

## PARABLES OF POWER #4

### Five Stages in Fruitful Faith

Read: Mark 4:26-29

#### A question

- Question: What was the most common image used by Jesus in his parables?
- Answer: Harvest and/or horticulture
- In 25% of all the parables
- In three of the only four parables recorded in all three synoptic gospels

#### 1. If we do not sow we will not reap

- ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground’ (26)
- The seed is the Word (Luke 8:11)
- ‘Scatter’ = spread the Word
- William Carey (1761-1834) is known today as the ‘father of modern missions’. As a young man he urged his Calvinistic Baptist Church to use ‘means’ (ie methods/actions) to preach the gospel. He was told, ‘Young man, sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine.’ Fortunately Carey ignored the advice and the seeds he planted in India are still bearing fruit today.
- ‘When we step out (in faith), God steps in (with power)!

The same principle applies to –

- Love – if would reap love, we must sow love
- Faith – if we see the results of faith we must plant the (mustard) seeds of faith.
- God-given ideas – plant them and see what happens!
- **To do a lasting deed, sow a simple seed.**
- Many years ago, I had to tell a story to our Sunday School Christmas party. I couldn’t find one I hadn’t already used. So in desperation I scratched around and threw a few ideas together and made a story of my own. To my surprise, the children liked it. I wrote another for Christmas Day and they liked that too. I didn’t realise it, but a seed was planted. Someone suggested I write a book of stories. Today there are 36 stories in seven volumes with 100 000 copies in print plus two musicals, a board game and a CD. Some stories have been published overseas and some were translated and broadcast into Soviet Russia to an estimated audience of millions. A few words were scattered on a piece of paper like seed and an exciting harvest resulted. Jesus said this is what the kingdom of God is like!

## Parables of Power – Stages of Fruitful Faith

2. Growth is a miracle

- ‘He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how’ (27)
- We cannot create life
- Salvation is by the power of God (Romans 1:16)
- Church growth is God’s work (Matthew 16:18)
- The fruit of the Spirit is just that (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Projects/plans only succeed when God is in them (Proverbs 16:1, 9)

3. God gives the increase

- ‘The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear’ (28)
- The Greek word for ‘by itself’ = *automatos*
- We don’t examine the seed every day to see how it’s going
- It is God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6)
- We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8)
- We walk by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)

4. Don’t expect the whole crop overnight

- ‘The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear’ (28)
- Growth is gradual
- We need patience and trust
- Do we want mushrooms or redgums? One grows overnight; the other takes a life time.
- In the 1960s, my older brother Ken was pastoring in Launceston, Tasmania. He began a Bible correspondence course for everyday Christians. Its slogan was ‘The whole Word for the whole world.’ Even though Ken was my brother, at the time I thought this was a bit over the top. That course was later taken on by Vision Christian University, an American college that only has campuses in local churches. Now forty years later, there are 100 000 students around the world enrolled in it! There are 7000 local church campuses in over 140 nations teaching in 15-20 different languages. In the last five years, graduates have planted 3000 new churches. The whole Word is indeed being taken to the whole world! Jesus said this is what the kingdom of God is like.
- We need to keep on planting seed because we never know what might result.

## Parables of Power – Stages of Fruitful Faith

5. Timing is critical

- ‘But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’ (29)
- Reap neither too early nor too late
- Eg with not-yet-Christian relatives or friends
- Neither falling short of faith nor going beyond faith
- Don’t miss the moment – ‘At once’ = ‘immediately’
- We need godly wisdom

The harvest will come!

- ‘But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’ (29)
- Harvest time is approaching
- The kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed
- What ‘seed’ (ie word, idea, revelation) do we have from God? We need to plant it and see what God does with it
- Not all seed grows but most of it does
- You may have a future Reinhard Bonnke or Billy Graham in your Sunday School class – sow the seed!
- You may have a great song or poem or book in your heart: no one will ever know if you don’t start sowing seed ie writing words
- In the kingdom of God, said Jesus, when we scatter seed God will give us a harvest
- **‘To do a lasting deed, sow a simple seed.’**
- Remember: When we step out (in faith), God steps in (with power).

**SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT**

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

**Read** Mark 4:26-33

Biblical

1. Why do you think Jesus chose so often to talk about horticulture when explaining the kingdom of God? Why not mining or pottery or city walls?
2. When Jesus taught, what was one advantage of being a disciple?
3. What can we learn about first century grain-growing methods from this passage?
4. If the seed is the Word (Luke 8:11), what is Jesus actually saying here about the way the Word of God works in our lives

Personal and practical

5. Remember – not all seed germinates and grows: what can we learn from this?
6. How would you apply this parable to the growth of a quality like love? How do you 'sow' love and how do you 'reap' it
7. How would you apply this parable to the growth of a God-given idea or dream – like going on a short-term mission trip or teaching a Sunday School class or writing a song?
8. What 'seeds' have you sown that have eventually borne fruit? Share with the group.
9. What 'seeds' have you sown that have not yet come to fruition? What could/should you do about it?
10. What methods have you found effective in sowing God's Word into your life? Which have been the most fruitful?
11. What are your dreams for our congregation? How can you 'sow' them in prayer and see what God does with them?

When we step out in **FAITH** God steps in with **POWER**

## 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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