

Responses to the Kingdom

Big idea: The kingdom of heaven advances through the widespread scattering of the word that generates different responses. The truth is revealed to those 'who have ears to hear', but is hidden from the hard hearted.

1. Intro

- I remember a guy I was once discipling
 - Came to church
 - He was pretty excited about Jesus and the fact that Jesus had died to atone for his sins
 - Just started reading his Bible
 - He was telling his friends about Jesus
 - We met up read the Bible together
- I was so encouraged and excited that this guy had this faith that seemed to be sprouting and flourishing
- But no sooner had he arrived ... he disappeared
 - He was confronted with another worldview that challenged his shallow beliefs
 - And like a passing yo-yo or footy card fad ... he dropped his faith as quickly as he had picked it up
 - He just turned away and now he doesn't believe it
- I wonder whether you have had an experience like that
- May have been a
 - Family member
 - Friend
 - Uni mate
 - I reckon if you've ever been involved in youth ministry you would have seen this all the time
- Of course when that happens
 - It's confusing because you wonder whether that person ever had a faith
 - It's discouraging because you invested time and energy into them
 - It's disheartening because you wonder if God's kingdom is ever going to grow or not
- Well this is what Jesus encountered all the time as he went around teaching and proclaiming the kingdom of heaven ... and he knew this is what the disciples would encounter as they took up the baton and began to proclaim the gospel themselves

- This is why Jesus told the parable of the sower
- Because the parable of the sower helps give understanding and comfort to us when we see people respond differently to the gospel
- But it also assures us ... that despite those different responses, God's kingdom will continue to grow

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2. Context

- In Ch 11-12 Jesus has been teaching and preaching in and around the towns of Galilee
- And as he's been doing that we've discovered
 - a growing opposition from the religious hierarchy and
 - increasing uncertainty among the people
- The reason being ... Jesus was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah the people had expected

- In Ch 13 we get this block of teaching by Jesus
- And Matthew tells us in v3 that '*he taught them many things in parables*'
- A parable is just an extended metaphor, story or illustration
- Jesus often taught using parables to teach key truths about the Kingdom of Heaven and what it means be a disciple of Jesus
- In Ch 13 captures 7 of those parables
- This morning we'll be looking at the first and longest of Jesus parables - the Parable of the Sower
- And this morning we'll look at it under two headings
 - Responses to the Word
 - Divisiveness of the Word

3. Responses to the Word of God

- We see in v3-9 that Jesus first tells the parable to the crowd as they are listening on the banks of the lake
- But it's only later in v18-23 that Jesus actually explains what the parable means to the disciples

- The key to understanding the parable is in v19 where we see
 - that the seed being sown is the '*message of the kingdom*'
 - The seed is the word of God ... the preaching of the Gospel
 - Jesus is the sower, scattering the word of God among the people

- And the various soils are different people and the ways they respond to Jesus' word
- And what we are going to see ... is that as the kingdom of heaven grows through the widespread scattering of the word that generates different responses
- The KOH doesn't grow through
 - Suicide bombing
 - Political lobbying
 - Clever marketing
 - Philosophical debate
 - Clever reasoning
 - You don't need a PhD in Christian apologetics to advance the KOH
- No ... the kingdom of heaven grows through the widespread scattering of the word that generates different responses
- **The Path**
- The first soil that the seed lands on is the path
- This is hard and trodden and the seed is unable to penetrate in
- It's easy therefore for birds to come and eat the seed before it has a chance to be ploughed in and grow
- And in v19, Jesus explains that this type of soil is like the person who responds with hard-hearted, unbelief
- Like the path, their hearts are hard and the word is unable to penetrate into it
- They don't understand, they don't want to understand ... and so Satan comes and snatches away the word that was preached to them
- They're like the Pharisee and Teachers of the Law who have been in opposition to Jesus throughout his ministry
 - Challenging his authority to forgive sins
 - Plotting to kill him because he healed on the Sabbath
 - Accusing him of being an agent of Satan because he cast out demons
- **Illustration / Application**
- No doubt you've come across this person
- Maybe a friend, school buddy, work colleague, family member
- You've talked to them about Jesus, you've invited them to church, or given them a book to read or a sermon to listen to ... and they just reject it

