

Receptivity to the Gospel, Part 3

Scripture: Luke 8:14-15

Code: 42-105

As we come to our study of the Word of God this morning, we return to the eighth chapter of Luke's gospel, and I'd ask you to turn, if you will, with me to that chapter. As you know, if you've been with us for all the months in which we have gone through the gospel of Luke, every section, every paragraph, every verse is immensely beneficial to us because Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God is the theme of every verse, every paragraph. We are literally walking in the footsteps of Jesus. We are literally hearing the words of Jesus. We are sensing the passion and the heart of the Savior Himself as we go through this gospel. That is why for me preaching from the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, is the richest of all experiences.

In the eighth chapter of Luke, there is recorded a parable which Jesus gave. We're looking at that parable and it's found in the section from verse 4 to verse 15. It is the parable of the soils. This is our third and final message looking at the parable, and we've entitled the message, "Heart Condition," because that's what the story is really about. Going through this particular parable is like taking a spiritual EKG. It is the best way I know to get a read out on your heart condition which is absolutely critical to your spiritual well being as a healthy heart is to your physical well being. The parable that Jesus gives called the parable of the soils is simple and unforgettable. In this parable is a rich insight into the hearts of people. It helps us to understand why people respond the way they respond when we give them the gospel. That is our responsibility, after all, isn't it? Aren't we those who are supposed to fulfill the great commission and go into all the world and preach the gospel? Isn't that why we're here? Aren't we ambassadors for Christ? Aren't we begging people for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God through belief in the one who gave His life for them? Aren't we witnesses to the truth? Isn't that our calling? Indeed it is. And because this is our calling, the more we understand about it the better.

And what you find very soon when you begin to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people is that most people reject it. And that becomes a problem because typically someone would feel that perhaps they're inadequate in the presentation. And I would simply remind you that that's really not the problem. If you know the gospel well enough to believe it savingly, you know it well enough to tell somebody else. It's really not that. And somebody else might think, "Well, it's because of the gospel itself, it's just an antiquated message or it's just a hard message, or it's an insensitive message, or it's culturally oblique, or obscure and that's the problem. So if we can somehow refine the message,

come up with a message that's more palatable and more acceptable, we're going to have better success." And so typically Christian people work hard on the methodologies of evangelism. How can we get a methodology that works? And they work hard on a message that is acceptable. How can we shape the message to make it more palatable and more acceptable? And so the church typically, even today, even as we speak, is busy trying to reinvent the method and reinvent the message, and that's not even the issue. That is not even the issue.

I say it again. If you know the gospel well enough to be saved by it, you know it well enough to present it to somebody else. And the message of the gospel is what it is and it isn't anything else and it doesn't need to be altered. And as we're learning in the story, it's not a matter of the sower and it's not a matter of the seed, it's a matter of...what?...the soil. Responses to the proclamation of the gospel are determined not by the skill of the sower and not by the state of the seed, but by the soil. It's really important to know that because that helps us to understand what to do in evangelism, what to expect and what not to expect.

When Jesus was training His apostles and His disciples for the work that they would do when He went back to heaven and the Holy Spirit came and filled them and they then went out to be the first generation of preachers and we sort of followed in their legacy, when Jesus was training them He wanted them to understand the nature of their ministry. So He told them things to expect like...He gave them a parable of wheat and tares and the point of that story was while you're giving the gospel and building the church, bringing believers together, Satan will be bringing unbelievers into the church. So just know that. Know that the tares are going to grow along beside the wheat and in the end you may not be able to tell the difference, but I can. And so you might have to wait till the very end, the final judgment, before you know. So don't expect that the church will be free from Satan's influence because he will even bring people in who are false believers. And then Jesus also said, "You can expect that the Kingdom of God is going to be like...it's going to be like a huge fish net that you cast into the sea and when you pull it in, you get everything. You get the good fish and all the debris that's collected on the bottom and so you have to sort out the good and the bad." And He said, "The good you keep and the bad you burn." And He was saying that the Kingdom, the church, is going to embrace the good and the bad, the real and the false and in the end there will be a separation.

Jesus also said that the Kingdom is going to be like a mustard seed which was the smallest of the seeds that they used in Israel. And it grew into this unruly huge tree and Jesus said, "Expect that to happen in the Kingdom, that while there may be only a few who are real, the influence, the power, the breadth of Christianity is going to be huge."

