

# The Fruitless and Fruitful Soils

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[ 0 : 00 ] It is certainly a marvelous thing when we can come together and sing together and worship together. It really truly, if you think about it, it's an amazing thing when we can do that voluntarily.

No one forces us to do it. We come out and, because when we do that, when we worship together, we send a message to one another.

That you are my brother, you are my sister, I believe as you do. This great God to whom we praise, he is my God as he is yours.

What an affirmation that we give to one another, and we should not take that for granted. Well, whether you are a farmer or not, in fact, whether you like farming or not, whether you know anything much about farming, whether you know anything about farming at all, I believe that we can all agree on one thing.

That is that a farmer farms to get results. A farmer farms to grow fruit.

[ 1 : 29 ] No one farms just to farm. Those who farm, farm to produce something. After all, farming is not easy.

I remember as a little boy, before I was old enough and expected to do any work, I enjoyed going with my parents in the field.

And I must say that at that time, perhaps not older than 10, it just seemed like we traveled all day to the field.

And many of you who are not from the island would perhaps not understand what I'm talking about. But we would walk, what now I would imagine was about a mile into the bushes.

At that time, it seemed like 10 miles. It took what would appear to me almost all day. And we would go, my father, my mother, and sometimes some of the children, and I would, as I said, I was happy to go along.

[ 2 : 35 ] And we would walk along a pathway, usually a very rocky pathway, into the field. And we would get there.

And my father, who at the time, appeared to me to be a giant. Not only because of the stories he told of himself, but because of what others said about him.

We all thought that he was a giant. And he would, as we arrived at the destination, he would clear a further path into the field that we would go to farm.

And he would clear the yard, clear the area. And very often, he would pile the bushes together and create a fire.

And I remember watching my mother plant corn and digging cassava and sweet potato. And the thing that I enjoyed most, quite frankly, was at noon time when they would roast corn, and crab.

[ 3 : 43 ] It was just amazing. It was an amazing thing to be a part of. But they always went where the soil was rich, where they knew that they could get the most for their effort.

And it was just an amazing thing to watch them harvest harvest, and to replant, and to harvest, and to walk back with their produce.

Before we go any further, I'd like us to just ask the Lord's help with this message. Father, Lord, we come to you.

And Lord, we lay this time before you. this time of preaching before you, this time of hearing your word before you.

And Lord, we ask that you would do what only you can do. Lord, we pray specifically for the soil of our hearts. Lord, we pray that you would make it right in each one of us.

[ 4 : 56 ] Lord, so that we might be productive. So that as your word is declared, so that as your word is farmed, that it would find fertile soil in each heart today.

And Lord, that there will be fruit as a result. Lord, help me as I bring your word today. Give me clarity of thought.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. And all God's people say, Amen. Please turn in your Bible to Mark, chapter 4.

And we're going to read verses 1 through 20. Mark, chapter 4, verses 1 through 20.

Mark 4, verse 1 says, again, he, that is Jesus, began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea.

[ 6 : 11 ] And the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. And he was teaching them many things in parables. And in his teaching, he said to them, listen, listen.

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Others' seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

And other seed fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

And he said, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

[ 7 : 30 ] And he said to them, to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive.

And they indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven. And he said to them, do you not understand this parable?

How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word, and these are the ones along the path where the word is sown.

when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

die, and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while. Then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

[ 8 : 48 ] And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in, and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

But those that are sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

But what is this message today about? What is, what are these verses, these twenty verses that we have read, what are they about?

I believe that Jesus is telling us in these verses this, hearers of God's word are either fruitless or fruitful.

That's simple. hearers of God's word are either fruitless or fruitful. And in the account that we have just read, Jesus makes plain to us that the seed that is being planted is the word of God.

[ 10 : 18 ] The seed that is being planted is the word of God, and this is what we know about the word of God. We know that the word of God is the same. The word of God is the same.

It is unchanging. And we also know in this account that the farmer is the same. It must be then that the fruitlessness, whether fruit is produced as a result of the effort of the farmer, it must be that it depends on the content of the soil.

So really this parable then is really about soils and not so much about the farmer or the sower. The fruitfulness depends on the soil.

Hence one might conclude that there are two types of soil. There's fruitless soil and there is fruitful soil.

And therefore I have organized my thoughts around those two points. Fruitless soil and fruitful soil.

[ 11 : 38 ] And indeed, the message, the topic that is in the bulletin, a perplexing parable, I want to change that to the fruitful and unfruitful soil.

them. But prior to considering these two basic points, I wish to provide a bit of context for the message.

message. All of you will be aware, I don't see any visitors this morning, you'll be aware that we have been in the book of Mark for several months and we expect to remain in this book throughout this year.

