

**Series: BRIDGE TO NOWHERE. January 4, 2009**

**CLUTTER  
Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23**

1. My Dad retired the week before his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, so that week—all of us descended on their home in Pittsburgh to get them moved. My role, the night before, was to clean up my Dad's shop—and get the tools ready to move the next day.

-I had somehow **forgotten** that my Dad had been collecting tools, pieces of wood, nuts, screws, bolts, do-dads, little scraps of this and that he thought he **might** use someday. I spent the whole night down there—and you couldn't even tell I'd been there. The clutter was unbelievable!

-Of course, now that Lori and I have lost our parents—we have inherited the good, the bad and the ugly. We cleared out the clutter pretty well when we moved from Pennsylvania to Markham—but after 16 **years**—with at least a ton of paper and crafts from each child, each year...?

-I finally figured out that in most marriages and most families—God places an unrepentant **saver...**and a relentless **pitcher**. One tries to save everything that comes in; one tries clear it out.

-Anyone here ever tried to find something when things are **cluttered?** It tests your patience. Sometimes when there's a **lot** of clutter, important things get lost. Then one day you find them—when you clean up. Like your Revenue Canada refund check that expired 3 months ago; or one of your children--lost among the boxes for 3 months.

2. Now, around here, we have decided that we confess our **own** sins—not other people's. So, I want to confess my clutter sins. This is a picture of my shop. SHOW PICTURE.

And I complained about my **Dad's** shop! The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. It doesn't even roll downhill!

-This isn't a message congratulating you obsessive-compulsive neat freaks—who make us sick with your perfectly organized, **labeled** closets, your neat garages, your kitchen spices—all labeled, and arranged in alphabetical order. Frankly, we think you're sick...**sick...SICK!** Just kidding!

-People who suffer from clutter-itis do mean well. They say things on January 1 like, "This will be the year...**this will be the year** when we organize the basement..." Does it get done? Well, maybe. But I'm not going to talk about that kind of clutter; I want to talk about a different kind. A cluttered heart. A cluttered house can be dangerous, I suppose—if critters and germs are hiding in the whole mess. But a cluttered heart?

A heart stacked with worries, anxieties, inherited grudges, trivia—loaded down with stuff that doesn't ultimately count or matter—**junk?** It affects everything else in life.

3. One day Jesus talked about **cluttered hearts**. It was included in a story he told about a farmer planting his fields. His point was that the seed was all good, but where it landed made a huge difference in whether it produced anything—or just died. Anyone here ever planted **anything** and actually had it grow? If we plant something and it doesn't grow—it's not a big deal. But the group Jesus was talking to were poor; seed was too precious to waste. If your seed didn't grow, you might not eat!

-Different things happened to the seed in Jesus' story. Some apparently landed on the path and bounced—and gave the birds a free meal. Nothing grows on hard soil.

-And some landed on thin soil—covering some rocks. The crops grew—but the roots couldn't reach water. So—they dried up and died.

-Some seed landed on soil that **looked** good. But the other stuff growing there—thorns and weeds—literally choked the life out of the seed—and it, too, died. No crops.

-And, of course, some seed, hopefully most of it, landed on really good soil—and produced a great crop. Later on, Jesus sat down with his disciples and explained that he was talking about **truth** and **hearts**—not giving lessons in agriculture. Let me read his words:

**"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When people hear the message about the kingdom and do not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their hearts. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to people who hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to people who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to people who hear the word and understand it. They produce a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:19-23 NLT).**

- a. In North America, **knowledge** is a big deal. We think that if we can just feed people the right information—they'll change.

In this parable, Jesus says, "A heart + truth does **not** necessarily equal **anything!**" A person can hear the most powerful truth in the world—but if they're not receptive—nothing will happen.

- b. The truth Jesus taught is not intended to just be memorized and regurgitated on tests or used to impress our friends. Spiritual truth is intended to transform our hearts and lives—and ultimately help us become a transforming influence in our world. Whether that ever happens or not depends on what kind of soil in our hearts it falls on.

