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Sermon Notes

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The Parable of the Soils: How Do Your Hear?

Matthew 13:18-23

I. The Gift of Hearing and the Gift of Listening

Context of this Parable

Importance of this Parable

“How then will you understand any parable?”

Parable restated and described

1. The Sower went out to sow

vs. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.

This is clearly the evangelist... the proclaimer of the Gospel of the Kingdom

In this case, it is Christ Himself... in later generations it will be anyone who is sent to preach the gospel... any evangelist, any humble Christian who seeks to bring a neighbor across the street, a close relative, a boss or co-worker into the Kingdom

It is anyone who crosses an ocean to plant churches in a Muslim country, or anyone who crosses a room at a high school reunion to witness to an unbelieving classmate

2. The Seed

The seed is the “message about the Kingdom”... what does this mean? It is the very thing the whole Gospel of Matthew has been proclaiming:

1) The Kingdom of Heaven: where God is King, where He rules over His domain with perfect love and perfect holiness

2) The Kingdom of Christ: where Christ is the gentle and humble master, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, who offers rest for your souls

3) A Kingdom which must be entered through repentance and faith... totally turning away from sin and turning to Christ in faith

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

4) A Kingdom described in these parables: which starts small like a mustard seed and grows, which is like a treasure hidden in a field worth selling everything so you can possess it

This is the message of the Kingdom... this is the seed which the sower sows widely. In a larger sense, it is the Bible as a whole... for every word of the Bible teaches the Kingdom of God in one way or another

MacArthur: "The most faithful and dedicated Christian cannot create the word of the Kingdom any more than a farmer or scientist can create the simplest seed. Just as only God creates seeds that reproduce themselves, only God creates the word of the gospel that brings the life of His Son to a believer. The work of Christian witness is not to manufacture a message to create a synthetic seed, or to modify the seed given to them, but to sow God's revelation by proclaiming it exactly as He has given it. The power of new spiritual life is in the word, just as

3. The ground... the soil... in four different conditions

- The walkway... hard soil

vs. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

The soil is hard, packed by constant traffic... like pavement. Therefore the seed does not penetrate at all... it lies on the surface and is totally vulnerable. The birds come along and eat it up and not a trace is left... there's no lasting impact, no cumulative effect. You could cast a million seeds on that soil and not one would bear fruit.

- The rocky soil

This soil is a thin layer of topsoil supported by a hard, rocky substrata. Just like parts of my yard that grows rocks every winter... soil in the Near East would be supported by an impenetrable layer of limestone. Any seeds that fell in that area would spring up quickly because there is nowhere to go but up. Initially, these plants would look healthier and more promising than any others. However, having the hard rocky base, there is no root system possible. When the sun rises, the moisture from the shallow topsoil is quickly evaporated. When the moisture is gone, so is any hope at all of the plant's survival.

- The thorny soil

This soil is fertile for growth, but it is crowded with thorns which compete for everything the seed needs to survive. The thorns suck nutrients and water from the soil, and take up the space the good plant needs in which

to grow. Furthermore, the thorny plants block the sunlight. In the end, the plant is choked by the thorns and is totally unfruitful.

- The good soil

This soil is rich and fertile... plowed and loose, so the seed penetrates deeply; weeded, so there's nothing to compete with the plant for moisture, nutrients, and sunlight; and incredibly productive. A typical Middle Eastern farm in Biblical times would yield about eight seeds harvested for every one sown. A modern American farm with the best agricultural knowledge and technology in the world might attain a yield rate of 40 to 50 times what is sown. Jesus speaks of yield rates from 100 to 60 to 30 times what was sown. This is astonishing!!

Having spoken the parable, Jesus challenges His hearers:

“He who has ears, let him hear.”

Everyone has “ears”, but not everyone can “hear”... i.e. “understand”. Jesus is challenging His hearers to seek understanding in the parable... most especially by asking Him what it means!

Jesus then describes why he speaks to the people in parables:

- 1) To fulfill prophecy
- 2) To conceal the truth from those who will not seek Him
- 3) To reveal the truth to those who will seek Him
- 4) Therefore, to make us spiritual beggars who come to Him for everything

Now, we can zero in on the meaning of the parable... in doing so, our focus is not on the sower or on the seed... but on the variety of soils.

In other words, the varying results that come from the same seed being sown by the same techniques and the same farmer

II. Soil #1: The Hardened Unbeliever

vs. 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.

