

A REVELATION OF..... THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The Call of the Kingdom

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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**“Growing Believers into Disciples, United in Christ,
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A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

Many times the words of Jesus seem difficult to understand. We look at things from a limited, earthly perspective while He comes from the heavens. Intellectually and spiritually, His knowledge and understanding of the natural world and the heavenly realms, was, is, and forever will be, perfect, while ours remains only partial.

At times too, He explained things seemingly in superficial, general terms, to the level of understanding of His listeners. Often though, deeper levels of meaning are included, waiting to be revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who earnestly seek the greater truth. So we have layers of revelation and understanding of 'The Word.' Jesus, both the living word and the Bible!

The real beauty of the Bible as 'His Word' is that every time – if we are open –we read it, we learn something new about Jesus and His spiritual kingdom. How boring it would be if it was set out in the simplistic way of that great series of simplified of computer manuals - 'XXXX For Dummies', perhaps as 'Salvation for Dummies'! For me, they need an even simpler computer series for 'dumb dummies' – but we wont go there!

I have heard and read the Parable of the Sower many times, absorbed the explanation Jesus gave His Disciples, and listened to many sermons explaining the explanation. But one day, as I was again reading this parable, the Holy Spirit gave me a further revelation. It changed the emphasis of, and transformed my understanding about, what was, and is for these days, the underlying and key meaning of this 'story'. My wife tells me that I had been taught it a long time ago, but I had forgotten! So it was brought back to mind! Of course, being a male, my memory is far shorter than hers!

It's now my pleasure to share it with you. I trust you will find it as inspiring and motivating in living your life, as it has been in mine.

His servant and yours
David Tait

FROM THE WORD

(Matthew 13:1-10)

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.” *1*

¹ All quotations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

PARABLES AND THEIR MEANINGS

It's surely not coincidental that Jesus explained why He spoke in parables in response to a question from His disciples, after this particular one. For it is not necessarily easy to understand but it is important.

Let's look at His general explanation of parables first.

"The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

*"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.
In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:"*
*'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'*

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." (Matthew 13:10-17)

Parables then, are not simply good moral stories but contain “*the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*”. This is confirmed by Wheaton in his discussion on parables:

"It was the mistake of Jülicher to reduce the messages of the parables to moral platitudes. More recent scholars have rightly recognized that they formed part of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God." 2

And further on:

*'Many of the parables of Jesus are specifically related to the *kingdom of God (e.g. Mk. 4:26, 30), and in general the parables are related to its nature, its coming, its value, its growth, the sacrifices it calls for, and so on" 2*

The parables confirm that we all must enter Heaven in the same way, by believing in Jesus and not through works. (e.g. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16) But they also reveal that not all Christians are the same.

Nor are our rewards, although that is not the subject of this parable. (See ' A Revelation of... The Overcomers of Revelation.') This is hard for those who live in democratic societies to understand and accept, as we tend to apply a completely wrong principle of egalitarianism to all those in the Kingdom. Extrapolating the ‘one man, one vote’ principle of democracy to a heavenly, ‘all floating about on the same sized, fluffy clouds!’ Definitely not the kind of Kingdom the parables, or indeed the whole Bible reveals!

2*The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH SOCIETY - IN AND OUT OF ISRAEL

It is most interesting that the development of Jewish society parallels God's revelations of Himself throughout Old Testament Israel. For God has always revealed Himself, then and now, in a way that people can understand. As the agricultural system upon which Jewish society was based developed, so God revealed His character and purposes in deeper ways. Like many things in God, there are three distinct time periods of revelation. (See 'A Revelation of... The Power of Three') Amazingly, these are split by two approximate 400 year Gaps in Bible recording, the transition periods between the three. So let's investigate.

NOMADIC PASTORAL FARMING

The Patriarchs, from Adam through Abraham and Isaac to Jacob (To the end of the Book of Genesis) lived primarily in nomadic family groupings, moving from one place to another as the grass in each area necessary for feeding their animals was exhausted. Some cropping was done by the time of Abraham. So presumably, they were able to stay in the one area long enough over the winter season when both grass and crops would grow in the cooler and wetter conditions.

This society operated under the very basic spiritual revelation of the Melchizedek priesthood, which we know very little about. Information had to be passed down the generations orally, so limiting its transfer. However, throughout that time, God built the foundations of what was to come later. In particular, He established one family, fathered by Abraham, as His chosen people. Because of the nomadic nature of the lifestyle, families would split up and go their own way in order to survive on the pasture available. Therefore, during this period, only one member of each succeeding generation retained the family 'spiritual inheritance'. So by the

time of Jacob 'Gods chosen race' only consisted of 70 people. Through the favour of the Pharaoh, as a reward for the work of Jacob's long lost son Joseph, the family was allowed to settle in Egypt during a time of famine in their usual homeland of Palestine. Here they settled for approximately 400 years.