-An early church leader, Paul, says this:

**But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT)**

-Think about that for a minute. What happens in a person's life when they become a genuinely loving person? When they are truly filled with joy and peace?

Think about what it might be like to work with, drive with, live with a person who is **infinitely** patient! How many of you are experiencing that with the people around you even as I speak! What kind of difference, do you think, a person would make in the world who is genuinely kind and good—not just in their thought life, but in their actions; the way they treat others, spend their money, use their time.

-Think about the impact of a person who is unwaveringly **faithful**; they keep their promises, not just to their friends and spouse and kids—but to everyone, including their employer. And think about people who are strong and capable, but gentle—**power under control**! They **never** use that power to intimidate or bully. And imagine being close to a person who is self-controlled. You never have to wonder what they're going to do when circumstances are explosive and tempers flare.

- c. How many of you think a person with that kind of character just **might** make a difference in the world? **That's** the kind of person **I'd** like to be. That's the kind of person I **could** be—and **you** could be. In fact, God is actively at work in our hearts shaping us, speaking to us, using other people to help us--working to produce **that** kind of fruit—**those** kinds of results in us. But sometimes He can't—and it's **related** to the soil that truth lands on in our hearts.

4. I think we struggle with all these kinds of soil in our hearts—path soil, where just the traffic alone makes our hearts like the 401—**hard**! This powerful truth about who Jesus is and what He's up to in our world just hits the exterior of our hearts—and bounces off.

-I think most people have issues in their lives—**rocks**-- that, out of stubbornness—they just don't want to deal with. Sometimes arrogance and self-confidence hardens our opinions. We want to be loving, joyful, peaceful, kind, good, generous and self-controlled—**and** hang onto our own opinions and do life our **own** way. And when it's hard to follow Jesus and requires making tough decisions—well—truth gets shoved to the side. We believe that Jesus is right—but not **that** right!

-But as I look at life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—our world—I think the thorny, weedy soil is what fits me best—and maybe you. It's **clutter**. There's just too much stuff, too much going on—our brains, cars, houses, offices and lives are **jammed**. We're tripping over...well...**junk**!

- a. Now, let's just do a truth test here. How many of you would say that **your** home, **your** desk, **your** garage, **your** junk drawer, **your** bedroom, **your** car is a totally clutter-free environment? **Anyone**? So we all **know** what clutter is, right? It's not necessarily bad stuff—there's just **too much** of it! And we just never sort it.

-Want to know how my shop got like it did? I was busy. In a hurry. I'd run down, fix something, run out and leave the mess. And that's the truth about our lives, isn't it? We're...**too busy!** And **that's** why I think clutter—weedy soil—is such a problem in our hearts. We're too busy to sort it out. So we tell ourselves, "Some day—**some** day I'm going to get this stuff organized!"

- b. Jesus actually gets very specific about the clutter—you know, the weeds and thorns. This is what He says:

**The seed falling among the thorns refers to people who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. (Matthew 13:21 TNIV)**

-Jesus lists clutter under two categories:

**\*the worries of this life**

**\*the deceitfulness of wealth**

-That's an amazing thing, isn't it? Think about the truth Jesus teaches us—about what life's really all about; that eternity is waiting; that the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is ready and **waiting** to bring meaning, hope—and use our lives in amazing ways to make a difference.

A difference so profound that one day, on the other side, the Father, the Creator of all says, **Well done—good, faithful servant!** And yet, according to Jesus' words, the normal everyday clutter in our hearts can choke the life out of this truth so that we wind up **fruitless**.

5. Let's talk about the **worries of this life**. I don't think this is necessarily **evil** stuff. It's just...everyday stuff.

\*What will I wear—and what will other people **think** of what I wear? Will it be warm enough—will it be too short, too sloppy, too formal—will other people think I look cool?  
\*What will we eat today—and will the kids like it? Is it healthy? Does it have preservatives or other cancer-causing ingredients? Will it promote heart-disease—or, worse yet—turn my six-pack into a keg?

\*What about the kids. Let's see, I have to drive Harvey to soccer at 3—and then we have to get Doris to ballet. How are they doing in school? Do they need tutoring—and are they well-liked by the other kids? And why are they either locked in their rooms—or at the Mall?