A. Hardened Heart, Darkened Understanding

1. The four results are four PEOPLE with four different OUTCOMES to hearing the gospel

“When anyone hears the message...”

2. The seed on the path is a hardened unbeliever
3. Key issue: they do not understand the message about the Kingdom
4. Why not? Sin and Satan has hardened their hearts
 - a. Old Testament version... “stiff-necked” = unyielded, rebellious

Exodus 32:9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people.

Jeremiah 17:23 Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline.

Jeremiah 5:3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

“Stiff-neck” = one that will not bow under the yoke of the King

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...”

They say NO!!!!

Issue is the response to the “Kingdom of God”... that God will be their King and rule over them. This is the very thing they DO NOT WANT

When they heard the word preached by the prophets, they immediately disregarded it... it bounced off them like the seed bounced on the hardened path

Stephen summarized the Jews of his generation the same way:

Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

b. why hearts so hard? Sin and Satan

- i) sin tricks us and deceives us... as we fall into its patterns, our hearts are gradually hardened to God and His word

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Ephesians 4:18-19 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Illus. Callouses built up... 1960 Olympics in Rome... skinny Ethiopian ran into sports legend by completing the marathon in a record time, winning the gold medal with a dominant triumph. Most astonishing was the fact he ran along the streets of Rome—the Appian Way and other paved highways—BAREFOOT for 26.2 miles. Your feet and mine would have been ripped to bloody shreds... he'd been running barefoot all his life, and the callouses on his feet were as hard as shoe leather

This is what repeated sin does to a heart... it makes it insensitive to spiritual truth

Illus: Woman on flight to Los Angeles; in the “adult entertainment” business... one of the hardest people I've ever talked to... with a pleasant look on her face, she told me she hated people, hated life, enjoyed nothing, had no favorite foods, didn't look forward to anything at all

No matter what I tried to do to lead her to Christ, she had no interest and was dead to anything I could say

ii) this hardening especially takes root in the mind... making even simple Bible truth incomprehensible and foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

iii) the devil is especially active in blinding hearts to spiritual truth... more in a moment

B. A Blessing Becomes a Curse: They Hear the Word

1. Ordinarily a great blessing to hear the message about the Kingdom
2. BUT for the hardened sinners who don't respond, it is MUCH WORSE for them once they've heard

2 Peter 2:21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

C. Satan's Activity

1. Active in hardening to begin with

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

The devil is constantly luring people into sin... hardening hearts so they are unresponsive to the gospel

2. Active in snatching away the seed after its planted
 - a. it doesn't lie dormant there and spring to life later
 - b. the "birds come and eat it up"... it is GONE!!

"the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart"

- He uses the lusts of this present age to do it: enticements and allurements to pleasure that dull the soul and harden the heart
- He uses the sins of Christians to do it: "Look at all those hypocrites going to church and then sinning the rest of the week..." "Elmer Gantry" [Note: the woman I witnessed to on the plane, involved in the adult entertainment business, said the worst experience she'd ever had was with a pastor who threatened to assault her!]
- He uses false teachers to do it: sowing confusion and false doctrine so the word has no chance
- He uses fear to do it: "What will my friends think if I become a Bible-thumper?"
- He uses procrastination to do it: "You can always believe later... there's just too much going on right now"

D. Eternal Consequences

The end result of unbelief is HELL

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Some people are simply closed and hard to the gospel... no interest whatsoever

Maybe they will respond with anger and violent persecution; maybe they will simply shrug and walk away

Either way, the message of the gospel makes as much impression on their hearts as a sharp, double-edged sword would on a steel plate... NONE

III. Soil #2: The Shallow, Temporary Believer

vs. 20-21 *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. 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.*

A. The “Temporary Believer”

1. Is it possible to “believe” for a while and then fall away?
2. This parable says YES... therefore, there is such a thing as “temporary faith”

Luke 8:13 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.

3. This “faith” does not justify... it is an entirely different thing

John 2:23-25 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

Justification is the declaration by God the Judge that a sinner is eternally not guilty because of genuine faith in Christ

Justification can never be revoked... it is ETERNAL!!!