- They think it's nonsense ... they don't believe it ... they're not interested
- But don't be discouraged
 - This is how the KOH grows ... through the widespread scattering of the word that generates different responses

- **Rocky Soil**
- Second soil in v5-6 is the rocky or shallow soil
- Here the plant springs up quickly but the soil is too shallow for the plant to develop roots
- And the sun scorches the plant so that it withers and dies

- In the first month after the seed was sown, this type of soil would have looked the most impressive,
 - ... because the seed would have started strong and come up quickly
 - this soil would look like it's going really well
 - but as quick as it came ... it was gone

- v20-21 Jesus explains that this is like those people who some respond with initial zeal and enthusiasm to the word ... but later they fall away.
 - These people hear the word and they respond with excitement
 - But almost straight away their faith withers under the heat of persecution or hardship they encounter because of their faith
 - They say they believe in Jesus and his message ... but when they start to get mocked, they quickly drop it
 - They're like the zealous crowd & clamoring sick who have been following Jesus and have been amazed at his teaching and healing
 - ... but have fallen away rather than heeding his call to follow him

- **Weeds¹**
- The third soil we see in v7 is mixed with weeds & thorns
- As the plant grows, the weeds grow up with it and choke the plants so that they don't bear any grain

- In v22 Jesus explains these are like people who hear the word of God but they let the worries of the world & the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word so the Gospel doesn't produce any fruit in their life
 - They don't want to let go of the comforts of this world ... and as a result the gospel is choked out ... and they don't bear any fruit

¹ Weeds cause the plant not to bear any fruit. Unless bear fruit will be cut off and thrown into the fire – Luke 13:6ff
'Parable of the barren fruit tree' & John 15 'The true vine'

- Eventually it becomes obvious they never really were a Christian who's genuinely turned to Jesus as Lord and Saviour

- **Application**
- This is like the person who comes to church or youth group each week
 - They say they're Christian ...
 - They say the right things that make it seem like they're Christian
 - They hear the word being read and explained
 - ... but it just isn't impacting their life
- They're more concerned with their comfort or happiness, or money
- They're distracted by their career, business, or kids, or relationship
- They're more committed to their hobby or lifestyle ... than to Jesus
 - And as a result the word of God is just squeezed out of their life

- **Illustration – Tibouchina Tree**
- We have this fabulous tibouchina tree in our back yard > it's just started to flower > looks magnificent
 - Couple of years ago I noticed section of the tree not producing flowers
 - No leaves ... it looked dead
 - When I looked closely ... a huge vine had wound its way around the branch
 - It's become entwined with the other branches
 - It was killing the tree
- I hadn't noticed it to start with ... because it had started so small
- I was left with two choices ...
 - Either leave it ... let it go unchecked > kill my tree
 - Cut it out ... and allow the tree to flourish and flower

- That's what the worries of the world are like
 - The superannuation, the gym, the bike, acceptance by others, the extension, the holiday, the school fees, the school grades the mortgage, the social life, the career,
 - They start small and insignificant > so small you don't notice them and the impact they're having
 - Then slowly but surely ... left unchecked ... they grow up and choke out the word of God in your life that means you bear no fruit for the gospel and it kills your faith
- Like my tree ... you can either
 - Ignore the weeds and allow them to destroy your Christian life
 - Or you can cut them out ... so you can start bearing fruit for Jesus

- **Application**

- **Non-Xn Relationships**

- One killer is when we get into relationships with non-Christians
 - It looks unimportant and unthreatening to start with
 - Initially the relationship doesn't seem to impact your Christian walk
- But just like a weed ... it starts small but as it grows and it eventually chokes the life out of the plant
- When ... Christians start dating and marrying non-Christians ... these relationships more often than not choke the life out of a person's faith and cause them not to bear any fruit
- Why? Because when you're in a relationship like this ...
 - you're distracted with trying to please them,
 - don't want to rock the boat when your Christian worldview clashes with their worldview , and
 - eventually it's just easier for the sake of a happier relationship to let go of God's word & your faith ... rather than dealing with the tension