THE FIRST GAP

The Bible records virtually nothing about the 400 odd years the people spent in Egypt. It is simply silent. But this period saw huge developments in Jewish Society that would afterwards see God reveal, and man record, a far more detailed picture of His nature and plans for mankind. This was not simply 'chance', for there was another similar gap during a further tumultuous period of change, before God's final revelation of Himself through Jesus. Quite incredible, really!

SETTLED AGRICULTURE

Because of his huge gratitude to Joseph, the Pharaoh allocated the most fertile grassland area of Egypt to Jacob's family to graze their stock. They soon learned too, from their Egyptian hosts, the principles of growing annual and permanent crops. Made possible because of the reliable water flows of the huge River Nile, used for irrigation during dry periods. Because of this combination of fertile ground and abundance of water, the people became prosperous and rapidly multiplied in number.

Family wise too, this represented a big change, for towns could now be built and the people lived together in much closer proximity. So the 'chosen race' went from being a single-family unit under the nomadic system, to now include all the extended family. Over four centuries their numbers grew into the millions and became a significant population and even more powerful economic force, in Egypt.

As feeding themselves became easier, the Jews had time to learn trades from the more developed Egyptians. These skills would enable them to build the Tabernacle of Moses and later Solomon's Temple, creating a powerful country, once they were released.

But first, during their time wandering in the desert, they had to totally rely upon God's provision to survive, becoming the reason why so many wanted to return to Egypt. But once they crossed the River Jordan and entered the 'Promised Land', a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (because of fertile soils) the farming methods they had learned in Egypt could once again be used. But now there was a difference. Here they had to rely upon the Lord, rather than the Nile, to water their crops.

The scene was now set for God to reveal Himself to His chosen people in a way that still has huge importance to, and impact upon us today. The simple fact that Moses could record the 10 Commandments and the Law enabled it to be passed down the generations, which even today, has a big, if reducing influence on most countries legal systems. The details of the Tabernacle, God's first church, provide a revelation of how we are to live our lives today and show the pattern of His church, past, present and future. (See A Revelation of... Gods First Church and Ours Today.)

As the people now had the ability to read and write, God was able to disclose far more detail of Himself and His plans than before, knowing that it would be accurately recorded for the generations to come. The people too, because of their more settled lifestyle, had both the resources and a little more time to devote to discovering more about, and worshiping their God.

So as Israel came to gradually settle the Promised Land, they had already acquired the technical and spiritual knowledge and resources necessary to organize and administer the major regional power they became, particularly under the leadership of Kings David and Solomon. Of course, as they disobeyed the instructions given by God, the Kingdom split into two, rapidly going into decline.

THE SECOND GAP

It is both extremely interesting and spiritually significant, that at the end of this period of growth and decline of the Jewish nation, there was another Biblical recording gap of approximately 400 years. During this time God

was preparing them for the third phase in their development – dispersion among the nations, for disobedience to Him. The prophets were again silent. The people once again lived under oppression. The final revelation, that of Jesus, was about to come.

THE DISPERSION

Have you ever wondered why Jesus came when He did?

By now the Jewish people had suffered greatly under hundreds of years of oppression from the various ‘superpowers’ of the day, those whose fortunes had ebbed and flowed through their land over the centuries. From the Assyrians to the Babylonians, to the Persians and finally the Romans, whose arrival in Palestine finally and literally paved the way for the coming of Jesus. For the Romans developed roads and communication methods, enabling the message of Jesus to be readily taken into all of Europe and into Asia, effectively the ‘ends of the earth’ as known at the time. An earlier dispersion would have been distinctly regional.

So Jesus came. The original Apostles failed to heed His instructions by remaining in and around Jerusalem after His death. This resulted in the addition of Paul to truly replace the traitor Judas. (See ' A Revelation of...The Coming Cross') Then God moved. Firstly, the Temple was destroyed on 5 August, 70AD and the now unnecessary sacrifices, finally ceased. This was followed 4 weeks later, on 2 September, by Roman destruction of the upper part of Jerusalem.

The Apostles and people, believers and non-believers alike, were forced to flee, taking both their Jewish faith and Christianity with them. The new Roman roading system aided much in the dispersion, for today we find Jewish communities and the Christian faith in nearly every country. The non-evangelistic Jewish Religion has not grown in a dramatic way, but those who embraced the teachings of Jesus revolutionized the world. All because Jesus came to the right place at the right time. God’s perfect time, of course! For He is in control now, just as He has always been, right through history.

