

Harvest Hazards (Luke 8:4-15)

Jesus' parable lasts less than thirty seconds. It's short, sweet and to the point.

In the beginning, we read, a farmer sows seed, in the middle the tiny seed faces some major hazards, and at the end some of the seed overcomes the hazards and produces a huge harvest. Simple!

The disciples, who are listening to Jesus' teaching don't get the point he's trying to make. They take him to one side and ask, 'what was all that about, Jesus?'

So Jesus sits down and explains to them what the parable means...

If we listen in on his explanation then we discover (v 9) that the **seed** represents the word of God. The seed is the message that comes from God.

Now, every time the seed of God's word falls into a life, there is *potential* for something to great to happen. Just as every time seed is cast into the ground there's *potential* for a plant to grow.

But we need to beware! Because although this parable is usually referred to as the parable of the Sower, if we look closely we find it's not *so much* about the sower, as about the soils. Just as the seed in the parable faces all the hazards of farming, (falling on paths and being trampled, being eaten up by birds, falling on rock and withering from lack of moisture, or being choked by weeds) the seed of the word has to contend with the hazards of how people receive God's word, what soil does it land in?

There are four hazards I want to draw to our attention this morning. Four 'harvest hazards'.

The first hazard is busyness. (v12)

In his explanation Jesus says *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

When God's word falls into a busy life, it can be snatched away. If there's lots going on, lots of 'traffic' in your life, then the seed of the word stands no chance of survival.

If we never stop running from one thing to the next, never make time to be still before God, or if when we come to worship we are busy thinking about Sunday lunch; planning our week's work; dreaming about a holiday – then life can become like a hardened path with no opportunity for the seed to take root.

If we are serious about following Jesus and changing his world, then we mustn't let our busyness crowd out this truth that God's great plan is one day to reconcile everything in Jesus Christ – the cross and the resurrection are God's pledge of a new day.

The second hazard is shallow thinking (v13)

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

We can be wonderfully enthusiastic about God's word but then don't allow time to think things through.

Jesus was full of questions. He asked people 'do you want to be healed?' he asked the disciples 'who do you say that I am?' he asked his followers 'do you understand what I'm saying?' Jesus wanted them to question.

The word of God is intended to make us stop and think. Not just to accept stuff without puzzling it out.

The third hazard is being overwhelmed by the needs of the world. (v14)

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

This is a picture of how the work of God's word can grind to a halt in our lives. The seed initially gets into the soil and is received well but then it can be choked by 'worries, riches and pleasures'.

Jesus is not talking about distractions while we are listening to God's word, things that stop us hearing, things that stop us concentrating. Instead he's referring to things that 'as we go on our way' will come in to stifle its impact.

When we ponder on the needs of the world, our good intentions can be choked to death by a feeling of helplessness in the face of statistics. A sense that we simply cannot do anything. And so sometimes we stop trying.

The fourth hazard is about persevering. (v15)

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

The seed which falls on good soil perseveres and eventually produces a harvest. When God speaks his word into our lives he expects to see fruitfulness and the key phrase here is 'by persevering'.

The hazard to avoid is the temptation to give up.

Perseverance has been termed the principle of 'keep on keeping on'.

We need a spiritual perseverance with a cutting edge purpose to bring us through the inevitable setbacks.

Perseverance eventually overcomes all the hazards of the harvest. God will provide us with the staying power, which will produce fruit that will last.