

## Hearing – Matthew 13 v1-13

I'm sure that we are all familiar with the wise saying, *“God has given us 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason”*.

Hearing is so important for our faith.

Jesus tells this little parable of the sower and the seed, at the seashore. He has moved away from the religious buildings and is now out in the open sharing God's word.

Willie Barclay thinks that he may have been inspired by watching a local farmer scattering seed as he spoke. But Jesus would have been well used to watching farmers scatter seed in Galilee. He was definitely a country lad. His understanding of nature, and his use of it for illustrations about God's kingdom, was quite incredible.

Here we have another lovely illustration. Simple, but with an important point.

The farmer goes out and does what the farmer always does, he scatters seed. Jesus is pointing his hearers to the fact that God scatters His seed about His Kingdom. He scatters seed generously and liberally. Everyone gets the opportunity to hear the word but not everyone responds.

Before lockdown, using the internet in this way was alien to me. I obviously didn't see the potential in sharing God's word through this medium. But as we went into lockdown I read this story, and suddenly a light went on and said, “John, this is what I want you to do, scatter the seed of the gospel through setting up a You Tube channel and use our Cadder Facebook page and put my message out there” and so I was obedient to Jesus' prompting, and I'm amazed at the wide audience that the message has now reached.

It goes to the other side of the world in seconds. My friend Wallace, who lives in Australia, can receive this Word as quickly as our congregation can here in Bishopbriggs. My mum, who lives in Tarbert, can watch this broadcast from the comfort of her own home. This has certainly been a time for scattering God's word and who knows where it will end up and in whose heart. Perhaps this is here to stay.

I don't think that Jesus is particularly concerned with how we scatter the seed, whether it is in a church building or by the seashore. He is concerned that we do scatter it, and that it is part and parcel of who we are as Christian people.

We all have a responsibility to scatter the seed of the Gospel and we all have our own unique way of doing it.

What is the seed?

The seed is the message or to use a biblical word, the gospel. Gospel simply means good news. So, we are scattering a message of good news. Good news about what? To Jesus it was good news that God's Kingdom was coming into the world. That Jesus was the catalyst for this good news message.

Now, it can be summed up in John 14, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in Him, will never perish but have eternal life”*. Here is the good news and it's a message for everyone. It's not just for church people or for rich people but it's a message for the whole wide world. It's a message for everyone on the world wide web.

God so loved the world. This is the seed that the farmer sows, and this is the seed that the disciples were to sow, and all Christians after them: to go and tell people that God loves them, and he wants them to believe in his Son Jesus Christ, and if they did then they would never perish.

Isn't that good news for us today?

However, all who are Christians who share the good news will quickly discover that not everyone is receptive to it.

They will quickly find that many people will have different views.

I remember when I received the message of God's eternal love into my heart, as a raw 19 year old, that one wise older Christian said, “John, don't expect everyone to pat you on the back and say well done, there will be those who have not time for this message and some who will reject it outright.”

He was certainly right!

Jesus is telling his disciples, to expect rejection, because some of the seed falls onto hard ground. In Palestine the field were long and narrow, and in between each farmer's field there were well trodden footpaths, in which the farmer walked and it's into this hard footpath that some seed falls.

It has no chance of ever taking root. According to Jesus it is quickly devoured by the birds. It's their breakfast. Jesus connects this to the evil one, snatching away the seed from their hard hearts. So as soon as these people hear the message it is gone, it is of no interest, and Jesus was telling his

disciples, you can expect this, expect people to reject the message immediately.

In fact for the early Christians, and Christians today throughout the world, the message is not only rejected but hated. There is zero tolerance towards anything to do with God, and if it is mentioned, then it is quickly uprooted.

Then Jesus shares that there is another type of hearer, and these are shallow minded people. People who hear the word, hear the message and perhaps like it and perhaps will go along with it for a few weeks, but then come challenges, for their hearts are hard. There is no space for the roots of the seed to take hold.

In Palestine much of the land has limestone rock just a few inches under the soil, and so the seed begins to put roots into the soil until it hits the limestone rock and it has no other place to go, and so with no roots there is no nourishment and no chance of growth and producing fruit that will last. So it withers and dies. It shows promise at first but when they hit a problem then they turn back.

Expect this, Jesus is saying, not everyone is going to grow and go forward in their faith. Perhaps they enjoy a little spirituality but nothing too deep and challenging.

There is a third type of ground and this seed grows and shows every sign of being good. It is full of promise, and we have great expectation for this seed to become a plant. But as it grows, so do the thorns and the perennial pests of weeds, and the cares and the problems of the world begin to choke the life from this little plant. Bit by bit it dies, and sadly the seed of promise has become another casualty. It is dead. Jesus said to expect this: some will start off with great gusto but then get distracted and caught up in the affairs of the world, and then sadly die.

So, three types of ground, and no fruit to bear.

Jesus, your diagnosis of the situation is not encouraging, but it is realistic.

Jesus never promised that to be his disciple and to be one who shares in his ministry would be easy. The problem that we face is spiritual. For sharing God's kingdom in the world is a spiritual battle. We are fighting against the powers of darkness, said the apostle Paul. And in another place he said, we are fighting against our own sinful natures, and so the battle for our souls goes on, and often we are not even aware of it.

But Jesus would not want us to lose courage, for he knows that there is a fourth soil out there, just waiting to hear the message - a fourth type of soil, that will be receptive to his Word.

With hindsight we know that this soil is good soil, and that it is well prepared by the farmer, and that it is waiting for the seed to fall.

When it falls on the hearts of all those who seek to understand and who look after the message and make it a priority in their life, then with perseverance, hard work and determination, this little seed will grow and produce a great harvest, a hundred, sixty or thirty times, and Jesus was pointing to the importance of hearing and understanding God's message, God's gospel.

Let's apply Jesus' Message to our own lives today:

Where are we this morning in relation to the seed and the soil?

Have we heard the gospel: that God loves us so much that he went to Calvary and died on a cross for our sin and that he has taken all our sin, on his own shoulders, and that through faith in Jesus Christ, we belong to him forever?

Have we heard this message, and have we received it, and made it a priority in our lives?

Many will say, *it's too good to be true!*

*I want to pay for this. If I could pay for it, then I would receive it. And God comes to us and says, there is no payment, it is free, it has been paid by Jesus already and all you need to do is receive it.*

But often we are not good at receiving charity, and grace is a word that can be challenging. Grace means "Gifts received at Christ's expense" and we *say why is it free?*

Because God is good and gracious and He gives freely – it's his nature and he wants to give us eternal life out of his generosity, and all we need to do is to come to Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and receive Christ into our hearts. Then go forward, making this free gift of God's grace a priority in our lives.

So, have you received God's amazing grace into your life?

Has the seed of grace fallen on your heart? And if it has, is it growing, are you making it your treasure, your inheritance for eternal life?

Jesus said, *those who have ears, let them hear.*

Amen