

HOW DOES THE KINGDOM OF GOD GROW?

SERIES:

Stories for the Heart – a closer look at the words and works of Jesus

9 February 2025 – Scottsville Community Church, 9 am

READING: Matthew 13: 1-9 (The Parable of the Sower) – (**WORDS**)



SERMON OUTLINE

- The kingdom of God
- The seed and the path
- The seed and the rocky ground
- The seed and the thorns
- The seed and the good ground

INTRODUCTION

One of the major **disagreements** between Jesus and the Jews of his time centred around the **Kingdom of God**. The Jews looked forward to a **future Kingdom**. **Jesus' main message centred on the availability of God's Kingdom NOW**. The Kingdom of God is among you, he would say. Or that the Kingdom of God was near/ was in your midst. This is the secret that Jews didn't know: **the kingdom is coming twice**. First with the coming of Jesus and in future when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead and to complete the salvation of his elect. **So, the kingdom of God is already at work**.

What is the kingdom of God?

I have **two small boys**, so this is how I have explained this to them:

- It is a different kind of life.
 - This life comes from God and we can't manufacture it.
 - We must receive it as a gift, by receiving Jesus into our lives.
 - It makes us love God supremely.
 - It also makes us love people.

That's the kingdom of God. John, **with two exceptions, refer to it as 'eternal life'**. It begins here, doesn't die at death and continues forever.

In today's reading, **Jesus will explain to us how this kingdom grows**.

SYNOPSIS

- A Sower went out to sow seeds.
- The same kind of seed is planted.
- The reception is dependent on the condition of the soil. Some fell on:
 - The path (hard due to human traffic, birds devour it)
 - Rocky ground (little depth, fruit is temporal)
 - Among thorns (a lot of organic matter but tormented, fruit temporal)
 - Good ground (produces good fruit, lasting fruit)

We now turn to these **four types of soil**.

	What the Jewish audience heard in the 1 st century	What we must hear in 2025
Path	The birds eat the seed (v4) 'hears but does not understand it', the evil one snatches it' (v19) Mark 4:15 – 'when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word...' ➤ Satan targets the point of entry: hearing/understanding. Luke 8: 12 - '...the devil comes and takes away the seed...so that they may not believe and be saved' Here there is immediate rejection of the word by the individual. '...it has not been given (v11)...the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away... (v12)' 'hear but never understand...' (v14)...'the hearts have grown dull...' (v15) ➤ Understanding of the scriptures doesn't come through much study. It flows from obedience. '...the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' Prov 9:10b	'...blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear' (v16) The 'unlocking' of human hearts and minds is always the work of God alone, for God's Spirit must work to overcome the deception of Satan and man's rebellion. It is my experience that Satan's work continues in the same fashion today. • Churches are open for business on Sundays. • The Bible is also read in such meetings. • But people go in and out untransformed. • Surely the word is powerful? Yes, it is when preached correctly. • What most people are exposed to in many pulpits is a user-friendly message that is incapable of saving them from their sin. • This message comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes: 1. There is the prosperity message of many charismatic churches. 2. There is also a 'spiritual formation' message of mainline churches where no one is expected to repent from their sin and place trust for salvation. All they need to do is 'follow Jesus'. In both instances, word is preached but the critical parts are censored so that the people only hear a distorted message that can offer no hope to a person in sin. Both these extremes fail to explain why did Jesus have to die on the cross?

