

Sunday 12th July 2020 Morning Worship. Romans 8:1-11 & Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23.

Preacher: Jenny Warrington

We have two huge passages of scripture this morning, both with deep truths for us all. I would encourage you to read each passage several times, over the coming week. There is much richness in them that I can only scratch the surface of this morning.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for your word. Help us understand it better and help us incorporate it into our lives for you glory and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Praise the Lord! No condemnation – none, none at all...no punishment for all the wrongs we have done, the wrongs we are doing or indeed the wrongs we will yet do, if we believe that Jesus lived, died and rose again for us.

To condemn is not merely to punish but to declare the accused guilty and worthy of punishment. As Christians, Jesus does not just withhold the punishment he declares that punishment cannot be justly inflicted. There are no grounds for punishment at all.

I'll say that again as I didn't hear any Amens or Halleluiahs! Jesus says, for those who believe in him, there is no condemnation – we are pronounced not-guilty and there are no grounds for punishment at all. Amen! Praise the Lord.

Paul goes on to say that therefore we no longer live according to our own desires but in accordance with the Spirit who lives within us. And it is the Spirit that transforms us and gives us life. And Paul calls us to live out our transformed lives...

There endeth the first lesson...

The second lesson is about the parable of the sower.

There's a book by John Ortberg, called '*Soul Keeping*' and he talks about this parable and I'm going to draw on his book this morning.

When you got up this morning and looked in the mirror who did you see? The answer is 'myself, of course, silly'....yes – but what I mean – How well do you know yourself? How well do I know myself? As you gaze into your own eyes in the mirror, which Shakespeare calls the window to the soul, what do you see. What are you really like?

There was an interview on Radio 4 a little while ago with a guy called Seth Stephens Davidowitz. Seth has spent his life analysing data – yes we need guys like this.... In his most recent book he analysed data mainly from Google searches and Facebook entries....

Every time you write something in that little white box - it is recorded.... apparently anonymously, and this chap has analysed, literally billions of our Google searches and

Facebook entries – and came to the very sad conclusion that ‘everybody lies’. And that’s the title of his book ‘Everybody lies’.

He said that people lie to their friends, they lie to their doctors, they lie in surveys and most interestingly, they lie to themselves – we lie to ourselves. We believe things about ourselves that are just not true.

I have a recurrent dream.... Less so recently for obvious reasons....but the dream goes a bit like this.....I am in a panic because I am about to take my medical exams and I am convinced I will fail them because I don’t think I know anything..... Now, I was a doctor for 33 years for goodness sake – and yet I still worried people will find out I was a fraud...I’m not! I did pass my exams!!!...it’s ok!!!..

It’s just we can be afraid that, if **we** think we are a fraud – others will discover that too... Good old imposter syndrome...but who is the real you?

We’re going to take a look at our passage this morning, this parable of Jesus. - about the sower, the seed and the soil.

And I’d like you to consider God as the sower, who generously sows the seeds of his kingdom...This whole section in Matthew is about God’s kingdom and what he’s like. So God’s the sower and I’d like you to consider God sowing his seed in us, in you and me.

Ortberg suggests that Jesus is not teaching about soil, well he’s clearly not teaching about soil! - but he suggests Jesus is teaching about the soul; about our inner life, about the inner life of you and me and of all who hear the Gospel.

He suggests that *‘We each have an outer life and an inner one. My outer self is the public, visible me. My accomplishments, my work and my reputation.’*

And most of the time, that’s where we operate - we don’t think about our internal life, most of us don’t, if we’re honest - we just get on with our everyday life on a very superficial level, just reacting to whatever life throws at us.

But we’re more than a superficial façade.

We are made up of body mind and spirit. And then there’s the **soul – the unique you**. Even if we lose a limb, even if we lose our memory – we are still a person – we still have a unique soul. When God breathed His Spirit into mankind – we became living souls.

Let’s not get too bogged down on what exactly a soul is...

It’s God who gave us our soul and as it says in Psalm 23 v 3 it is God who restores and refreshes it.

In the parable, the seed falls on 4 different soils, the **path**, the **rocky**, the **thorny** and the **good** and so we’re going to look at these in terms of souls.

So firstly, the path.

Some souls are hard

V4 says 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

Paths in Jesus day- weren't made of concrete but of hard compacted earth.

Souls can get like that, can't they? Those who have been walked on, who have been walked all over by others, they can get hard, bitter or angry. Sometimes you can get so hard that you don't care anymore, you don't care about yourself or about others. And hard souls can get mean - - as the saying goes: Hurt people, hurt people.

Jesus explained – in v19

v19 when anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.

Life can make us hard. It can turn us away from seeking God ... and please hear me, I'm not condemning anyone...remember there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

But as it says in 1 Peter 5:8

'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.'
And there's nothing better the devil loves than a hard, bitter soul.

