

Sunday 9th May, 2021

Matthew 13: Soil

1. Reading:

Matthew 13

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 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. 6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!'

The Purpose of the Parables

10 Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' 11 He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 13 The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." 14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

"You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

15 For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them."

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it

The Parable of the Sower Explained

18 'Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 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. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 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. 22 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. 23 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.'

2. Questions:

- a. What is your experience of taking someone to an evangelistic event, Alpha Course or similar? How did your guest respond and why do you think that was?
- b. Eugene Peterson, writer of the Message version of the Bible says that trials and hardship equally have the ability to drive us towards God, or away from God. Is this what you observe? Why do you think this is?
- c. **'...the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.'** Hand on heart now, in what ways do cares of the world and lure of wealth choke the word in you?
- d. Ashley suggested that the good soil is the person who hears, understands, welcomes and *acts*. Why is the acting part so important?
- e. Ashley ended the message looking at verses 10-15 and the prophecy that, **'...hearts have grown dull and eyes are now shut.'** He said that this was true of the religious leaders and disciples, as well as the early church (Acts 10). He encouraged us to see God as being just as active as ever, communicating to his people about contemporary matters. Why hasn't God's revelation stopped? How do we hold in tension the words of the Bible with what the Spirit says to us today?
- f. Finally, what are you and God *working on* at the present time?

3. Prayer:

Words from Lee Strobel:

Tour-bus Christians drive comfortably through life as they gaze out the window at others who are elbow-deep in the daily adventure of serving God and working among spiritually needy people.

Tour-bus Christians are insulated from the real-world activity and excitement of God's work. They may avoid some of the pain that's involved, and they may protect themselves from the difficulties, and struggles, but there's no real adventure on a tour bus. They miss out on the excitement of living at the edge of expectation. They don't experience the tremendous counter-cultural truth that the more a Christian pours himself out serving others in God's name, the more God will fill him to overflowing.

Prayer

Lord I want to get into the fray. I want to play a role in the greatest adventure story of all time. Use me to make a difference. Use me to impact a young person for you. Use me to solve someone's problems. Use me to soothe someone's pain. Use me to answer someone's prayer. Use me to feed someone who's hungry. Use me to rescue a child. Use

me to bring someone to you. Use me to ease someone's loneliness. Use me to raise a godly family.

Use me to deepen someone's faith. Use me to cheer someone on. Use me to help a broken person to understand that they are precious in your sight. Use me to touch lives in your name.

I don't just want to observe cathedrals through my bus window; I want to roll up my sleeves and build one! Lord, use me to build a living cathedral dedicated to your glory. Amen

4. Text of the Sermon:

Matt 13:1-23 Soil

Parable of the Sower

The Message:

Matthew 13 – Parable of the Sower. It's about speaking a message and the result of speaking that message. As one person commented this is a parable *about* parables. In fact the middle of the passage addresses this specific issue – but we'll come to that in a moment.

Reading: Matthew 13

3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 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. 6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!' 18 'Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 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. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 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. 22 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. 23 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.'

There are four places the seed might fall, four responses if you like, to the message which is spoken. They are symbolised by the **path**, the **rocky ground**, the **thorns** and the **good soil**.



1. Path: 5&19

The 1980's were still a time of mass evangelism – the big event with the famous preacher. Dick Saunders, Billy Graham, Luis Palau, Reinhard Bonkke, (yes that was his name). And I took friends to go and see them – but with pretty limited success. Perhaps they came because of my persuasive skills, or because they were just my friends, or they were fed up with me asking them, but they came to Earls Court and other enormous venues. They listened attentively, the call to respond came and they usually didn't respond.

I don't think it was because they didn't understand the message – they were intelligent people, of course they understood – they got it – but the message which is heard in the mind, has to travel to the heart – the desire to respond, and that journey simply didn't seem to take place. And the message they had heard and understood, just seemed to evaporate away.

2. Rocky ground: 6&20,21

It's about an initial joy at hearing the message – a thrill at what it contains – this certainly has moved from heard to heart. Yet when trouble or persecution comes the person seems unable to hold fast and immediately falls away, or as other translations puts it – the person takes offence at the message.

Many years ago I was in a church where one couple had a second child born, but born with a disability. The couple, I think it would be fair to say, struggled enormously with this, struggled faith-wise. I would sit in my office with the husband who, after work would visit me and spend long hours raging (in an intellectual sense) about what had happened to their son and why (in his words) God would do such a thing.

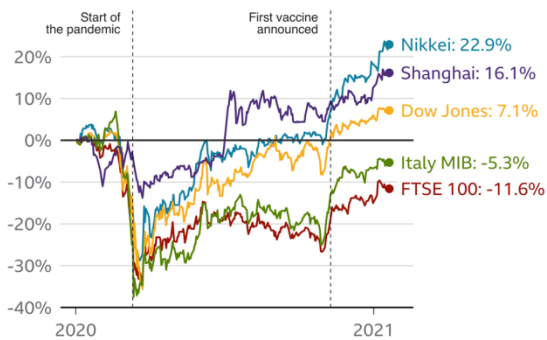
I'm sure I didn't handle things as well as I might have and indeed I became the focus of their upset and dismay. He was angry at God and he was angry at me. He stopped coming to church. I think the last I saw him was at a church social event where I approached him to say hello, but as I did he turned away from me and left.