JEWISH RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS – FOLLOWING THE CYCLE OF THE HARVEST

Israel has two calendars, Civil and Religious, starting 6 months apart. This brings confusion when it comes to understanding the timing of events in the Bible, so we need to know which calendar is being used, in order to see how things fit together.

Added to this, unlike most countries at latitudes further north or south where annual crops are grown over the summer, cropping in Israel is centred round the relatively cooler and wetter winter months.

The seasons too, follow the Northern Hemisphere pattern, summer coming in the middle of the now generally used Gregorian Calendar Year.

Their annual crops, in earlier days primarily wheat and barley, were planted in the late autumn at the beginning of the Civil Year. Grown over winter they were harvested in spring in the case of barley and early summer for the longer maturing wheat.

The 3 primary festivals of the Religious year, which all men were required to travel to Jerusalem to attend, followed the pattern of the seasons and the harvest. Part of the Feast of Passover, the sub-feast, Feast of First Fruits (Bikkurim), is a celebration of the first of the annual crops, the quick maturing barley, harvested in April/May. God was to be offered the first of the harvest both then and now. From my experience as a commercial grower, the first is usually the best of the crop as well. The men had to return again 50 days later to celebrate the maturing of the more desirable wheat. Wheat is harvested over June/July, with the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) or Pentecost ('Pente' meaning fifty as we now know it, celebrating this.

Towards the end of the hot, dry summer and into early autumn, the traditional, delicious, permanent ‘summer fruit’ crops including olives, figs and grapes matured. They were harvested during September/October. This led to the final celebration of the Religious Year, the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), at which time the people gave God thanks for His provision throughout another year.

The Civil Calendar (Genesis 1 – Exodus 11) closely follows the agricultural cycle, beginning with the month of Tishri, in late Autumn, when planting commences, ending in early Autumn, at fruit harvest time.

The Religious Calendar, which the Lord gave to Moses after the Israelite’s escape from Egypt, (Exodus 12 onwards) commences in the 7th month of the Civil Calendar, with the month of Nisan. It is spring, the natural season of new beginnings. It’s also the month of Passover, the first of the religious festivals, celebrating the new beginning for the Israelites after their captivity in Egypt. For us too, as Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus at Passover time represents a new beginning, the change from Law to Grace. The opportunity to be restored into a relationship with God through the death of Jesus, the final sacrifice on our behalf.

WHEAT AND BARLEY

The two staple cereal crops in biblical times were barley and wheat, as indeed they, and in particular wheat, are in much of the world today.

Great religious significance was placed upon the bounty they provided throughout the Old Testament, with Jesus himself using them to illustrate a number of aspects about the Kingdom of God, including of course, the Parable of the Sower.

BARLEY

Barley is a coarser grain than wheat, with a long 'beard' which is hard to separate out from the grain. The beard was used as fodder for horses and cattle, even though its sharp strands could sometimes get stuck in the animal's mouth. Barley grain was also used for making bread. As it was cheaper and less desirable than wheat, it was looked on as poor people's food. It had advantages over wheat though, in that it matured more quickly and could be grown in poorer soils.

On both occasions when Jesus multiplied the loaves and the fishes, barley bread was used.

Spiritually, barley can be seen as a type of the resurrection of Jesus, the 'firstfruits' of the Harvest to follow. The first harvest, the annual barley crop was of course, the reason for the Feast of Firstfruits. Significantly this is celebrated on the exact day Jesus rose from the dead, 3 days after the Feast of Passover, when He died. (See A Revelation of..... The Feasts of the Lord) Surely not a co-incidence!

WHEAT

With the possible exception of rice, wheat is the world's most popular cereal crop and definitely its most valuable. The universal use of bread, mostly made from wheat, signifies the huge importance of this crop to us.

Wheat has a great flavour and its short beard makes it easier to separate out the grains from the heads in the threshing process. It takes a little longer to mature than barley, so the wheat harvest is celebrated 50 days after 'Firstfruits' at the Feast of Pentecost (Weeks). We, of course, relate Pentecost to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that day. Jesus too, likened himself to a grain of wheat. The seed must 'die', be planted and grow again, in order to produce a crop. The comparison is striking.

In general though, the wheat crop is seen as an illustration of the harvest of souls into the kingdom, again shown in our parable.

THE HARVEST

Barley and wheat are harvested in slightly different ways. The harvesters, or reapers, would grab the standing grain in one hand and cut it near the top with the sickle they held in the other. Because barley stalks are used for horse and cattle fodder, the whole plant was then generally pulled out by the roots.

With wheat though, the remaining stalks were left for sheep, goats and cattle to graze at a later time. The cut ends of the stalks were tied into bundles and left out in the fields to dry. Once the moisture was removed and the grains had turned a golden brown, the sheaves were taken away to the threshing floor for further processing.