But this faith does not justify... it is a temporary emotional response based on spiritual truths that are not fully understood

THUS: There is a faith which does not justify

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

Demon faith will not save them... neither will a dead faith that has no deeds:

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

So, there is a faith which does not justify... it is temporary, it bears no eternal fruit, it is a counterfeit faith

B. Emotional “Conversion” and Initial Joy

the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

1. The joy is genuine, the emotional displays are usually intense

So... the plant springs up quickly, and actually looks healthier than many other true converts

So filled with exuberance, he tells everyone about his new experience... he feels he’s found the answers he was seeking... everything is now perfect in his world... he weeps with tears of joy... he throws himself into many aspects of the Christian life... this joy may go on for quite some time, since Christ gives no timetable for how long the joy lasts

NOTE: joy over the word is a GOOD thing

Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

THUS: this type of shallow false believer IMPOSSIBLE to tell from a genuine convert initially... time will tell!

2. “Revivalism”... looking for the joy and the outward response, then declaring the sinner to be saved and eternally assured of heaven no matter what happens from here on!!

Illus. History of revivals... greatly affected evangelicalism and evangelism

Always seeking the upswell of emotion, the dramatic display as proof of God’s activity

Jonathan Edwards: “Distinguishing Marks of a Movement of the Spirit of God”

Illus. Free-will Baptist tract brought to my house.. “If you prayed this prayer, you are now a Christian!!”

C. No Root System, No Survival

since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

1. Mind: No genuine understanding
 - a. just like the seed along the path, in the end this person does not truly understand the message about the kingdom

- b. they see only a part of it... that part makes them joyful
 - c. there is no depth, no deep understanding of the real issues of the Kingdom: repentance over sin, reconciliation with God, personal holiness, a lifetime of spiritual warfare and fruitbearing, the sovereign rule of Christ as “King of the Kingdom of Heaven”
2. Soul: No genuine brokenness over sin
- a. part and parcel with “revivalism” and “easy-believism” and “decisionism” is a light working over the soul with the law
 - b. the sins are dealt with only lightly, no wound of deep conviction, no becoming a spiritual beggar, no mourning over sin
 - c. the work is shallow, light, superficial and quick
3. Relationship with God: No genuine conversion to Christ
- a. no yielding in full submission to Lordship of Christ
 - b. no “engrafting into the vine”
 - c. no life-giving sap flowing through

D. What Does “Quickly Falls Away” Mean?

1. Note: this “pseudo-believer” may fool a lot of people (even himself) for a long time
2. He might walk in that “joy” of a shallow acceptance of the Kingdom for a long time
3. BUT AS SOON AS THE TESTING COMES... that’s when the time ends

“when trouble comes because of the word, he quickly falls away”

What kind of “trouble”: that which comes “because of the word”...

- persecution, yes
- But also, maybe a deep searching of his lifestyle and conscience by the ministry of the word... a call for deep repentance and change brought about by certain lifestyle issues

4. Resources to survive trouble because of the word are completely missing

“since he has no root”

- a. root = means to draw moisture and nutrients... deep in soil, protected from sun's heat and evaporation
- b. spiritually = invisible connection with Christ, ability to be renewed and sustained invisible

Illus. "No visible means of support"... a good way to be, thus totally dependent on the Lord

Ironically, the very trials that destroy the false faith of these shallow believers, actually purifies and strengthens the faith of true believers:

Romans 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Summary: The seed sown on rocky soil is the shallow, temporary believer... without genuine understanding, without genuine faith, without genuine repentance, without a genuine connection to Christ, he cannot survive the testing that inevitably comes. When the cost of following Christ gets too high, he quickly falls away.

IV. Soil #3: The Double-Minded Man

vs. 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.

Illus. Weeding... why it's needed, how difficult it is to do

**Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing 'Oh how wonderful' and sitting in the shade,
While better men than we go out, and start their working lives
By grubbing weeds from garden paths with broken dinner knives.
- Rudyard Kipling**

Sweet flowers are slow and weeds make haste.

- William Shakespeare

Sign seen along a country road: “Free weeds... you pick ‘em!!”

**It is not enough for a gardener to love flowers;
he must also hate weeds.**

- Anonymous

A. Competing for Nutrients, Moisture, Air, Sunshine

1. Within the soil, there is only so much fertilizer
2. When the rain fails, there’s only so much absorbed into the soil to go around
3. When the thorns grow, they block the sunshine and steal the basic commodities of life from the seed
4. NOTE: they grew up and “CHOKED” the plant

vs. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Strong word: “choke”, “drown” also translated... to cut off air supply for a breathing creature or person... for plants, it means to be starved of what it needs for life

The seed is choked off from what it needs for life and fruitfulness... all the available resources are getting sucked dry by the aggressive thorns... they grow faster, and they dominate the soil

What chokes out the seed of the word of God?

