

PARABLES OF POWER #2

The Life-Giving Word

Read: Matthew 13:1-23

Background: Parable of Sower. Jesus no doubt told this story more than once and in each of the synoptic gospels we have varied versions. See also Luke 8:1-15; Mark 4:1ff.

This is one of the few parables Jesus explained Himself.

The seed is the Word of the kingdom. (Luke: the word of God — 8:11). This is the key to the whole passage. There are four categories of people.

1. Those who don't receive the word in the first place (19)

- Some people never do believe. Jesus says this is because the evil one takes the Word away from them.
- Luke = the devil
- Mark = Satan
- The evil one 'snatches' the Word because they do not understand it. This suggests a violent, quick, desperate action.
- The Devil is looming nearby waiting to move in quickly. If we are going to believe, we need to do so right from the outset. We need to grab the Word quickly ourselves first!
- Now is the time to believe God's Word! Don't linger or procrastinate.

2. Those whose faith is short-lived (20f)

Others receive the Word with joy but do not go on. To all intents and purposes, their conversion is real. But—

- They have no root in themselves. In other words, the word has not gone very deep. Cf Jeremiah 17:7, 8; Psalm 1:1,2.
- They are temporary — literally: 'for a time.' They believe for a while' (Luke 8:13). Might even be baptised. They sing the songs. Pray the prayers. Remember Simon Magus (Act 8).
- *They fall away in times of trouble.* We are guaranteed trouble! John 16:33; Philippians 1:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:5,6; Revelation 1:9.
- They fall away in times of persecution — See 2 Timothy 3:12.
- 'Because of the Word.' Not because of worship, or prayer, or works, or going to meetings etc. And not because of our own foolish behaviour, even if sincere. It is the Word that changes us and this is what causes trouble! We need to live by the standards of the Word, not the world.
- They fall away or falter quickly. The fall, once started, is rapid.
- Jonathan Edwards referred frequently to 'stony ground Christians' — those who began with fervour but quickly evaporated.

Parables of Power – The Life-Giving Word

3. Those whose lifestyle chokes the word (22)

They do not make any change to their way of life. Note that Luke says, ‘As they go on their way’ (8:14). They hear the Word (22) but it makes no difference. So they are choked (surrounded) by—

- The worries of this age. Cares and concerns about material concerns.
- The deceitfulness of riches (also Mark). Money is deceptive — is deceiving many in the church at the moment. Not godliness is gain (1 Tim 6:6) but ‘gain is godliness.’
- Story of grandson who, because of responding to the Word, gave up a job involving compromise of his integrity. ‘I only have three dollars in the bank and nothing else, but I am glad I made the decision,’ he said.
- The pleasures of life Pleasure is also deceptive — we all want it, of course. No normal person *wants* pain. But when pleasure becomes an end in itself, we are in trouble
- eg marriage: the goal is not happiness but holiness. Keeping the covenant, loyalty, humility, patience produce to happiness; happiness does not produce them. So they are not fruitful. Luke — ‘they do not mature.’ those who produce a crop (23)

4. Those who are fruitful.

Of these, Jesus said —

- They hear and understand ie they think about it! Frequently, Jesus appeals to people’s understanding (Matt 15:10; 16:11; 24:43; Mk 4:13; 7:14; 8:17,21; Lk 24:45) and thinking powers (Mt 17:25; 18:12; 21:28; 22:42; Lk 10:36).
- They hear and accept (Mk 4:20) Accept = receive, welcome, acknowledge, recognise.
- They have a noble (lit. beautiful) heart (Luke 8:15).
- They have a good heart (Luke 8:15).
- They retain the Word (Luke 8:15). They don’t forget. Eg Bible College students who learned a book of the Bible by heart as an assignment.
- They persevere (8:15). They ‘plod with God.’
- They are fruitful (Matthew 13:23) — of varying degrees, but still a crop! This is the point of the whole story. Seed is sown so a crop will be produced! See Galatians 5:22f etc.
- This is important — we need to listen to it! (Matt 13:9)

Challenge

- How do we respond to the Word?
- The degree of our fruitfulness is directly proportional to this.
- It is time to take the Word seriously. Understand — accept — retain — persevere.
- Receive it readily
- Read it daily
- Recall it carefully

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions: choose those that seem most relevant

Read Mathew 13:1-23

Biblical

1. The seven parables in this chapter are all about the same subject. What is it? (19, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47)
2. What do you think is the kingdom of God?
3. Why don't people understand the gospel? (19)
4. Who is the evil one? (19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12)
5. What is the difference between trouble and persecution? (21)
6. Now for a tough one: What answer does Jesus give to the question in verse 10?

Personal and practical

7. What might we do to prevent the actions described in 21?
8. Why does Jesus talk about the 'deceitfulness' of wealth/money? What other aspects of life might be called deceitful? How and why? Give examples.
9. Read Luke 8:15. On a scale of 1 (little) to 10 (much) how would you rate these five qualities/actions in your own life? What can you do to improve your grade?
10. Why do different people produce different levels of crops? (Romans 12:3-6 might be helpful here.)

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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