\*And what about golf, vacation, the computers, university, neighbors. And what about the car?

\*And what about work? I wonder if I'll get the promotion? I wonder if the boss will find out I've been shopping online? I wonder if I'm good enough? I wonder if other people like me? I wonder if I could've done better—if I should've taken the job with Wal-Mart? Or —and what about..., what about..., what about...??

\*Throw into this the constant stream of information that goes through our minds—all the factoids we collect. All the news we watch. The whole collection of fears that get steadily pumped our way every day.

\*And throw into the mix all the baggage, the fear that we inherit from our parents! Oh yes, we *inherit* junk! More clutter.

\*In any given week, we have this stuff and more on our minds. Choosing, buying, transporting, putting away and cooking food—and then cleaning up afterwards. Choosing, buying, transporting, stowing, cleaning, and folding clothes. Choosing, buying, using, maintaining, putting gas in, getting repairs done on, washing, cleaning the snow off cars.

-Just think of all the activity that goes on around music, TV, DVDs, computers, facebook, tools, I-pods, cellphones, Blackberry's, ...the list goes on and on.

-And then there are activities, entertainment, sports, classes, parties, appointments, teeth, eyes, braces, prescriptions, pets. And surrounding all this is **worrying** about this stuff. Did I get it all done? Is it losing value? Is there something better out there? Does it need fixed, cleaned, petted, brushed, oiled, scheduled, updated, downloaded, sharpened, deodorized or replaced?

- a. Now, is what I've said accurate in describing life in my world and yours? It's not so much having to be responsible for our lives, our friends, our activities, our possessions that creates this choking jungle of clutter; it's being pre-occupied with it. It's letting life run *you*, manage *you*—instead of you managing your life. -And it's **worrying** about it. Stressing over it. Letting it take over your brain every waking hour. It's taking on more and more and more and more—without ever even asking **why?** It's getting your kids into more and more and more and more—simply because it's available, or someone suggests you should—without ever asking **how** it will benefit their souls and their hearts—and whether it will make life, in general, better for the **whole** family. -Jesus said that this stuff—the **worries of life**—can smother—choke truth—and leave you, at the end of your life—with **all your junk—and that's IT!**

- b. Now, think about all this stuff—this **clutter**—and ask the tough question: Does this help me become a more loving person? Does it bring joy—or even **satisfy** me? Does it bring peace—or chaos and agitation?

-As my life gets busier and more complicated—am I becoming a more patient and gracious person? Are the qualities of kindness and goodness growing in my heart—and making a difference in others? Do I have this quiet strength about my life that produces gentleness—or am I into power? Am I becoming more faithful—do people **know** they can count on me—or are things dropping through the cracks? And is all this stuff leading me to become more and more self controlled with the things I say, the ways I react, and the things I do? Am I just getting more skilled and more knowledgeable—or am I becoming more like Jesus?

-See, the person I've been describing is **WHO** God wants us to become—but **clutter**—the worries of life can choke all the fruit right out of a person's life.

6. The other thing Jesus referred to as thorns...clutter...was the **deceitfulness of wealth**. That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? When someone is deceived, it means they're deliberately **fooled** into believing something is true when it's not. I think wealth deceives in a number of different ways.

-The promise of **more** is like this carrot that gets dangled in front of us. **More—wealth**—promises that it will solve our problems, make us happy, help us feel secure about our future. That if we have enough—**just a little bit MORE**--we'll be set for life.

- a. Fascinating, isn't it, that in talking about weeds—Jesus place these two things—the **worries of this life** in counter-balance with the **deceitfulness of wealth**. We are deceived into thinking that **wealth—just a little more**—can solve the worries of life. Jesus said, that **both** of these things are weeds that can keep you and I from ever producing the kind of life He promised.

-And money/wealth lies to people every day. “Not happy with how you look? **More** can buy you clothes, make up, cosmetic surgery, club memberships, hair styling, liposuction—and people who will stand around and **lie** to you about how young you look and how stylish you are!”