As part of God's 'social welfare system' the poor were allowed to follow the harvesters through the fields and pick what was missed. Also to harvest grain from the corners of the field, deliberately left for them. This was made famous by Ruth, when she gleaned in Boaz's fields. (See A Revelation of...Thee Book of Ruth)

THRESHING AND WINNOWING

This age-old process was perpetuated in Jordan and Syria right through until the mid-1980's.

Sheaves of grain were spread out over the threshing floor. This generally consisted of a flat area of exposed bedrock surrounded by a low wall of

fieldstones. A threshing sledge was made of wood, approximately 3 metres long, a metre wide with an upturned front like a toboggan and embedded with metal spikes or sharp stones on the bottom. This was used to crush the stalks and release the kernels from the husks. A draft animal would pull the sled, heavily loaded with weights, back and forth over the grain. Once threshed, the winnowing process could begin.

For efficient winnowing, the threshing floor would ideally be located at a high spot exposed to afternoon breezes. At this time, an open-ended tent would be erected to funnel the wind more efficiently. Taking a shovel you would throw the grain into the air. The lighter chaff would float away on the wind, while the heavier, denser grain fell more or less straight down. Having disposed of the chaff you then closed up the open ends and slept there at night to protect the grain from theft. Crop protection was the reason Boaz was sleeping out at the threshing floor when Ruth was sent out by Naomi to lie with him.

GROWING THE BEST CROPS

There are 4 primary factors affecting the production of an optimum harvest.

THE BEST SEED

Ask any farmer or horticulturist about the importance of planting good seed and they will quickly tell you that seed quality plays a huge part in the crop produced. Hence today, we find huge resources being put into hybridizing and developing new seed strains to produce greater and greater crops. The controversial field of genetic engineering too, has found its first and major application in the modification of seeds, in an endeavour to grow larger, pest and disease resistant, more easily grown, crops.

As a former horticulturist and floriculturist, I spent often seemingly exorbitant amounts of money to purchase the best seed available in order to produce the best crop I could. It's truly amazing the difference quality seed makes.

THE SOIL

As Jesus so rightly points out in this parable, soil quality too, is a huge determinant of crop success. Growing crops in unsuitable soil types is an almost certain guarantee of failure. Fortunately, soil conditions that favour one crop are anathema to another, so there is a wide variety of crops available, to suit many different soil types. Sometimes we can adjust the soil quality for a particular crop, but only in a limited way. But growing the wrong crop for the soil is an almost certain guarantee of failure.

CROP CARE

While we can have good seed and great soil, if we don't feed, water, weed and generally look after our crop's ongoing growing requirements, our crop will fail, or at least not do as well as it should. Good husbandry is as necessary for plants to grow well as is taking good care of our bodies for

us to be healthy and strong. Except for weeds of course, which seem to thrive in all conditions! Blame that on Adam and Eve!

‘ACTS OF GOD’

One of the challenges of horticulture, and farming in general, is coping with and accepting the unexpected. For nature, for God, is simply greater than us. Even though we often try to deny it! It's not surprising then, that those who work on the land are, on average, more spiritually aware than city dwellers. For they can see, and are directly affected by, a greater power than themselves at work, every day. Rain, hail and snow, floods, storms and drought, sun, cloud, heat and cold, all affect crop performance, often dramatically.

Yes, the might of God is reflected in so many things that are simply beyond our control. Whatever we do, however careful and skilled we are, the fruit of our labour can be wiped out in a moment. Such is the awesome power of God.

THE EXPLANATION OF JESUS

(Matthew 13:18-23)

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

The most interesting thing about this explanation is not what was said, but what wasn't! For Jesus clearly explains who enters the Kingdom of God as He describes the people illustrated by each soil type. Of course, all but the final group didn't make it.

While this explanation shows how people enter the Kingdom, Jesus did not explain the key last sentence, which is about the Kingdom working in us. This 'punch line', potentially the deepest and most important part of the parable to the Christian, that of the seed grown in the good soil, is unexplained, but left for each of us to discover and apply to our own life. He explains all about the soil, but ignores the seed! Amazing! He and His Word (which of course is Him!) are just so full of surprises, of revelation, of unexplained depths of meaning, deliberately left waiting for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us.

PART 2: A REVELATION OF..... THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

NOT ALL CHRISTIANS ARE THE SAME

In a world seduced by a veneer of democracy, where all are supposedly equal, if only on Election Day, the concept of a heaven where everyone is the 'same' has natural appeal.

We all know that we receive the same salvation, whether we have lived for God for 40 years or 40 minutes. The parable of the workers in the vineyard reveals that aspect of the Kingdom to us. The entry price is the same for all - acceptance of, and obedience to, Jesus.