But you know? the good news is.... God loves them more. The sower keeps on sowing..... God is so generous, so patient, God's Spirit is still at work. And even the hardest souls can be softened and God can break through.

Have you ever seen a little seedling pushing its way through concrete- cracking the hard surface...one tiny seed from God can break through a hardened heart. The seed is strong.

So, if that's you, this morning and your soul feels hard or bitter or resistant to God's word right now – take comfort –The sower will keep on sowing and the seed is powerful.

The second soil, the second Soul are shallow ones...

Verse 5 says, 'Some seed fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.'

Richard Foster said, 'Superficiality is the curse of our age.' A new fad comes along and that grabs our attention and off we go in a different direction.

As a preacher and teacher, I read this parable with trepidation....if we, if I give a superficial message of the Gospel and maybe hype it up to sound attractive, forgetting to talk about the difficult message of the pain of the cross, the cross Jesus bore on our behalf and the cross which we are all called to carry. If we miss out the part about how life can be tough or

the inevitable opposition we will face as believers, then we will reap what we preach – people who fall away from the faith.

And that, my friends, extends to you too - as sowers of the message. Matthew 28: 19 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them* - we are all teachers –or sharers - of the gospel and we mustn't dilute it.

If our souls live in the superficial and have no depth – if we live most of the time in the external self – then when a crisis comes, it is all too easy to fall away.

How deep are your roots? How well do you know the Gospel? OK, Jenny challenge time...Could you explain the Gospel in 50 words? Now there's a challenge. Will you write down the Gospel in 50 words and share it with me...or better still with someone else! If you're not sure, if you can't explain the Gospel in 50 words find a friend to talk about it, find a more mature Christian or email or phone Andrea or me.

And friends, it's okay, the sower continues to sow. It's God's mission – he'll work with you until you grow some deep roots.

Don't give up, keep coming and hearing God's work, hearing the Gospel.

And remember the seed is powerful.

The third soil, the third soul are those who are choked

The seed makes a good start in this soil. It was soft and deep – but then the thorns choked it out

Jesus explains in verse 22 that it can be the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word.

For me, particularly, it can be busyness that chokes God's word. If I am too busy, I can't spend time just resting in God's presence, praying or reading and reflecting on his word, the bible.

Sometimes our lives are cluttered with too much stuff – that can be physical stuff cluttering our houses causing anxiety and distraction, and sometimes it's too much other activity like social media, watching TV and so forth and so there just isn't enough room for Jesus.

Many years ago, a good friend bought me this.

It's a little stone that on one side says, 'Be still' and on the other side says....'and know that I am God' – a daily reminder to put God first. It fits in my hand as I pray.

If you have a small pebble left from painting for the pebble garden, why not write on it 'Be still' and keep it close – maybe beside your kettle or in the place where you pray. A reminder to be with and listen to God each day.

We all need to weed, to declutter, take time to look at our souls and see where we are being choked and where our priorities lie.

Fortunately, the sower keeps sowing and the seed is powerful – and just like the prodigal son, we can keep coming back and be welcomed into the Father’s arms.

And so, we come to the final soil, the final condition of our soul.

Some souls are good

Verse 8 reads *‘Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’*

Jesus explains:

the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’

This is good soil, this is a good soul – one who hears the gospel message and takes it to heart. In Luke’s gospel it goes like this – *those who..., hearing the word of God,.... hold it fast, in an honest and good heart*

Do you want to be good soil this morning?

So now to the how. How do we cultivate good soil, a good soul?

Well maybe by starting with a spiritual health check. By stopping and taking a good hard look at ourselves, because you know, I wonder if perhaps, we all have a bit of each of these soils inside us – I have if I’m honest. Jesus is calling us to look into the mirror and consider our souls.

Perhaps we all need to be a little softer, a little kinder. We all need to put down deeper roots by praying and studying the bible more? And we all need to set aside some of the distractions of life?

And may I encourage you, if you say nothing else when you first wake up in the morning, say ‘Come Holy Spirit’. You see, God, the sower will keep on sowing and Jesus, the seed in you is powerful enough to beat death and rise again - Our role, our role in God’s unfolding story, is to open our hearts and souls to His powerful transforming Holy Spirit.

But there’s one more thing...The word ‘understands in verse 23 where it says *good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it*. The word understands is a verb, a doing word. It’s not just about passively, intellectually understanding but about perceiving and **doing** the preferred will of God.

We are called to be radical disciples who know we are saved, who know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
...and who are actively looking to bring others to Jesus so they may know the same.
We are called to bring in a plentiful harvest, the good soul produces a crop a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Will you open up your inner life, open up your soul to the Holy Spirit this week? Seek the Jesus within you and allow the powerful seed that has been sown within you to grow. And as you work with Him you will bear much fruit.

Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Amen.