-“Want a better, cooler, more desirable image? Have **we** got the car, the house, the stereo, the job, the watch, the jewelry for **you...!**”

-And the lies go on and on and on. “With more money, you don't have to worry about supper—go out to eat! With more money, you don't have to worry about getting old and poor. With more money you can get a faster computer, get your kids the schooling and activities **they** need—so **they** can make lots of money and be happy and satisfied **just like you!**”

-We have been deceived, hoodwinked, into believing that more money is the sign of a **better** life. That having **more**—a better car and better clothes than the person next to us really **does** make us a **little** better than them.

- b. So, how does this clutter life? Money **itself** is not the problem. It's our pre-occupation with it; it's being deceived into thinking that it can do more than just buy so turn our heads—that we're always conscious of it. And the more we have, the more time and money it takes to store it, move it, maintain it, insure it, use it, and keep other's grubby hands **off** of it!
- c. If we're not careful, the promise of wealth and the drive for more can deceive us into violating what we say we believe about prayer, about the supremacy of Jesus' Kingdom over every things else that goes on—and about loving others as we love ourselves.

-The promise of wealth can deceive us into nibbling around the edges of integrity to either get more or keep it. Without taking a poll, my guess is that **everyone** here, myself included, has stretched the truth a little on a tax return,

been given too much change by a cashier and **kept** it, or not told the truth, the whole truth...and nothing **but** the truth when you returned something to a store for a refund!

-Money can do a **lot** of good in our world when it's been devoted to serving God—but when it gets in the driver's seat of our lives—well, it can choke the life—the **life that really counts**—right out of us. Can you see how it can make a person **less** loving, joyful and peaceful; how it can make someone less patient, less kind and good? How it can lead us to break our promises, not keep them—be less than self-controlled?

-Know why? When the quest for **more** gets hold of us, God is really no longer Lord of our hearts. Money has replaced Him. Money makes almost all our decisions for us--where we live, what we drive, where we work, who we hang with. And that kind of life creates junk. Clutter. Thorns. Weeds.

- d. Interesting word Jesus used for wealth, isn't it. **Deceit**. Remember the fishing lure I showed you a couple of weeks ago? As fisherman, I am a **deceitful** person! I throw out this lure—but it's **nothing** like food. It's steel with a hook in it. In fact, my plan, if the fish bites, is to reel him in and eat **him!**

-That's **deceit**. Jesus said, "Money is like a lure with a hook in it!" And you will get lured away from what **really** matters if you follow it! We know that, right? Duuh! We **know** that money doesn't bring peace and joy and hope and life. We know money doesn't make us better than others. But when the dollar sign flashes...!

7. There are probably other kinds of clutter in our hearts. Like emotional clutter. Maybe this fits with the stuff Jesus called the **worries of this life**.

- a. Have you ever had something happen that makes you angry or frustrated or fearful or guilty—and you really, **really** don't want to deal with it. It's like you're holding it and you think, "Hmmm. Where do I put this to get it out of my space?" You find some junk drawer in you heart—and throw it there. And that stuff stacks up—and it creates **clutter**.

-Or has anyone here felt totally overwhelmed? Sometimes, you don't know what to do with it—you feel that you don't have the time to sort situations out, or even think about how you feel, or how to solve the problem. So...you open the junk drawer—and throw it in!

-This stuff doesn't just **go away**, you know. It creates confusion and stress---it **clutters** our hearts and chokes truth.

- b. Sometimes the clutter in our hearts could best be described as this tangled nest of grudges. We remember **everything!** This person did this—and that person did **that**, and our husband did **that**, and our wife did **this**, and our parents did **this**--and we've never forgiven them. We can remember with precise detail

what was done to us 20 years ago—but we can barely remember our own phone number!

-One author describes grudges as planes circling, waiting to land—and us as this overwhelmed traffic controller, watching the screen--trying to keep the planes from crashing into each other. He says, **Forgive! Let it go! Land the planes!** Jesus **told** us to forgive! And if we don't--spiritually, we keep tripping over this stuff, moving it from one spot to another—and it chokes us spiritually!