However this equality of entry principle so easily leads to the popular misconception that there is also an equal reward for all, once entry is gained. Trying to put heaven into a human perspective is impossible, but the best example I can think of right now, is going to the theatre. All the seats to the performance are the one price of salvation through grace. But once you are inside, the ushers direct you to your individual seat, reserved in advance of your arrival. And the location of our seat is determined by our actions before we enter. For it is obvious that not everyone can sit in the middle, 5 rows from the front, in the very best seat in the house. While we all will see the play, some will inevitably see it from one side or the other, others from further back or even from the 'gods'! (That is, the seats upstairs at the very top and back of the house.) Please excuse the terrible pun!

This ticketing process, such an important truth, Jesus was revealing through this parable. (For reward details see ' A Revelation of...The Overcomers of Revelation) His parables are indeed designed to show

Christians the deeper truths of His Kingdom. It's very good to hear about, perhaps with a smug sense of satisfaction, the three types of seed that haven't made it to the stage of fruiting. But the emphasis and real point of the parable is on the fourth group, those who grow to harvest, who produce fruit.

While you can easily get bogged down and side tracked as to whether any of the first three groups made it into Heaven, this is not the real reason Jesus spoke. Briefly, the Calvinist school of theology would surely say some of these people did get there, because of their 'once saved, always saved' beliefs. The Armenians on the other hand, would argue none of these first three groups made it, as faith is to be ongoing and reflected in continuing works, which obviously wasn't the case with any of these groups.

But the main point Jesus was making in the parable was this. Although all the seeds sown in the good soil are of a similar high quality and fertility, some will produce a 30-fold crop, some a 60-fold crop and the remainder, a stupendous, 100-fold harvest. So the real question is, "What causes or determines the differences in the harvest?" Jesus is saying that not all Christians are the same, but that some bear more fruit, or grain in this case, than others. This is the 'Kingdom' truth He was truly revealing.

Returning to our explanation of crop growing in the natural, we can see that of the four elements going towards making a crop successful, two can be immediately ruled out. Both the seed and the soil are of the same quality for all the 'Christian Harvest.' So that leaves the two remaining requirements of 'Crop Care' and 'Acts of God.'

Acts of God, or circumstances beyond our control, or God making some of us more fruitful than others, has a certain appeal as an explanation. Personal responsibility for our actions, or rather, the lack of them, is absolved. It's always convenient to blame our lack of performance in life and God, on someone or something else, isn't it? Although it is true that the 'Gifts of the Spirit' are given out in differing quantities and type as God pleases, we all have equal opportunity to develop the 'Fruit of the Spirit' in

our lives. To produce a 30 fold, 60 fold or 100 fold harvest. Yes, the harvest in this parable is about fruit, not gifts.

Gifts are given and gifts will end, as the scripture tells us:

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” (1 Corinthians 13:8)

The gifts pass away, marked 'return to sender', our God, for they were His to give in the first place. So when we get to heaven, the greatest evangelist, prophet or healer will no longer be able to exhibit the gifts that made them such heroes of the faith while on earth. All will be stripped away, and their spiritual fruit, the ultimate of which is love, will be all they will have to show. So we can now truly understand the Kingdom truth Jesus was speaking of when He said,

‘But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.’ (Matthew 19:30)

It's so easy to say, “If only I had their gifts, my Christian walk would be much better than it is.” Another excuse - for it's simply not true. Those with great gifts are often remarkably ordinary people, with many human failings, just like you and I – me anyway! Most often it is harder for the gifted person to build fruit in their lives, as the ‘gifts’ they have been given make it look as if their fruit has developed, when, in reality, it's the fruit of the gifts, and not their own fruit at all.

So this leaves us with the one remaining element of ‘Crop Care.’ Here the analogy with the natural breaks down a little. For instead of the farmer in the natural looking after the crop to achieve an even result overall, in the spiritual we, the seed, are individually responsible for the production of our own fruit. We must fertilize and water, that is nurture, the spiritual seed implanted in us at the time of our salvation, to produce the 30, 60 or 100 fold crop referred to.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4)

Yes, it is the development of the Fruit of the Spirit in our life that brings us to maturity, that determines of the size of our spiritual harvest.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HARVESTS

As we will see shortly, it is not by chance that Jesus quotes 3 levels of Harvest. What are particularly interesting though, are the differences in production levels. The first group, the 30-fold harvest, obviously produces thirty times the amount of seed that was sown. ($30 - 0 = 30$) The second group doubles the first group's harvest at the 60-fold level. ($60 - 30 = 30$) The final 100-fold harvest level however, shows the greater incremental increase of 40 fold over the second group. ($100 - 60 = 40$) This is significant in that those who show the greatest level of commitment produce not only the largest crop, as would be expected, but one that is also greater relatively, than those of their less committed counterparts. This is a hugely important truth, as we will see.