Rocky ground	'They did not have much soil...sprang up quickly...when the sun arose they were scorched...withered away' (v5) '...hears the word and immediately receives...no root in himself...when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word...immediately falls away' (v20-21) Luke 8:13 – 'they believe for a while' ➤ Quick to receive, quick to fall Here is an individual whose heart is 'rocky'. The reception of the word is superficial, even though it produces what looks like joy. Joy- while 'active', this faith looks real. The true nature of this temporary change only becomes evident when word-induced persecution/tribulation surfaces. These people like the benefits of being associated with Jesus, just not the challenges associated with him.	<i>In a church in Johannesburg, we were praying hard for a 'Christian' couple that was held in hostage by some of the violent Muslim groups in Saudi Arabia. The whole of Johannesburg was behind this couple. Loved ones and NGOs wrapped yellow ribbons around trees in the area close to their house (Hyde Park/Craighall/Saxonwold). At last, the couple was released. We waited to welcome them back in the church. They never showed up. The husband while in hostage decided to become a Muslim.</i> When they left, they were Christians. When they returned, the story was different. Rocky ground people! God's love appeals to them, the problem is their understanding of the extent of this love. Ephesians 3:17-18 - '...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love...that you may have to strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth...' <i>Breadth:</i> covers all my sin <i>Length:</i> it is from eternity <i>Height:</i> it has seated me with Christ in the heavenly places <i>Depth:</i> it sent Jesus to the grave This is not a God who is going to let us die in our troubles. The seed that fell on the path represents a total rejection of the word. The seed that falls of rocky grounds represents the superficial faith of a pragmatist. She only wants what works. She is free-spirited and shops at any shrine where her needs can be met. She has no sympathy for discomfort. We now move to an 'open-minded' person who likes to keep his options open.
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Among thorns	‘...fell among thorns, and thorns grew up and choked them’. (v7) ‘...hears the word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.’ (v22) Mark 4: 19 - adds ‘...and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word...’ Luke 8:14 –adds ‘...and the pleasures of life...’ If we add all these extras from Luke and Mark: Cares Riches ... ‘the deceitfulness’... Desire for other things Pleasures of life They go by the adage, ‘the more, the merrier’. These people do not know the beauty and freedom of simplicity. Did you notice that ...their plate seems full already! Why do they still need Jesus? John Stott: ‘The one thing contemporary people cannot do is to simply live Jesus alone’. There is something about Jesus that draws people to him. Even those who love themselves, the world, ...more than him...still want be to associated with him! As expected, where Jesus is not exclusively worshipped, he retreats. And so, the thorns grow and make the hearer unable to accept the word that can change his life.	The gospel is free. Discipleship is costly. In Matthew’s account, this parable is preceded by a story about who is the real ‘mother, brother and sister of Jesus’. In Luke, this parable follows a list of Jesus’ preaching companions as he travel from city to city. Some of the people who followed were ‘the twelve, Mary Magdalene, Joanna...Herod’s household manager...’. Surely these men and women had other important things to do. Surely, they had children, and wives and husbands, and... Jesus made it difficult for people to follow him. The events of this chapter mark the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. For from this point on, he begins to address the crowds only in parables. His ministry was not user-friendly. My own Impendle experience. Discipleship is costly. Jesus cannot and doesn’t promise: • Your career will not negatively be affected by a life of integrity. • You will spend maximum time with your spouse and children. • You will still afford your mascara. As he did with those first disciples, his call is simply, ‘follow me’! The ‘open-minded’ person is one ‘ofuna-zonke’. ‘Abantwana abahle, namateki amahle’. And a little bit of Jesus for relevance. Zonke! Self-denial is the only way you can remain in him. And the only way, his word will grow and produce fruit in any person and in any context. We now turn to the fruit-bearing soil.
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Good ground	‘...other seed fell on good soil, and produced grain...hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty’ (v8) ‘hears the word and understands it’ (v23) Mark 4: 20 – ‘...hear the word and accept it and bear fruit...’ Luke 8:15 – ‘...hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience’. What is clear from these multiple descriptions is that the bearing of fruit by the good soil is both an immediate and long-term endeavour. They hear, then accept...and with patience (after a long time of suffering...) bear fruit. It is also a journey where God helps them. Remember the part about ‘to you it has been given to know the secrets...’ That is, in this journey, each day becomes sweeter than the day before. But one needs to get to the next day to realise that. So, the blessings of the good soil only become clear in hindsight.	It is comforting to know that all seeds that fall on good soil produce fruit. Their fruit are not identical but are all good fruit. What are these fruit? • Obedience (the fruit of the Spirit) • Winning of souls • Good works/service
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CONCLUSION

I am sure **you know someone** who perfectly fits each of the four situations described this morning:

- Those who reject the word of God.
- Those who accept it superficially but fall away when hardship comes.
- Those who have one foot in church, the other in the world.
- Those who are continually being transformed by God's word.

What about you? Where would you place yourself on this continuum?

When did **you first accept the word (and The Word, Jesus Christ) in your life**? If not, why not do so this morning? Why not come to Jesus and surrender your life to him?

If already born-again, is there evidence of the word bearing more fruit in your life? When last did you witness to someone about Jesus... **let alone leading someone to Jesus?** Are you **more self-controlled** this year, than in February 2024? Which of the **ministry portfolios** of our church do you wish to sign up for this year?

David Pawson, in his book, Unlocking the Bible, says, 'we should not worry if three out of every four seeds come to nothing. From the one seed in good ground you can get a yield of 30, 60 and 100-fold, so it will be worth it'. **As a church-planter**, I find these words very comforting. So, lets scatter the seed of God's word.

NEXT SUNDAY:

We look at an encounter of God's Kingdom with evil spirits. The Kingdom triumphs. See you then.

Amen.