- **Money & wealth**

- It's no surprise that Jesus makes special reference to the distraction that money causes to the effectiveness of God's word
 - Because it's so easy to be caught up in our work or savings or mortgage or investments as you we seek after the lifestyle or house or the retirement that we want
 - And as a result ... you're too tired, too busy, too focused and too selfish to allow the gospel to take root in your heart and bear the fruit that it should
- And notice Jesus refers to it as the 'deceit' of wealth
 - The implication is ... it's subtle
 - Often you're not even aware it's going on ... because you're swimming in a culture that values and celebrates money and lifestyle as normal

- **Illustration – Frog in Boling Water**

- It's like the fable of the frog that jumps into a pot of water that has been placed on the stove
 - As easily as the frog jumped in ... it could jump out
 - However, the frog is just happy to be swimming around in the water
 - What it doesn't realise is the water is getting hotter and will soon boil
- The story goes, that although the frog can jump out, it doesn't notice the slowly increasing temperature, until it's too late and it boils to death

- **Comfort or Happiness**

- Other killer weeds in our culture is comfort or happiness
- If you're motto in life is ...
 - "I don't want much, as long as am comfortable"; or
 - "I just want my kids to be happy"
- If you find yourself saying or thinking those things ... then there's your weed that's going to choke your faith
- If you're more committed to being comfortable in life, or making sure you're kids are happy ... than following Jesus
 - Rather than gather at church on Sundays, you'll prefer to sleep in or take your kids to Sunday sport or the party
 - Rather than be generous with your money towards God and his kingdom, you'll prefer to use your money for that nice holiday or latest gadget
- Are you plodding along, coming to church, hearing the Gospel ... but letting the distractions of life squeeze God's word out of your life?
 - Are there things in your life that are choking the life out of your faith?
 - Do you look at your life and realise that you're not really bearing fruit for the gospel?
- Friends ... if that's you ... get rid of the weeds that are choking your faith
 - Because as Jesus says in Ch 7 ... those branches that don't bear any fruit get cut down and thrown into the fire²

- **Good Soil**

- The 4th soil Jesus speaks about in v8 is the good soil
- The seed that fell on the good soil took root, it grew up and it produced a massive crop that any grain baron from Dubbo would be over the moon about³
- Jesus explains in v23 that people who are like the good soil,
 - hear the word of God
 - they let it take root in their lives
 - the word grows so abundantly within them and produces a crop

- **Application**

- This person welcomes and obeys the word of God ... and as a result their life is transformed

²Matt 7:17-20, John 15:1-8

³ Note: the harvest metaphor is a common way of understanding the final judgement of humanity

- God's word brings about deeds, actions, thoughts and speech that is pleasing to him
- This person lets the word of God determine ...
 - their attitude to and use of money
 - how they prioritise their time
 - the way they speak to their spouse and kids
 - how they model their faith to their children and their friends
 - how they deal with their sexual desires
- They live lives that bear good fruit ... fruit that is pleasing to God and glorifies him and his kingdom

Application

- Jesus point in this parable is that kingdom of heaven grows through the widespread scattering of the word even though it generates different responses
- As the word of God is scattered
 - Some will reject it
 - Some will be interested and then quickly fade away
 - Some will hear it but be distracted by the things of this world
 - Others will hear it, accept it, let it take root and obey it
- Of course as we hear Jesus explain the parable to the disciples ... we can't but help ask ourselves ...
 - "How am I responding to the word of Jesus?"
 - Are you rejecting the gospel?
 - Are you allowing the worries of the world and deceit of wealth to choke the word?
 - Or are you allowing it to develop deep roots into your heart and therefore into your life?