GOD WORKS IN THREES

There are many patterns of 'three' found right throughout the Bible. Of course, we must start with the most important and difficult to understand of all - God himself. For God is three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet He is also one. A mystery we do not yet, but one day will, fully understand.

However, God clearly works in patterns of three, in most important matters of history and revelation. (See A Revelation of...The Power of Three.)

And generally, each of the three parts of the pattern emphasizes one aspect or person, of the Godhead. While the three are always present, there will be a particular emphasis on the one, either Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Father. As we look at each member or aspect of the Godhead, we see a reflection of the other two. For the three are inseparable, which of course leads to the vigorous arguments between 'Trinitarians' and those of the

' Oneness' movement. Like most theological arguments, there are truths on both sides. So let's not attempt to limit God by putting Him in a box of our limited human understanding. Rather, embracing the truths revealed in both approaches, leaving room for our understanding to become complete on that glorious day when we meet Him. (Or is it them?!)

Leaving aside that which sadly separates, we can see that there are patterns of three, both in our individual lives and that of the church, reflecting the 30, 60 and 100 fold crops that Jesus taught about in the Parable of the Sower. Indeed, this is the real revelation the Lord was teaching through the parable.

APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES

There are numerous examples Biblical patterns of three that relate to our lives. (See again A Revelation of...The Power of Three) However we are going to limit ourselves to one that succinctly and beautifully sums up the basis of God' s desire for how we should walk with Him. Found in one verse, tucked away in the middle of the last ' Book of Revelation' of the Bible, incidentally the one on which Walking With Jesus Ministries is based, clearly defines the path God wants us to take. The path towards becoming one that produces a 100-fold crop.

One day as I, in my usual, unusual fashion, was feeling good with myself for nearing my goal of finishing reading the Bible from beginning to end, the Lord stopped me at Revelation 12:11. He told me to base a ministry upon this verse and went on to explain what it meant. Once I got over the initial shock, I did it!

The special verse talks about a particular, some would say ' peculiar' group of people, who are able to overcome satan. We know from experience that these are not your normal Christian, for our lives surely reflect the obvious - that in most of us, satan has not yet been fully overcome. Yet in these simple 29 words, Jesus reveals through the revelator, John, how it is to be done. And here it is.

"They overcame him (i.e. satan. See verse 10) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." (Revelation 12:11)

Here we are given a cumulative three-step process as the means by which we can fulfill the ultimate goal in our Christian journey, to overcome the power of satan in our lives. To become fully reconciled with the Father! To become reflections of Jesus! As taught by the Holy Spirit! What Jesus did ' positionally' , spiritually, for us on the cross, we still have to apply ' experientially' , practically, to our lives. This dilemma of the ongoing battle

within us between our old earthly and new heavenly natures, the Apostle Paul describes so vividly.

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." (Romans 7:15-20)

I have met but two extra 'super-spiritual' men in my life, those who effectively claim to have reached perfection. One was shown not to be so by his treatment of his wife and his teachings, the other by his reaction to the Holy Spirit coming in a way he couldn't control. Very definitely, spouses and the Holy Spirit are two critical areas that expose our old earthly natures!

So let's now have a look at the 3 ways in which Satan is overcome in our lives.

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB (Jesus)

Belief in Jesus, is the first and foundational step in our Christian experience. The words used by John the Baptist in announcing the ministry of Jesus were:

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

And of course we are forgiven through the blood that represents life. His life for our life, as God requires.

"In him we have redemption through his blood (His life), the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." (Ephesians 1:7-8)

We take the first step on our walk through believing and personally accepting that Jesus died for us, as ' the blood of the Lamb' . We cannot earn our salvation through living a good life, but are accepted back into relationship with God the Father through the blood of Jesus. Jesus is our one and only ' hope' of salvation.

Walking in this amazing truth of the salvation of Jesus enables us to produce a 30-fold crop.

THE WORD OF OUR TESTIMONY (Holy Spirit)

Receiving forgiveness for our sins though, is just the beginning of our Christian walk. We next have to grow into the likeness of Jesus, not physically, (fortunately ladies!) but spiritually. To enable us do this, Jesus promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit. He arrived 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead, having overcome satan and sin on our behalf, on the day of the Jewish ' Feast of Weeks' , which we call the Day of Pentecost. ('Pente' meaning 50)

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:25-26)

The Holy Spirit empowers us to make the necessary adjustments and changes in our lives required to become more and more like Jesus. As Paul said:

"Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit." (Romans 15:17-19)

But how do we relate, ' the word of their testimony' to the Holy Spirit? Can hear you asking? Well, that was my question of the Lord too, when he first stopped me at this verse. And as usual, He had the answer! He took me to

Matthew 12:34.