B. Worries of Life

1. Negative: fears and concerns of not having enough... worries about food, clothing, shelter
2. Worries about: health, family members, the future, possessions, possible pain and disappointments

Example: God calls someone to quit their job and go overseas as a missionary... they begin to get consumed with worries about the future... “What will I eat? What will I wear? What about my family? What about their college education? What if they contract some disease overseas and die before they can get to good medical care? What if some war breaks out and I am taken hostage by some militant Islamic group and tortured?”

The worries of this life!

C. Deceitfulness of Wealth

1. Positive: hungering and thirsting for earthly comforts
2. “Wealth” implies abundance... yearning for earthly luxury

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Illus. con game... “The Sting”... Expert con artist said to young apprentice: “Relax kid... we had him the moment he wanted to be someone.” So it is with the devil using worldly success to make us eternally unfruitful

Wealth is deceitful because it keeps luring and luring us to invest our precious daily resources and our even more precious overall life purpose on something worthless and temporary... it is a terrible con game

A businessman wakes up: his mind is filled only with the world’s wisdom... he runs 60 hours a week to make his business everything it can be; but he has lost sight of the Kingdom of God

“Worries of this life” and “The deceitfulness of wealth” are two sides of the same coin

It is total preoccupation with material prosperity... first to meet basic needs, then to acquire luxuries

It is a quest that will never end!

D. Unfruitful

1. The end of such a life... crop failure... the seed bears no fruit
2. All the time he should have spent in studying the Bible, he is consumed with making a buck
3. All the effort he should have spent building Christ’s kingdom he spends on the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth
4. This word is the key: This man is NOT A CHRISTIAN!!!

As we shall see in a moment, every true Christian bears SOME FRUIT, though not all are equally fruitful

This man bears no fruit at all... the fruitbearing process is cut off completely by the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth

E. The Double-Minded Man

Mark: adds “Desire for other things...”

Mk 4:19 the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

“Other things??” Other than what?

Other than the Kingdom!!

1. Wants the Kingdom of Heaven

2. Wants the kingdoms of earth more
3. True Christians are amazingly single-minded about the Kingdom:

The man who found the treasure hidden in the field ***sold all he had*** and bought that field

The merchant looking for fine pearls ***sold all he had*** and bought that magnificent pearl

Paul said: “One thing I do...”

Philippians 3:13 I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me

This man says “Two things I seek... two masters I serve: God and Money”

Single-minded devotion taught by Christ

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Single-minded devotion taught by Paul

2 Timothy 2:4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-- he wants to please his commanding officer.

This seed sown in thorns represents a double-minded man

He wants the Kingdom some... He wants the world more. He is not single-minded... in the end he bears no fruit... in the end he is condemned

V. Soil #4: The True Believer... Bearing Fruit

vs. 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."

A. It All Begins With Understanding the Word

“hears the word AND understands it...”

1. He’s not the PATH: The word doesn’t bounce off his hardened heart
2. He’s not the ROCKY SOIL: The word doesn’t move him to shallow, superficial emotional response only

3. He's not the THORNY SOIL: It is clear that the Kingdom is of immense value, worthy of his entire life and he devotes himself to it above all earthly things
4. WHY? Because he UNDERSTANDS the message of the Kingdom
 - a. naturally dead in trespasses and sins, our minds are darkened and we do not understand

Ephesians 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

- b. God the Father gives us true understanding to save our souls

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

- c. God the Son gives us true understanding to save our souls

1 John 5:20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.

- d. God the Holy Spirit gives us true understanding to save our souls

1 Corinthians 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

The work of the Triune God in the good rich soil of a human heart made ready for the Word of the Kingdom is plow it up and make it soft and yielded to that Word... He does this by the understanding... by removing the blindness that the devil and his world has cast over the eyes of our heart; He does this by softening the hardness that sin has left in our heart. He does it by a deep, searching work of conviction of sin... of fear of the wrath to come... of the immense value of his own soul, of the coming Judgment Day in which every sin will be brought to life...