4. Divisiveness of the Word of God

- Sandwiched in between Jesus teaching and explanation of the parable ... Jesus answers this question that the disciples ask in v10 – "why do you speak to the people in parables?"
- And the short answer is that the parables divide people into those who have 'ears to hear' and those who are hard hearted to Jesus and his word
- You see that in v11
 - *The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.*

- And then we read this shocking quote from Isaiah 6
 - v13-15 *"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand ... "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*
- In Isaiah 6 God sends Isaiah to preach to Israel who have rejected God
 - And his preaching has the effect of further hardening the hearts of people
 - This serves to confirm that their judgment is deserved
- The implication here is that Jesus sees his preaching not just in terms of bringing salvation ... but also in terms judgment
- That is, the parables are not some cutesy stories that Jesus uses to explain the KOH, that are so simple that everyone is meant to understand the meaning of
- No, Jesus speaks in parables to divide his hearers into those who have ears to hear ... and those don't
- That is, the parables are veiled and obscure to those who are hard-hearted, unwilling to persist in faith, or caught up in the worries of life
 - To these people (like the listening crowd), the parables are just bland, shallow stories about life
 - The message is hidden and meaningless
 - And as they fail respond to Jesus' words ... their judgment is confirmed by their unbelief
- But on the other hand ...
 - to those who have faith
 - to those who come willing to listen ...
 - to those with 'ears to hear' like the disciples ... he reveals the truth about the kingdom
- **Illustration – Sliding Doors**
- In a sense, the parables were like automatic doors you pass through when entering a shopping centre or office building

- It's only when you walk close to them will they open up
- But if you remain at a distance, they stay closed

- **Application**
- As we look at the parable of the sower, we see the seed is scattered on every type of soil
 - Its indiscriminate
 - It goes out to those who are given understanding and those who are not
 - Because ... the method for growing the kingdom is through the widespread scattering of the word
- We can see that here in Ch 13 where Jesus is speaking a huge crowd, so large in fact that he had to get into a boat in order to be able to address them all
 - He appeals to them "he who has ears to hear ... let him hear"
 - He appeals to the **whole** crowd ... but we see in v10, only the disciples (not just the 12, a much larger group of disciples) come to Jesus seeking understanding
 - But the word was scattered to all

- If we were to go back through Matthew's gospel we would see over and over and over Jesus teaching vast crowds and appealing to them
- He proclaimed the truth far and wide wherever he went
 - 4:23 – Jesus went throughout all Galilee teaching and proclaiming
 - 9:35 – Jesus went throughout all towns and villages teaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (v35)
 - 11:1 – he went out from there to teach in the towns of Galilee
- Jesus proclaimed the kingdom far and wide, to all types of people
 - Yet only some received it
 - Only some were given understanding
 - Only some were the good soil
- But this is how Jesus kingdom grows ... through the widespread scattering of the word that generates different responses

- And so as the disciples come and ask Jesus ... why do you speak in parables
 - He is able to explain to them that just as he faced different response to his teaching and proclaiming of the kingdom as he sowed the seeds of the gospel
 - So will we face different response as we too sow seeds of the gospel

- Therefore, you and I can be assured that this is how the kingdom grows

- Widespread scattering > different responses ... yet extraordinary growth
- Which means as you and I get on with our mission of living to be and make disciples ... then you ought to expect the gospel seeds that you scatter will generate different responses
- And so while that is always disappointing ... it shouldn't be surprising
 - This is the way God grows the kingdom
- Which means ... when the gospel is rejected ... you needn't lose heart and think that it's because of your lack of
 - knowledge
 - skills
 - personality
 - persuasiveness
- The gospel will generate different responses
- But on the other hand ... you should also expect that as you scatter the word of God widely, there will be some who **will** accept it > obey it > and produce a harvest 30, 60, 100-fold
- What that means ... is if you're a follower of Jesus living to be and make disciples of Jesus ... then part of that means ... is you are now the sower
- You are the one scattering the seeds of the gospel amongst the people and the community God has placed you
 - Just like Jesus did, you just need to scatter the seed far and wide without discrimination to all God places before you
 - And as you scatter the seeds of the gospel ... yes there will be different responses ... but that is how God will grow his kingdom
- You won't know whether the people you share it with are like the path, rocky soil, weeds or good soil ...
 - But as you proclaim the good news of Jesus ... God will ensure that the gospel grows abundantly and produces fruit in those who have ears to hear
- So friends ... keep praying > keep sowing widely > keep proclaiming Christ boldly ... and as you do ... God's kingdom will grow

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