And perhaps some of you recall that even in the very first chapter of Mark, precisely in Mark 1 and 14.

Mark tells us that Jesus read about preaching in Galilee. He began to preach in Galilee, spreading the word.

[12:51] Indeed, to this point, up to chapter 4, we are told that Jesus preached throughout Galilee. He preached in various towns and in synagogues.

You'll recall Jesus' various encounters as He preached the word, as He fished the sea. Indeed, Jesus even had outdoor services, as large crowds gathered from distant places to listen to Jesus as He preached the kingdom.

God but in the verses leading up to Mark 4, 1, the verses that we have just read, Mark makes plain that Jesus did not enjoy universal acceptance of His message.

It was not universal. Indeed, Jesus was called Beelzebub. Beelzebub. Somebody calls you Beelzebub. Those are fighting words.

Jesus was called the son of the devil. And even His mother and His brothers thought He was out of His mind.

[14:16] They thought Jesus was out of His mind. So Jesus, though He was preaching about the kingdom, the Son of God Himself did not receive universal acceptance.

So why did Jesus share this account? Why did Jesus teach this particular message? Well, perhaps Jesus wanted people to understand that not everyone who followed Him at the time would be saved.

perhaps He wanted us to understand that not every heart into which He planted the seed of God's Word would bear fruit.

Perhaps by doing that He sends a message to pastors and evangelists telling them what they ought to expect, not to be disheartened or dismayed by what happens.

Jesus begins this parable, He begins this account, this message in verse 3 with a word.

[15:36] The word that Jesus uses as He begins this account is listen. Take a look at it in verse 3, Mark 3, Jesus says, listen.

When you say to someone, listen, it means that you want to have their attention because what follows is very, very important.

So Jesus had something really, really important to say. In fact, throughout this account, Jesus uses this word listen, or a similar word ten times.

Jesus wanted those who were present to hear Him, to pay attention to what He was saying. He wants to get the attention of His audience.

how many of you know that we can't receive the word of God unless we listen? Unless we listen.

[16:46] But we got to see in a minute that there are different ways of listening as Jesus helps us to see.

But we must first listen. listen. We must first listen to the word in order to receive the word. In order for the word, that the word might be planted in our hearts.

But after telling the audience to listen, Jesus proceeds to give them a parable. Now what is a parable?

It says in verse 2, and He was teaching them many things in parables. What's a parable? Jesus is simply saying to them, helping them to understand something in their own way of living, helping them to understand a spiritual truth using something that they are very familiar with.

parables. Parables simply is a story that has a spiritual meaning. So Jesus, understanding that He was speaking to people who understood farming, tried to bring out a spiritual truth using the illustration of farming.

[18:20] Now I want to say a couple of things about parables. Parables are, yes, analogies, but they have limitations. And sometimes we, and I've done it before, try to take parables to an extreme that really is not intended.

We read too much into them. that. But let's see how Jesus responded to this question about why. Why did Jesus use a parable? Why? What was the purpose of this particular parable, or parables generally?

Jesus helps us to see why he did this. Take a look at verses 10 and 11. Jesus said, Mark writes, and when he was alone, those around him, with the twelve, asked him about the parables.

And he said to them, to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables.

[ 19 : 40 ] And then he goes further, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

We see, and I must say that as I read through this account, in preparation for this message, having read this account so many times, it was not until I read it with the purpose of bringing this message, that I realized how challenging certain aspects of this message, of this account, are.

Certain, as we will see in a moment, and this happens to be one of them. Jesus says, listen to what he says here, he says, to you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, it is imparable.

So that, and listen to what he says in verse 12, so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear, but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.

When you hear something like that, what comes into your mind? Jesus is saying here that he is speaking in a parable, so that those on the outside of the kingdom don't understand him, so that they may not perceive, and may indeed not hear, nor understand what he is saying.

[ 21 : 19 ] So what is Jesus really saying to us? What is happening here? I believe that Jesus is helping us to see that parables had a dual purpose.

On the one hand, a parable, as we said earlier, helped those who were a part of the kingdom to understand what Jesus was saying even more deeply.

They were able to grab a hold of a spiritual truth. So a parable, on the one hand, it was a blessing, a gift for them, a way of expounding what Jesus was saying.

But on the other hand, for those who were on the outside of the kingdom, it was for the judgment to them. Jesus was shielding the truth from the unbeliever as a further judgment on him.

fruitless soil. Let's now consider the two kinds of soils that Jesus talks about in this parable, beginning with the fruitless soil.