More than anything, the Triune God works understanding of the immense value of Christ and of His perfect work on the Cross... this is the light He speaks into the formerly darkened understanding:

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The good, rich soil of a converted heart readily receives the word and keeps it covered in the soil until it bears fruit

Luke 8:15 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 of the word is surrounded by the nutrients and moisture and sunshine it needs... and IT WILL BEAR FRUIT

B. Fruitfulness Guaranteed

Simple, clear-cut statement: True Christians produce fruit... without fail!! Conversely, if there's not fruit, the person's not a Christian

1. The nature of the soil is proved by the results... a good noble heart produces good fruit
2. God uses fruit as absolute proof for the nature of the soil
3. Consistent teaching: the Kingdom of God produces fruit... where there is no fruit, the Kingdom has not come

In the parable of the tenants:

Matthew 21:43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

In the cursing of the fig tree:

Matthew 21:18-19 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

In the teaching of the vine and the branches:

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Clear teaching: if you bear no fruit, you are not a disciple... you are not in the Kingdom!!

C. Fruitfulness Varied

vs. 23 He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

1. Obvious lesson: seed is EXTREMELY FRUITFUL!!!

Ancient Near East yield on a single seed: excellent would be eight to one... eight seeds harvested for every one sown

Modern American soybean farms: with state of the art fertilizers, chemicals, irrigation technology and soil management science: 30 to 1 ratio... thirty times what was sown!

Christ is promising a bumper crop on this seed!! AT LEAST THIRTY TIMES what was sown... but perhaps as much as ONE HUNDRED TIMES WHAT WAS SOWN

2. However: secondary lesson... FRUITFULNESS IS VARIED
 - a. some return 100, some 60, some 30 times
 - b. not everyone equally fruitful in amount, nor in quality
3. What is "FRUIT"??
 - a. attitude fruit

Internal heart attitudes: fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength... Love neighbor as yourself

Love for God's word... love for God's Kingdom and its progress... Love for God's people... yearning after righteousness... deep desire to be in the presence of God... yearning to glorify God in all you do, to reveal His nature in the way you eat, sleep, work, act

ALSO: Hatred for evil, war against sin, desire for total perfection in holiness, grief over sin as intrinsically evil—not just for the consequences, hatred over injustice and ungodliness in the world

These and many other heart attitudes are considered good fruit produced by the seed of the word

b. action fruit

Any action you take for the glory of God and the advance of Christ's kingdom

Any prayer you speak, any cup of cold water give to a disciple of Christ, any money you give to support Christ's work... any time you act courageously to witness for Him, to speak the words of life

Fruit is the disciples you make, the lost people you bring to Christ... teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded

Fruit is the using of your spiritual gifts... if it is encouraging, to encourage; if it is teaching, to teach; if it is giving, to give;

Fruit is a happy, holy, and Godly marriage, where husbands love their wives as Christ the church; and where wives gladly submit to their husbands as to the Lord

Fruit is a godly, well-ordered home, where the children are brought up in the training and nurture of the Lord; and where the children are delighted to honor their parents so they may please Christ

Fruit is a series of spiritual disciplines done in secret, simply for the delight of knowing God better: of secret prayer, of fasting, of scripture memorization, of singing psalms and hymns in your heart

Fruit is conquering besetting sin, resisting temptation:

for a former alcoholic to refuse to drink again, and to take each temptation as an opportunity to honor God and His Kingdom

for a typically angry irritable person to learn to respond gently and hum

for a young man to keep his way pure and shield his eyes from anything that would cause him to lust

for a young woman to avoid dressing in a way that attracts ungodly attention to her body

for God's people to refuse to be polluted by the world is great fruit

Fruit is varied in kind... fruit is also varied in amount

The more we consecrate ourselves wholly to the Kingdom, bowing our necks under the yoke of Christ, repenting of sin and warring against it... trusting in Christ moment by moment, and doing His will by the power of the Spirit... the more fruitful we will be

ONE HUNDRED TIMES WHAT WAS SOWN!!!

Illus. George Mueller's fruitful life:

- Number of dayschools: 7
- Number of students at the day schools (64 year total): 81, 501
- Amount of money raised for dayschools (64 year total): 109,992 pounds
- Number of Sunday Schools in great Britain: 37
- Number of students at the Sunday Schools (64 year total): 32,944
- Bibles or portions circulated (64 year total): 1,989,266
- Amount of money raised for Bible circulation: 41, 090
- Missionaries aided financially: 115
- Amount of money raised to aid them: 261, 859 pounds
- Circulation of books and tracts: 3,101,338
- Total number of orphans at Ashley Downs (64 year total): 10, 029
- Amount of money raised for orphanage: 988,829
- Total amount of money raised & spent by George Mueller: 1,498,000 pounds (almost \$8 million)
- Specific answers to prayer recorded in notebooks: over 50,000!
- People led to Christ through his life and example: perhaps incalculable