“You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

The book of James similarly tells us that *“no man can tame the tongue (3:7)”*. Yes, in the end, no matter how we try to cover things up, when tested, the words we speak reflect our heart attitude. And our heart, the symbolic seat of our emotions or feelings, is the realm of the Holy Spirit. That is why, when we are baptized in or released into the power of the Holy Spirit, our ability to express our emotions in our worship, in the adoration of our God, increases amazingly.

“so that with one heart and mouth (by the Holy Spirit) you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:6)

The power of 3 once again! The Holy Spirit builds the reality of Jesus into our life. He increases our level of 'faith'. I have found this to be reality too, when looking at individual Christians and churches. For those who are empowered by the release of the Holy Spirit in their lives, while still having lots of faults, are more open to allowing Him to change their lives and generally show a greater dedication towards the expansion of God's Kingdom. Enabling us to produce a 60-fold harvest.

OBEDIENCE EVEN UNTO DEATH (The Father)

The ultimate goal of every Christian is to become like Jesus. And the key area of difference in His life to ours, (excluding resisting sin 100%) was his 100%, absolute obedience to the will of God the Father - even though it would ultimately cost Him his life. This is amazingly illustrated in the hours before His death.

*“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘**Sit here while I go over there and pray.**’” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to***

the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” (Matthew 26:36-39)

Yes, Jesus was literally prepared to sacrifice His life for the Father's will. So we too, are expected to deny our own human desires to do His will. For most of us this, at least until now, this has not required literal martyrdom. In a way though, it's equally difficult living a life of total obedience as it is facing death for the cause. So for most of us, the death talked about in this verse is 'death to self.' It is hard and it is painful, but it reaps the richest of rewards.

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:7-11)

And confirmed in:

"The mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (v16) Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 8:6-8,16)

And which forms the basis of the Golden Rule, the 'new commandment' of Jesus.

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'
Mark 12:30-31.

Yes, the precious ones throughout the ages who have been prepared to commit their all to Jesus by doing the Fathers will as revealed by the Holy Spirit, are those whom truly display God' s ' love.' These are the hearts that God truly desires. For ' love' is the greatest of all.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Truly those who produce the 100 fold harvest.

APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH

Just as this parable applies to our individual lives, so it also relates to the pattern of God' s church. This pattern was revealed 3,500 years ago in God' s first church, the Tabernacle of Moses. Its design was provided in precise, minute detail, reflecting its huge importance in portraying God' s plan, not only to the people of the time, but for His church ever since. (For a more detailed account, see A Revelation of...The Tabernacle Church)

The Tabernacle was a portable church, used by the Israelites during and after their 40 years of desert wanderings, as required by God when the people disobeyed His instructions to enter into the Holy Land after their miraculous escape from Egyptian captivity. Here dwelt the presence of God - literally. The whole structure could be dismantled, packed up and carried from place to place, as determined by the movement of the pillar of cloud by day or of fire by night.

A replica of the Tabernacle has been erected in Israel, as faithfully as possible to the building instructions provided to Moses on Mount Sinai.



It consisted of three parts, as illustrated below.

**HOLY OF
HOLIES**

Tabernacle
(End Time)
Church

RIVER

**HOLY
PLACE**

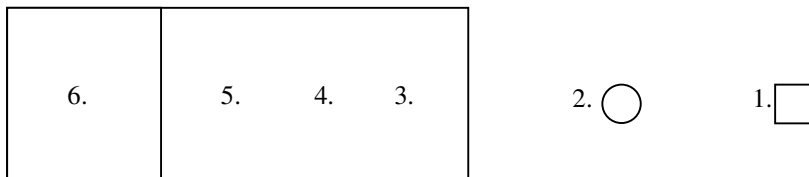
Pentecostal/
Charismatic
Church

DOVE

**OUTER
COURT**

Traditional/
Evangelical
Church

CROSS



The pattern of the Tabernacle amazingly illustrates the development and restoration of God' s church today.

OUTER COURT CHURCHES

The Outer Court consists of the open area inside the fence. After entering through the gate you come to the Brazen Altar (1.) which is symbolic of Jesus. It was on the Altar that the gory, bloody, sacrifices were made. Jesus was our final blood sacrifice.

The foundational truths established and built into the early New Testament Church were gradually lost from AD100 onwards, as form overtook substance. So much so, that the church finally became an organ of the Roman State in AD380, 30 years after the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

The aptly named Dark Ages followed. It wasn' t the time of the Reformation in the late 1500' s that the first and greatest truth of salvation

through the blood of Jesus, was restored and applied to the Traditional type churches This started with Martin Luther' s revelation that ' the just shall live by faith' . So was formed the first traditional denomination, the Lutheran Church.