- c. Another form of clutter is guilt and shame. It's stuff we've done that haunts us—and yet we're afraid to call it sin and confess it to God. See, if we own it, that means we know it's hurting us, God, and others—and we need to change. And we don't **want** to change or make things right.

-Sometimes the wrong things we've done are these memories we like to toy with in our spare time—relive the moment. And we don't want to give them up. Or we're afraid we can't. Maybe we don't think God could or would forgive us. So we hang onto it—and it clutters up our hearts and keep us from being transformed into the person God has called us to become.

8. Is there valuable stuff among the clutter? Of **course** there is! The people who go on **Antiques Roadshow** count on rabid **cleaner-uppers** to sell \$25,000 paintings in garage sales for 5 bucks when they're clearing out the clutter! But don't let that keep you from cleaning up!

-Here's the question: Are you tired of the clutter? That's really the **key** question. Because if you're okay with it—I mean, you're fine with tripping over it, getting overwhelmed by it, looking for things you can't find—and, worst of, having the good things God wants to do **choked** from your heart—then you're probably not ready to deal with it. But, if you **are**—if you would like to move into 2009 with the closets cleaned out, the junk drawers emptied, the planes landed—then that's where I'd like to go.

- a. There's a reality show called **Clean Sweep** where, if you get accepted for the show, people will come and go through all your stuff, make the decisions about what you should keep and shouldn't keep, and clean out your house while you go on vacation! My daughter **loves** that show!

-I mean, wouldn't be cool if you could just **let go** and **let God!** Ask Him to come and clean up the clutter while you go sleep or play golf or vacation in the Bahamas? God doesn't do that. He asks us to engage with Him in the process. Oh, He'll help sort, He'll walk with us through the process of figuring out what's valuable—and what needs to go. But He won't do it for us.

-And part of the reason for that is that He wants **us** to understand what's cluttered up our lives—so we won't just jam up everything up with craziness again.

- b. You have some paper—what clutter would you like to clear out?

\*What are some of worries of life that have been pre-occupying your mind? What needs to stay? What needs to go? How can you be a little more free from what other people think and how they evaluate you and your family? What kind of mold are you trying to stuff your life into?

\*I think one of the things that keeps our lives jammed up, cluttered with worry, is **busyness**. Keeping all these plates spinning—education, kids activities, trying to maintain 46 friendships, maintaining all the toys of life. Sometimes we have to limit **good** things because they're ultimately choking fruitfulness; our ability to love, be joyful, show kindness to others—and be filled with peace!

- c. And we just need to be ruthlessly honest about the part that the quest for **more** plays in your lives! The quest for wealth is deceitful! Have you been deceived into thinking that you need to make and have and accumulate more and more—to the detriment of your soul? Is the **Monster of More** breathing down your neck—and damaging your spirit?
- d. One more thing. What if you were to open the closet of pain where you store all your grudges—all the hurts, all the wrongs that have been done to you, and today you were to **choose** to forgive? Choose to leave that door open and, by God's grace, empty out it? It won't happen instantaneously—but it will **never** happen if you don't choose to open the door. You could do that today, you know. **Justice?** God tells us to leave that in His hands! Once we choose to forgive—He pours on the power and makes it possible.
- e. It could be, this morning, that what needs pulled out of the closet is your own sense of shame and feeling unforgiven. I have no idea what you may be carrying—but I do know this: God's grace and forgiveness and compassion is bigger. **Way** bigger! God has the power over time to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**—erase the mental videos we have of garbage and junk. God can wash that. If you have things to make right—God can help you do that.

9. I want you to know that I practice what I preach! **This** is my shop now. I cleaned it out on New Year's Day!  
Aren't you happy for me?

-This table here represents all the power of God available to us clutterers!

The Bible tells us that Jesus died to set us **free**. As we take communion today—it may be helpful for you to do something symbolic with your clutter. Write it down—whether it's the craziness and busyness or life, or worry about your finances, or something you haven't been able to forgive yourself for—or someone else for—or just clutter—baggage—you inherited from your parents. If you bring it—I'll burn it!

-God has called us to live fruitful, meaningful lives. Lives where we can actually **breathe** and **live!**