VI. Applications

A. Self-assessment

1. Four soils: which am I?
2. We may have tendencies in each of the four directions... but the key issue ultimately is perseverance that produces fruit
3. Don't misunderstand this parable: These are four distinct responses to the word... three of them lead to hell, however promising
4. Re-evaluate "evangelical" witnessing techniques that mingle a low commitment to Christ, and a superficial preaching of sin and repentance to seek even a slight grudgingly positive response to the gospel, a quick "sinner's prayer" and a full assurance of "once-saved, always saved"... this is a false gospel, and many will be deceived by it
5. If you feel there's no fruit in your life, you may be right... and you might be still unsaved...
6. If you believe you are a Christian, you do see the fruit but you know you could be even more fruitful, I will speak to your situation more in a moment

B. "Proper Ear Care"

Illus. Mark Dever's Sermon "Proper Ear Care"

Luke 8:18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

One of the most dangerous skills the devil teaches: how to listen to good sermons on the Word of God, and do nothing about it.

Diagnostic questions: how do you prepare to hear the word of God? Do you consider it a light thing? A frivolous thing? Do you prove it by failing to pray, failing to prepare your heart?

Do you read the text I'm going to preach on ahead of time? How are your Sunday mornings? Do you come in here ready to hear and accept the seed of the word with a soft heart?

Consider carefully how you listen!

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

C. Yearning for Fruit

Set maximum fruitfulness in the word before you as your top goal in life

Pray constantly: O Lord, make the most of my every moment! I want to be one of those one hundred times fruitful people!!

1. Soften my heart to the word
2. Lord, help me to dig deep and not settle for superficial emotional response only... to meditate deeply on the word, be strongly connected to Christ, prepare for (and even welcome) the trouble which the word will bring
3. Lord: Weed my life of worldly goals and ambitions, of lusts and sins, of temporal pleasures, even of lawful things that have come to master me... Father you "prune" your branches so they will be even more fruitful... do that to me!!

D. Time and Fruit Will Tell: Surest Mark of Salvation Is Perseverance in Fruitfulness

1. Can we really tell the difference from the outside between the joy of rocky soil hearer of the word and the joy of the man who sells everything he has to buy the field with the hidden treasure? Initially... NO!!! But the difference comes over time... once they are both tested by trials and by time; only time will tell
2. Can we really tell the difference between man who is like the one sown along the path, but who will ten years later trust Christ? No!! The Apostle Paul hated the word initially, then came to love it... only time will tell
3. Can we really tell the difference between a thorny soil hearer of the word and a Christian who is temporarily drawn into worldly pursuits and becomes temporarily unfruitful? No...

again, only time will tell. The true believer ultimately triumphs over the temptations of the world by the power of the Spirit!

4. In the end... time and fruit will tell. The surest external mark of salvation in this world is perseverance in fruitfulness.

An old riddle: What comes with a carriage and goes with a carriage, is no use to the carriage, and yet the carriage cannot move without it?

Answer: A sound!!

Rearrange it: What precedes the Kingdom, advances the Kingdom, is central to the Kingdom, and the Kingdom cannot grow without it?

Answer: The word of the Gospel

Romans 10:17 “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

Time: Asked to select the most precious of the five senses, few people would name hearing. Yet of all man’s links to the outside world, hearing seems to be the essential sense, the one that makes man peculiarly human. How precious hearing is becomes clear when it is lacking. A baby born blind or insensitive to pain usually surmounts his handicap to lead a useful life. But a baby born deaf may be lost to mankind. The first steps of his intellectual development are beyond his reach. The sounds of life—his mother’s lullaby, the clatter of a rattle, even his own yowl of hunger—remain unknown. He cannot learn to imitate meaningful sounds because he cannot hear them. Unless heroic efforts rescue him, he will never truly master his own language; he will live cut off from the human race. It is hearing, with its offspring speech, that gives man his superlative ability to communicate: to pass along hard-won knowledge, to make use of that knowledge, and so to rule an entire planet.”

As Christians we would add, it is through hearing the sound of the Word of God—through speech—that faith is born. Therefore, the creator of speech, the creator of language speaks to us this morning

“He who has ears, let him hear...”

In the last fifty years, extraordinary progress has been made in

PHYSICS of sound: how sound is produced and travels through the air

BIOLOGY of sound: how sound is transmitted from pressure waves to brain signals in hearing

Today, we discuss

THEOLOGY of sound: how the sound of the gospel transforms the heart and saves the soul