From the Altar we move to the Washing Basin (2.) where the priests cleansed themselves before carrying out their various functions. This is symbolic of the truth of Water Baptism, which along with the Altar of Sacrifice is the foundational basis of the Evangelical churches, starting with the Anna Baptists. Baptists baptise! By full immersion.

Typically, in Traditional and Evangelical churches you will see the symbolism of the Cross, representing the understanding of the truths of the Outer Court in which these believers walk.

Referring again to Revelation 12:11, generally speaking, these believers and churches are primarily those who walk in the Outer Court realm of *"the blood of the Lamb."* They produce a 30-fold crop. And God is happy with that.

HOLY PLACE CHURCHES

Now we enter the tent. It has four covers, the outside one being made of animal skins, most likely those of the sea cow (manatee), which were common in the area at the time. The skin has a bluish tinge to it and is oily, the colour and the oil being representative of the Holy Spirit. Divided into two rooms separated by a curtain, the first area, the Holy Place, contains three items of furniture.

As you enter, you see the Table of Shewbread (Showbread) (3.) representing the underlying, revelatory Word of God. This illustrates the greater understanding God gives us of the Bible when we enter the tent through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Next, there is the Golden Lampstand, (4.) which speaks primarily of the gifts the Holy Spirit makes available to us when we enter.

Finally, there is the Altar of Incense (5.), representing Thanksgiving, Praise, Worship and Prayer, our response to the Revelatory Word and Gifts the Holy Spirit has given us.

These three pieces of furniture then, represent the Holy Spirit truths that God restored to His church during the 20th Century, most publicly starting with the Welsh and Asuza Street (Los Angeles, US), revivals, through which the Pentecostal church was formed in the early 1900' s. In the latter half of the century, this powerful move of the Holy Spirit spilled over into some Traditional and Evangelical churches in the form of the Charismatic movement.

This restoration of Holy Spirit power is symbolized by the dove, which you will see, along with the cross, in many Spirit filled churches.

The Holy Spirit empowers and motivates people to want to share "*the word of their testimony*" as described in Revelation 12:11. For our testimony comes out our mouth from the overflow of our heart, the seat of our faith and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. These ones produce a 60-fold crop. And God is happy with that.

HOLY OF HOLIES ' CHURCH'

In the back third of the Tent behind the curtain, is found the Ark of the Covenant (6.). Here, on the Ark' s cover, between Cherubins with outstretched wings, the presence of God dwelt. As sinful man cannot live in the presence of a sinless God, this room could only be entered by the High Priest once a year, on the most holy Day of Atonement, to seek forgiveness for the sins of all the people of Israel. Yet even he, in order to enter and live, had to first purify himself in an elaborate ritual. (See A Revelation of...The Day of Atonement.)

The Ark of the Covenant represents God the Father, as He dwelt there over the period of the Tabernacles life, and subsequently, for a time in Solomon' s Temple.

There are still people, although fewer now, in the Pentecostal movement, who make the mistake as their forbears in every church movement since

the Reformation have done, in saying, "we have it all." The pattern of the Tabernacle, remembering that God works in threes, shows this is not the case. For there is one type of church, the end time ' Bride of Christ' still to come. (See A Revelation of...The End Time Tabernacle Church) Unlike previous revelations which resulted in the formation of new denominations, further splintering God' s church, this is a movement of individuals who have sold out their lives 100% to the will of the Father, as Jesus did.

In terms of Revelation 12:11, *"They loved not their lives so much as to shrink from death."* This can only be an individual decision. No one church can lay claim to being ' the one' to belong to, to receive this ' gift' . For it is a ' sacrifice' of obedience to the Fathers will and direction in our lives. Only individually, can we commit to this, as Jesus did. As we submit to leading of the Holy Spirit in a greater way however, we will find our ' unity of purpose' growing, as we come closer to the will of God for each of us as individuals and as a church. It is only then that we will stand united as the overcoming church, which will finally defeat satan and see the return of Jesus.

A church movement symbolized by the River of God, through resting in which we will be able to approach (upstream!) His very throne, pure and holy in His sight. Yes, it is these obedient disciples who produce the 100-fold crop. The people of the church God is calling to Himself today. And with them, He is very pleased!

CONCLUSION

The Parable of the Sower then, in relation to Christians, is all about the fruit we produce. While God is happy with those who live 30 fold and 60 fold crop lives, He is seeking today not only individuals, but a ' church' of those who are completely sold out to Him. These 100 fold Christians will fully participate in the fulfillment of God' s Kingdom on earth, and see the overcoming of satan, in preparation for the glorious return of Jesus, which every committed believer deeply desires. He is coming for His one, holy, pure, righteous bride. The one clothed in white. Do you wish to participate? Are you prepared to pay the price? I am!