[ 22 : 47 ] soil. Now, Jesus talks about fruitless soil and a fruitful soil.

But about the fruitless soil, Jesus says that there are three types of fruitless soils. soils.

And the first fruitless soil that Jesus talks about is found in Mark chapter 4, verse 4.

This soil is along the path soil. Mark chapter 4, verse 4, Jesus writes, And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path.

And the birds came and devoured it. Seeds fell along the path. And Jesus explains what this means in verse 16.

[ 23 : 53 ] In verse 16, Jesus says, And these are the ones, so, sorry, in verse, in Mark chapter 4, verse 15, Jesus says, And these are the ones along the path.

where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

So here it is. Jesus uses the analogy of a farmer. A farmer goes out to sow. And some of the seed falls along the pathway.

Not in the farm itself, but along the pathway. way. And Jesus says about that seed that it is as a sower who sows a seed and the enemy comes and steals the word, the seed that is sown before it is able to take root.

the impression one gets from these seeds, from this soil, from the pathway soil, if you will, from those persons that are represented by this, is that there is a lack of intentionality, that there is no purposefulness, that this group of people who hear the word, that there is carelessness, that they're present, but they're not really here.

[ 25 : 40 ] these seeds are ill-placed along the pathway. There is hardly any expectation that they will produce anything whatsoever.

So these are those who just come to service, or who listen to the word, but don't come with any purpose really of being said, of being changed.

There is no chance whatsoever to truly embrace the word. These are people who are present out of ritual, out of ritual alone, or perhaps some obligation to someone.

Perhaps they're present to appease someone who has been appealing to them. Perhaps they came because they came to see Jesus, to hear Jesus, because everyone else was doing so.

There's no willingness to change, no desire to be impacted by what is being taught. So as the sower sows the seed, as the sower shares the word to these folks, the enemy comes and

immediately takes the word that is sown.

[ 27 : 32 ] there is no chance whatsoever of the word taking root in their hearts.

No chance whatsoever. I wonder if you know people like that. I wonder if you know people like that. They show up in body, but their minds are far away.

they're here, but they're not here. They have no clue what was shared.

The word is preached. They have no clue. But Jesus doesn't stop there.

Jesus tells us in Mark chapter 4 and verse 5 about another type of soil, the rocky ground.

[ 28 : 48 ] In Mark chapter 4 and verse 5, Mark writes, other seed fell on rocky ground. where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

And in verse 6, he writes, when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

joy. And Jesus explains this in verse 16. He says, and these are the ones sown on rocky ground, the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

They receive the word with joy immediately. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while. Then when tribulation or persecution arises, on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

Jesus tells us a lot about this rocky ground group. They hear the word and even grow.

[ 30 : 03 ] But because there is insufficient soil, there is no root. And the sun scorches them. If you know anything about farming, you know that the root system is very important.

You know that roots are, you need your roots so the root goes down and is able to absorb the minerals and water and what have you. And it also holds up the plant.

Jesus characterizes this group this way. They quickly hear the word.

They joyfully receive the word. It sounds good. They quickly hear the word. They joyfully receive the word. But there is no root.

There is no connection to a church. There is no connection. There is nothing outside of what they would have heard.

[ 31 : 15 ] There is a lack of ongoing nutrition and water as there is no root. they have not counted the cost. They have not counted the cost.

And hence when tribulation and persecution arise because of the word, they stumble and fall. Their faith is superficial.

It's just a tingle. It can't grow. It can't withstand anything. Jesus says about this rocky ground group. You see them for a while in church attending gathering.

They come for a while. They start strong and then they begin to fade. They wither away. Perhaps they still attend services but it's clear that they are in a withered state.

you see the reality is that the sun will shine.

[ 32 : 33 ] The sun shine is an inevitability. sun here represents the tribulations and the trials and so for the seed that will mature the sun is good and necessary for growth.

Let me say that again. For the seed that will mature. For the seed that will be able to withstand the pressures of life. The sun is good.

A little bit of trial is good. A little bit of disappointment is good. Our faith is strengthened by these things but not so with this group. For this group trials and testing exposes who they really are.

Now I told you already that this account really has some difficult perplexing implications.

And right here in this section we find one. We find one such challenge. theologians have noted and perhaps you are wondering as well whether Jesus is saying here that this group, this rocky ground group represents people who were once converted or who were converted after hearing the word and then lost their salvation after some challenging event.

