christian but really there's only a superficial or an emotional response or an intellectual agreement. There's no depth to this response and the seed has no roots or foundation to depend upon and so in the face of hardship or suffering or temptation, the seed withers and dies and the person falls away.

The story of Sarah that I mentioned at the start of tonight's talk is an example of this. She never really counted the cost of becoming a Christian. She hadn't really thought it through and she had no roots or foundation.

When she was tested and asked to pay the cost and to give something up for God, she couldn't do it. She fell away. For a seed to grow, it has to die and so it is with Christians.

To really become a Christian means dying to ourself and to our sin and being born again. Just as Jesus said to Nicodemus, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

Being a Christian means dying to ourself and our sin on a daily basis. It means kneeling at the cross on which Jesus died and repenting and crying out to God for his grace and forgiveness.

[19 : 13] Only this will compel us to change and compel us to sink our roots deeply into God's word and the salvation that we find at his cross. If our faith is based on anything else, then it will fail.

An example of Darren is another true story. His faith was based on his own experiences and a particular leader, not on the cross or God's word. When that leader was shown to be a fraud, his faith was tested.

He had no roots and he withered and fell away. An intellectual or emotional superficial Christianity won't transform us. It won't result in repentance and action or a desire to live for God rather than for yourself.

How can we be born again and sink God's roots deep within us if our faith is just a dry intellectualism or superficial emotion? How can we be born again if we are not prepared to change our lives?

This type of Christianity goes through the Sunday motions, flops at the first catastrophe and doesn't stand the test of time. My wife, Ali, reminds me of stories of many uni students that she meets that have this sort of immature childhood faith.

[20 : 30] Their faith is tested at university in many ways. There's intellectual and academic attacks by their lecturers. There's non-Christian relationships that pull people away.

There's social and emotional attacks. I mean, we're all relational creatures. We want people to like us. So there's going to be these sorts of attacks on our faith. We're all tested by our friends, by our workmates, by family and by our society, our post-modern secular society that wants us to give in and go along rather than holding on to our faith in Christ as the only road to salvation.

And we might face rejection and ridicule for our beliefs. We might not be popular. We might even suffer and be tested. But turning to God in faith and repentance, trusting him with our whole lives, reading the Bible, acting on God's word and praying on a day-to-day basis, these are the things that will ensure our foundation is strong.

And when the storms of testing come, we won't be shaken. So once again, the solution is the same. The cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word.

Next, we have a group that seem to have potential for spiritual growth. They go on with their faith. They might even withstand the testing that leads others to fail. But as they go on, they become so distracted by things other than God that there's no room for spiritual fruit.

[22 : 05] Jesus says in verse 14, As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear. But as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life and their fruit does not mature.

There's all sorts of anxieties and worries of life that can choke a person's faith. People can be so caught up with worries that they're robbed of the peace that comes with having trust in God.

Then there's riches and pleasures. These might not look like bad things, but Jesus says they're thorns, thorns that would choke any real growth. This is the irony of these words.

Pleasures don't hurt us, but Jesus says that they're thorns. In the West, people are obsessed with financial security and wealth. Things that we think are good for us.

Ambition to succeed. Having a good job and career. Investing for the future. We've got money shows on TV and shows about property and hot auctions. We're constantly bombarded with advertising about bank loans and home loans and shares and managed investments.

[23 : 15] And then there's all sorts of passions and desires that tempt people away from God. Not only do you need the right share portfolio and investment plan, but you need the right car, the right looks, the right clothes and of course the right holidays.

And then there's a social life of hedonism, which is pleasure as the ultimate aim. If it feels good, do it. Excessive drinking and casual sex. And the decadence and debauchery that flows from all those things.

These riches and pleasures might be promoted by our society as good things, but spiritually they're thorns. They're weeds that will harm your relationship with God and lure you away.

When anything takes the place of priority in our lives that God demands, when you put anything above God in our lives, then it will quickly become an idol and set about to choke and ruin our faith and make us useless to the kingdom of God and useless to the mission of Jesus to proclaim the good news.

It simply won't be a priority for us. We'll be out doing other things. Other things will be more important. God can have everything, but this one thing, this one ambition, this one luxury, he can't have.

[24 : 33] Cares, riches and pleasures of life, all three point to something very definite in the background of our lives that threatens to take control, that you may not be prepared to give up and that will ultimately obscure your vision of God's purposes in your life and his mission to the world, in the world.

So these thorns are idols we set up. They're sins and dependencies, things that prevent us from going on with God, that block our full surrender and finally prevent us from producing fruit, from maturing and growing in our spiritual lives.

So ask yourself, what are the thorns in your life? What things prevent you from growing and choke your spiritual life? Well, if we remember from this passage that the seed is the word of God, then we'll continually go to God's word to be refreshed and to be renewed.

The cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word. If your Christian life is being choked by thorns, then there's no better solution than taking the Bible as the pruning scissors that God provides and allowing God's word to go to work with the weeds and the thorns that are growing around you.

Take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. And remember that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[25 : 57] God's word is the seed that makes us grow. As Paul tells Timothy, hold fast to the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.

So that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. So if you're suffering, if you're being tested or choked by the things in your life, don't run from God but go to the Bible.

Pray and seek God's voice and the peace that passes all understanding. The cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word. So Jesus is saying to us, don't leave the seed fall on a hardened path.