Eugene Peterson, writer of the Message version of the Bible says that trials and hardship equally have the ability to drive us towards God, or away from God.

3. Thorns: 7&22

Here are two charts – they are versions of charts I see in the newspaper or online all the time. The first shows the **stock market** and how it has fared over the pandemic. The second is the **housing market** and how **it too** has fared in recent years.

The impact of coronavirus on stock markets since the start of the outbreak

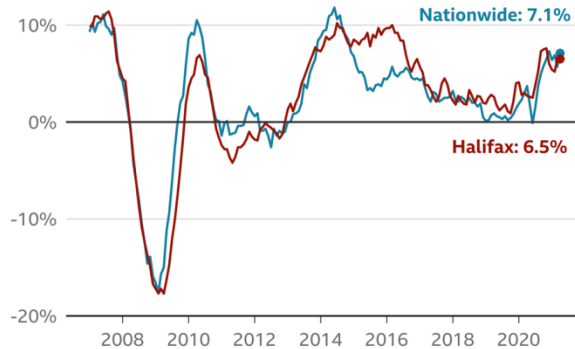


Source: Bloomberg, 24 January 2021, 00:01 GMT

BBC

UK house prices

Year-on-year percentage change



Source: Nationwide, Halifax

BBC

Having seen an almost 10% retraction in the economy, this 7.5% predicted growth in the economy is good news. Your house will increase in value; your pension fund will rise... And?

Is this what you and I live for?

Is this what you and I focus on and give our attention to?

Because if they are – we have things gravely wrong – and we will have nothing to show for ourselves by the measures which God sets us.

...the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

4. Good soil: 8&23

Finally the good soil. Those who hear the message, get it in their heads, understand it and act upon it. In the lives of such people the message has the capacity to bear incredible rewards.

But I sometimes wonder whether we define that fruit in the way Jesus intended.

We talk of Christian faith **giving our lives meaning**. This is of course completely inadequate description of faith. In a world which is searching for meaning is all that we can say, **'I've got Jesus in my life and he – gives - me meaning'**, (it's incredibly self-interested).

Or is the fruit that we approach life (consciously or unconsciously) trying to juggle or manage our Christian lives alongside another kind of life – (perhaps a life characterised by cares of the world and wealth) and we successfully manage to hold the two in tension – is that really the fruit Jesus is speaking of? As one writer puts it:

'Possessed by possessions, we desire to act in the world, often on behalf of the poor, without having to lose our possessions.'

The good soil is **only** and **ever** good soil – and good soil **alone** yields much fruit.

I did say though, at the beginning, that this was a **parable about parables** and that the middle section, which we are yet to read, explains this to us. Here is what it says:

10 Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' (Jesus replies – vs 13)

13 The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” 14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: and let’s listen carefully to these words:

“You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

15 For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.”

Hearts have grown dull and eyes are now shut.

I wonder if that is me, (or you)?

Have I/we lost the ability to hear and see?

Have I become so comfortable and literally set in my ways, so sure of myself that in fact I have become unreceptive and unreceptive to what God is now doing – doing now?

As I grow older I am pleased to be able to draw on a lifetime of Christian living, experience, understanding, but I am also in danger of simply understanding and responding to the present, out of my past and that will not do.

I view the world and God’s brand new activity in the world with a minds that is already made up and so set that

**18 Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.**

**19 I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?**

For **Jesus** this is the religious authorities whose proud adherence to the law prevented them from seeing there was a new way to live in obedience to God.

For the **disciples** it was their certain belief in the kind of Messiah who would come which made them constantly critique Jesus’ method and message.

For the **church in Jerusalem** it was their understanding of who constituted God’s people which blinded them from the new inclusive world which was coming.

They interpret the present in terms of what they have always thought and done. And our present can seem a strange and alien kind of world.

cancel culture woke generation Millennials BlackLivesMatter
Brexit Covid-19 Man City in the Champions League final!

It’s certainly alien to me a 56 year old man, born the year before England won the World Cup – yes I’m THAT old, educated in schools that were 99.9% white in the days when racist, homophobic and misogynistic jokes were common place on TV, the school playground, the workplace and even my Christian home. **(Sounds like I might have some stuff to deal with.)**

In terms of how we might respond to Jesus’ message – his challenge to be good soil – I’ll suggest just one possibility.

- What have you been working on with God recently?
- Where's the movement, the new growth, the testimony you could give to God's new revelation to you where your heart has not grown dull and your eyes have not been shut?

Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!