[ 34 : 23 ] Let me say that again. I want to make sure you get it. perhaps you are wondering whether Jesus is saying about this unfruitful group that they represent people who having heard the word became saved and after some challenge lost their salvation.

salvation. On its face, it does seem that that is what Jesus is saying. However, you and I know that that flies, that that view, that interpretation flies in the face of fundamental biblical teaching, of eternal salvation.

salvation. The witness of scripture is that God completes the work of salvation that he starts. And that nothing, including tribulation and persecution, can separate us from the love of God.

As such, this group is best understood as never having received salvation. This is where it's really important.

remember I told you, you got to be careful how you use these parables. Got to be careful. You can run into some trouble if you extend these parables too far.

[ 36 : 03 ] Jesus was not contradicting scripture. But there's another group. There's another sub group of this fruitless soil that Jesus teaches about.

It's those among the thorns. Among the thorns. In Mark 4, verse 7, Jesus says, other seed fell among thorns.

thorns. And the thorns grew up and choked it and yielded no fruit. Now, just in case you don't know what a thorn is, a thorn is really grass, shepherd needles, and things that shouldn't be there.

Right? You guys know a lot more than I do, perhaps, on this issue. But these are things that really should not be there. When you're planting corn, you don't want to have thorns.

You don't want to have shepherd needles and all these other kinds of things present. Jesus says that these seeds, they fell among the thorns.

[ 37 : 21 ] And the thorns grew up and choked the plant and it yielded no grain. Jesus interprets this and explains this in verses 18.

19. And others, he says, are the ones sown among thorns. They are those, he says, who hear the word.

They hear the word. But listen to what he says further. They hear the word. But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, that's number one, the cares of the world.

Number two, the deceitfulness of riches. And number three, the desires for other things. Enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

You see, unlike the pathway seeds, this group, they actually hear the word. You know, they hear it. There is a sense of interest.

[ 38 : 30 ] They don't seem to have the same issues as the rocky ground, rocky ground area. They don't have the same issues.

Their issue is unique. The soil of their heart, though, the soil in their heart is not singly focused. They remain in the world, but they remain in the world and they continue to be of the world. Jesus identifies three categories of things that enter into the hearts of this group that make them nonproductive.

Jesus says of this group of people that, number one, the cares of this world, choke them, cause them to be nonproductive.

How many of you know that there are lots of cares of this world? Lots of things to care about. They can be very personal.

[ 39 : 48 ] Some cares in this world are really personal and real deep. Each one of us can share some personal cares that we have.

Jesus says about this group that cares of this world, they choke this, they choke them and cause them to be nonproductive.

This group, they're allowing things, they're allowing the circumstances that they're in, whether it is personal or whether it is general, maybe there's some national things, the cares of this world, that crowd out the word.

The cares of this world that cause the things of God not to be priority, not to take a preeminent place in their lives.

The cares of this world, choke out, crowd out the things of God. And then Jesus says further about this group, about these thorns.

[ 41 : 02 ] Jesus says these are thorns. He refers to these things as thorns, things that should not be there, things that can cause, things that cause this group to be unfruitful.

thorns. Jesus talks about the thorn of the desire, the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches.

He calls it a thorn. And he says it's deceitful, the pursuit of riches. Jesus helps us to see that the pull of money is really strong.

what are you going after? Money. What are you going after? Money consumed by the pursuit of money. Jesus said it's a thorn. It will choke out truthfulness.

The pursuit of riches. And then just to make sure that he captures everything Jesus says, that the desire for other things as well can be a thorn.

[ 42 : 25 ] Perhaps there are some in this group who are, maybe it's not the cares of this world, maybe it's not the deceitfulness of riches, but perhaps it's something else.

The desire for other things, the desire for fame, or the desire for popularity. Something that is before Jesus Christ.

Something that's more important. Something that is all-encompassing. Something that consumes you. Something that keeps you up at night.

something that chokes out the word. Earlier, we asked the question, why did Jesus tell this parable? could it be that Jesus also did so because he wanted each of us to do a little bit of introspection?

[ 43 : 44 ] Could it be that Jesus wanted us to stop and think about where we are as individuals? He wanted us to ask ourselves, are we allowing so and to make us less fruitful?

Or not fruitful at all? Who cares of this world? And then finally, Jesus tells us about the fruitful soil in Mark 4 and verse 8.

And this is what Jesus said. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

And he said, he who has heirs to hear, let it hear. Let's see what Jesus, how he explains it in verse 20.

He said, but those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word. Listen to what he says.

[ 45 : 09 ] Are the ones who hear the word. And are the ones who accept the word. And bear fruit. Thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.

The first thing that we see that really distinguishes this group, this fruitful soil group, this good soil group, is that they hear the word.

