

# The Word of the Kingdom ...

## ... *no Word, no Kingdom.*

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*The sermon given by the Vicar, the Revd. Canon Jonathan Baker, at Evensong on 17 November 2019, in Beverley Minster.*

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

In Matthew's Gospel the parables of Jesus are particularly grouped in Chapter 13, where a collection of parables is introduced by the parable of the sower. So this story of seed falling on different kinds of soil is programmatic; it says something that is replicated in most parables.

Jesus describes the seed sown by the sower as the word of the kingdom. It's so obvious we might miss it: but if the seed is the word of the kingdom, that means that the Kingdom of God is established by the Word of God – words are spoken and that suggests that he communicates, reveals, seeks a relationship.

Without the word there is no kingdom. It is important to hear that, because in our day there is a tendency to be disparaging about words – how can words convey the reality of God? So we sometimes imagine that other media can speak about God more effectively – art or music for example, which might touch our emotions, or social action producing visible benefits; actions speak louder than words, so we are told. But that isn't what Jesus says here, in his overture to the teaching of the parables. The seed is the word of the kingdom – no word, no kingdom.

So what kind of word does Jesus mean? When the Bible talks about the Word of God, it does so in three main senses:

1. The fullest sense of the Word of God is not about words we hear or are written in a book: God speaks most clearly and truthfully through his Son, Jesus Christ, the Living Word – 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'; 'In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets .... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son'. God's word

reveals God's nature, and God's word in this sense is a unique human being, Jesus Christ.

2. The Word of God in the Bible can also refer to the message of what God has done through Jesus. The same meaning as the Gospel message of incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so we would have sins forgiven and become his children, and creation can be renewed.
3. The Word of God can also refer to the Bible itself, because the Bible is text pointing towards Jesus and what he has done. If we want a clearer focus on Jesus, we have to read the Bible – 'Scriptures are the manger in which Jesus Christ is laid' (Martin Luther)

In this parable, the 'Word of the Kingdom' can be read in all three senses: the reality of Jesus Christ, the Gospel message, the text of Scripture are all like a seed with power to establish the Kingdom of Heaven if we will receive it.

So the parable is making a powerful statement about the importance of the Word of God – without it there is no Kingdom of God – so if we are wise, we shall pay attention to the Bible, to its Gospel message, to the figure of Jesus Christ we encounter there.

The parable is also saying that just because the seed is the Word of God, it doesn't mean it will easily take root. The Word of God often fails because for one reason or another, people will not receive it. Perhaps because they are indifferent and don't think they need it – Why would I read the Bible? What do I want with Jesus? I'm quite happy as I am, thank you. Or perhaps some receive it only superficially. They think receiving the Word of God will be easy, or they can receive it and not be changed by it, and as soon as they discover it's not what they expected, they give it up as too much trouble, too disturbing. Perhaps others want to receive it, but aren't prepared to give it enough space – so their spiritual growth is choked by all the distractions and false idols claiming their attention.

So for all kinds of reason, the Word of the Kingdom often fails to yield a harvest. Despite being the Word of God, despite its power to reveal the life-changing love of God, it doesn't easily get under the surface of lives that have managed to live without it.

The thing about an agricultural image of farmers and seeds and harvests is that things don't happen immediately. The cultivation of crops is an art that requires patience and willingness to wait for the right season.

Often we are impatient. We want immediate results. We think our prayers should be answered instantaneously. We think God should prove himself without any corresponding willingness on our part to be changed. Changing a human life with all our ingrained habits and attitudes takes time, but ...

- where there is patience
- where there is a desire for a harvest
- where there is faith that the seed of God's Word contains the potential for new life
- where people want to find wholeness and discover who they truly are
- where people are dissatisfied with the injustices and complacencies of the world and long for it to be a kinder, fairer place where the riches of the world can be enjoyed by all
- Where people are attracted by the humanity and grace they can see in Jesus Christ,

... then the Kingdom of God can start to take shape and become more real.

I wonder, what kind of things are being cultivated and encouraged to grow in your life?

Is it time to sow a different kind of seed, the seed of God's Word?

Is it time to open ourselves to the Word of the Kingdom, and allow God to work in us, and through us to work in his world?

The seed is scattered by the sower indiscriminately all around us. It's not difficult to hear. But receiving it requires our consent, our trust, and our change of heart. Those who are willing can produce a great harvest. So as Jesus says, 'Let anyone with ears listen.'

## Reading Texts

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

<sup>1</sup> That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> Let anyone with ears listen!" <sup>18</sup> "Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."