Be careful not to be too shallow so the seed can't take root. Weed or cut out the thorns. And finally in verse 15 he says, be good soil. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who when they hear the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patient endurance.

A Christian growing in good soil not only hears the word of God but holds on to it. They retain and remember God's word. They count on it and they trust it.

[27 : 14] They take God's word seriously and invest their life and energy into it. These people have an honest assessment of themselves as fallen sinful people and so they accept the word, the seed for what it really is, God's word of salvation and life.

Jesus died on the cross for you to set you free from sin so that your broken relationship with God can be restored. So not only do these people hear and receive God's salvation but they act on it.

They respond to God's word. They live obediently according to God's word. They give the seed the attention and care that it needs to grow and with endurance it produces fruit.

God's word demands our attention. How else can we be receptive soil unless we allow ourselves to be ploughed and opened up by God's word and wait on how God might feed us or prune us?

But that requires time each day where God's word is able to sink into our minds, our hearts and our actions. Testing will come. Suffering will come.

[28 : 22] Temptations will come. But patient endurance will mean that you endure hardships and suffering. You won't covet or desire the cares, riches and pleasures of life because you'll persevere the greater treasure.

When we accept Christ we receive God's Holy Spirit and so we'll produce fruit of love and joy and peace and other good works that God has prepared for us. And not only this but our patient endurance will look forward with great hope and expectation of a heavenly rest and spending eternity with God in a restored creation.

So Jesus isn't just telling us this parable for information as agricultural statistics for the kingdom of God. He's putting us to action to be good soil, to hold on to his words, to get rid of hardness to his word.

Not to squeeze him into cracks and crevices of our day's business but to give him some real time that we can grow and mature in our spiritual life and in our relationship with God.

And this example of the good soil should give us great confidence and encouragement. Jesus assures us that fruit will be produced if we act on God's word.

[29 : 33] It's not a waste of time. It will happen. So this is what we must do to be good soil. Remember and act upon God's word. And lastly in verses 16 to 18 Jesus provides further illustrations of the need for this spiritual exercise and a further warning of what will happen if we ignore God's word.

No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar or puts it under a bed but puts it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light.

Then pay attention to how you listen. For to those who have more will be given and from those who do not have even what they seem to have will be taken away. If you're a follower of Jesus then you must let your light shine out into the world for all to see.

Don't hide your faith away but trust God and let your faith shine. These verses are linked to the parable of the sower. The best way of avoiding a shallow fragile faith with no roots is by being open and honest about your faith in Jesus.

Being open about your faith will help you to trust God and you will gain great confidence from that. How can you grow as a Christian if you hide your faith and can't be honest and open that you're a Christian?

[30 : 55] And this leads to the idea that in the end all that is hidden will be made public. In context this refers to the disciples making known publicly what Jesus has told them secretly.

And the idea that if at this time in Jesus' mission in chapter 8 the gospel message is hidden, in the end will be made known and proclaimed in all the world. Jesus has already warned us that if we have a shallow faith we are in danger of falling away in a time of testing.

And if we have other priorities or idols then we can be choked and not come to maturity. And verse 18 is another warning. Jesus here isn't making a universal sort of economic assessment of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

It might sound like this is what Jesus means but it applies to the way the disciples hear the word of God. And the key to verse 18 are the words then pay attention to how you listen.

In verse 18. Those who remember and act on God's word will receive further spiritual insight. While those that fail to pay attention will be deprived even of the little they seem to have.

[32 : 05] This verse is a further illustration of verse 10 and emphasises the need to listen to the parables with care. It's important to hear God's word like those in the example of the good soil.

Hold on to God's word and use the faith that God has given you and you'll produce fruit. You'll receive more. But if you use what God gives you then it will increase and you will grow in your relationship with God.

On the other hand when people fall away or are choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of life, even what they think they have in God is taken from them. If you don't use what God gives you and you exchange God's salvation for the things of the world then in the end you will lose even what you think you have.

In this parable tonight Jesus has diagnosed types of spiritual sickness. There's unbelief. There's falling away and immaturity. He's told us the causes of this spiritual sickness are the devil's attacks on hardened hearts, testing times and choking by the cares, pleasures and riches of life.

Then Jesus examined the ideal condition of the good soil, hearing, responding, acting and growing in God's word with patient endurance. If you go away remembering anything from tonight's talk then remember that the cure for spiritual sickness is remembering and acting upon God's word.

[33 : 29] And so this parable is both a warning to us about how we hear and receive the word of God and an encouragement to remain and live in God's word and to persevere until the end.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, thanks that we have heard your word at some time in our life and thank you that that word has taken root in our lives and that we've been able to defeat the devil's attempts to steal that word away from us.

Lord, please help us to stand in a time of testing that our roots would go deeply into God's word, that we would have a strong foundation. Lord, please help us also not to be choked by the cares, riches and pleasures of life, that our eyes will be fixed on you and your word and we would go back to it to clear the weeds that grow around us.

Lord, help us to be good soil, that we listen attentively and seriously to your word. Please help us in our busy lives to take time to look at it and meditate and pray to you.

Help us to trust your word, Lord, and to live for you and to produce fruit and grow in our relationship with you. Please help us to do these things.

[34 : 50] In Jesus' name, Amen. Chances each other, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.