Now here's a little bit of difficulty, and you've got to bear with me a little bit here. I want to explain this. This group, Jesus says of them, they're the ones who hear the word.

Now according to James Edwards, a professor of theology, an author of a commentary on the gospel of Mark, the tense that Mark uses to describe how those in the fruitless group heard the word, suggests something done simply and finally, and thus implying something done quickly and superficially, in one ear and out the other.

In other words, they just heard the word. They just heard it, and that was it. They heard something. It was final for them.

[ 46 : 50 ] It was simple for them. It was done quickly. It was superficial. It was in one ear and out the other ear. That was the kind of hearing, and that is the word, that is the tense that is used when Mark explains their hearing.

But in this instance, in verse 20, the present tense is used, which means that there is a continual, ongoing hearing as opposed to a careless, inattentive hearing.

So the hearing that Jesus talks about here is ongoing. It's continual. It's meaningful. It's impactful. When Jesus said, listen, they heard him, and they heard him, and they heard him not only in that moment, but they continued hearing.

They continued feeding their souls. second thing that Jesus says about this productive group is that they accepted the word.

You see that? Jesus says that they not only heard the word, but they accepted the word. So it's just not a matter of saying, Lord, I accept the word.

[ 48 : 18 ] that's not what he meant here. They were transformed by it. Their hearts were changed.

They do what the word says. They were committed to the word. They accepted the word. more over, we can conclude about this group that they were intentional.

Unlike the group on the pathway. What are you doing planting seed on the pathway anyway? This group, they were intentional.

They have root that could withstand the pressures of life. They were connected to a local church. They were accountable.

They were accountable. pressures of life made them stronger, not weaker.

[ 49 : 31 ] They didn't permit things to crowd out the gospel. Finally, Jesus said about this group, this good soil group, that distinguishes them from the others.

Jesus said that this group, that they were fruitful. How many of you know that fruit is evident of the tree you are?

Truly, there can be no salvation without fruit. Scripture teaches us that, that there is no salvation, that you are going to be known by a fruit.

Whether it's the fruit of discipleship, whether it's fruit of good works, whether it's fruit of the Spirit. Jesus says of this group that they were fruitful.

But as we consider this parable of Jesus, notice that Jesus does not say exactly why one soil differs from the other.

[ 50 : 59 ] He doesn't say exactly. Surely he gives the characteristics of these different areas, these different groups, if you will. But why?

What really makes them different? What makes you and I different? What makes the believer different? We know from farming that in the end, it is the farmer who tills the soil.

farmer's choice. It's the farmer who goes out and decides where he's going to plant the seed with the expectation of getting good results.

It is he who plants the seed. It is he who removes the thorns. It's the farmer who does the work. It is the farmer who protects the seed from the birds that would come down ordinarily and swoop them up.

It's the farmer who does the work. It's the farmer who waters the plants. It's the farmer who clips the dead leaves, who prunes the trees.

[ 52 : 10 ] It's the farmer who provides the fertilizer. It is the farmer who does the work. And in the same way, it is the Lord who grants grace to those whose hearts are good soil.

Indeed, Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 tells us, for it is by grace you and I have been saved through faith.

And this is not of your own doing, but rather it is the gift of God, not a result of works, lest any man or any woman or anyone should boast.

It is God himself who decide. God Bob Coughlin and Doug Plank were spot on when they wrote these beautiful words in the song Show Us Christ.

Prepare our hearts, oh God. help us to receive break the hard and stony ground help our unbelief plant your word down deep in us cause it, Lord you cause it to bear fruit open up our hearts to hear lead us to your truth it is the farmer God himself who prepares our hearts it's he who helps us to receive it is he who breaks the hard and stony ground it is he who moves the thorns it is he who helps our unbelief and he who plants his word be down in us and it is he who causes us to bear fruit and that is why there is gratitude in our hearts and that's why it is a joy when we are able to to get together on a Sunday morning and sing together and declare how great is our God you know when you have an understanding of these words those words have deeper meaning they are more impactful when you realize what he has done how great is our God how great is our God indeed singing those words there is truth in mind knowing that you are a mouth a good soul but perhaps you are here today and the word that was preached today as with other words that you have heard have fallen on unfruitful soil in your heart perhaps that describes you today that I'm sure those whose hearts are filled with fruit who are delighted because of what God has done for them they are joining me in praying for you and asking the Lord praying that it would please the Lord to save you to break the hard and stony ground in your heart so that you might be among those who who bear fruit that's our prayer for you today that God that the God of grace will be pleased to prepare your heart indeed

[ 57 : 06 ] God