Well these are all important lessons, very important, because they tell us that within the big picture of quote/unquote "the church, the Christian church," there are going to be the children of Satan, the

useless riff-raff sort of scraped up that ultimately are just the souls of people that are going to perish. There's going to be a kingdom that appears to be very large and influential when the truth is much smaller than that. Those are really important things to understand. The bottom line of all of that is not everybody talking about heaven is going there. Not everybody talking about Jesus knows Him. Not everybody who says they believe the Bible is converted. That doesn't sound too earth shattering to us, but this message has to be preached again and again and again and again. We are so method oriented that we think if somebody goes through the four steps of our little method, prays a little prayer, we can affirm to them that they are saved. Or if somebody comes to the church and manifests a certain amount of interest and makes it a routine part of their life and makes an outward profession to belong that that's sufficient. We have to just keep going back to the issue of the heart.

And so, Jesus told the parable of the soils to help us to understand that there are going to be people in response to the gospel whose response is immediately rejection, some whose response is immediately acceptance, some whose response is even more prolonged acceptance but none of them are saved. And then there are those that Jesus says are the good soil, and they're the real ones.

Now as we go back to this parable, let me just remind you of the parable, apologies to those of you who haven't been with us. This is the last of the three messages on this parable. Verse 5, simple agricultural scene, "A sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some fell beside the road." Remember I told you there were beaten paths around the fields, or down the length and across the breadth of the field where people walked, trampled hard, baked in the sun, not irrigated, not watered. Some of the seed fell beside the road, was trampled underfoot, the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, rock bed, under the surface, down below where the plow hit solid rock bed. And soon as the plant grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. The roots couldn't go down to get the moisture because of the rock bed that was there. Other seed fell among the thorns or weeds. The thorns grew up with it, choked it out. Those were the roots of thorns and weeds still left in the soil. And they grew and choked out the fragile seed. And then finally, "Other seed fell into the good soil. It grew up, produced a crop a hundred times as great." Incredible crop comes from the good soil.

It's a simple story. Everybody would understand it. A sower is throwing his seed and it falls into soils in all kinds of conditions. But the point of the story is that the good fruit is produced because the soil is good. And it goes back to what we've been saying all along. It's not about a sower and it's not about a message, or a seed. It's about soil. And by the way, in the middle of this you see in verse 8 before Jesus even explains the meaning, He says apparently repeatedly as He's telling the story, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Which is a way of saying, "Are you getting it? Can you understand what I'm talking about?" And the only people who can are His disciples because they

belong to Him. And so they began to question Him as to what the parable might be. And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God," in verse 10. "But to the rest it is in parables in order that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand." That is a statement of judgment. This is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus in the life of Jesus. He came, He preached, He healed, He cast out demons, He did miracles. He gave the message of the gospel and He was rejected. At this point the rejection is final, if you will. It's fixed. The collective attitude of the nation is set, rejection. So Jesus says, "I'm now going to speak in parables." And for the remainder of His Galilean ministry, He didn't speak in any way but in parables. He says, "I'm speaking in parables so that they can see and not understand. They can hear and not comprehend."

In other words, this is judgment. I'm going to speak, I'm going to tell stories. They'll hear the story, the story will make sense but they won't know its spiritual meaning because I won't explain it to them. But to you, He says, I will explain. So what you hear from now on is this judgment on Israel, they wouldn't hear so now they couldn't hear. They wouldn't understand so now they couldn't understand. And so Jesus spoke now only in parables and the only way you can know the spiritual truth that He was giving would be if He explained the parable and He only explained the parable to His disciples. And so they came to ask the question because they wanted to know, their hearts cried out to know these spiritual truths. And they did have ears to hear and know. To them the Lord gave the explanation.

The explanation then comes in verse 11, nothing is said about the sower because anybody could be the sower. The seed is the Word of God. Anybody who throws the Word of God is the sower. The seed is the gospel. He says that, verse 11. But the real issue is the soil and we pick that up in verse 12 as Jesus explains what this means. This is about the heart, verse 12, talks about the heart. Verse 15 talks about the heart. The soil is the heart. And the first heart is the hard heart, the roadside soil. The seed is thrown there and He says in verse 12, "Those beside the road are those who heard, then the devil comes and takes away from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved." These people don't believe. These people aren't saved. They...they're hard. The seed never penetrates the soil, as we saw. The devil snatches away what does land there. Earlier in the story, you remember, Jesus said it's also trampled down, the seed is literally crushed by the march of sin through the life of that individual. This is just hard-hearted, stiff-necked, rebellious, indifferent people who want nothing to do with the gospel.

You're going to run into those people, that's just how it is. That soil is out there. Common, we've all confronted people like that. And at last their hard-hearts are plowed deep by repentance, by the work of the Holy Spirit, there isn't going to be any ability to receive the Word.

The second soil that we looked at is the superficial heart. And in verse 13 this is the rocky soil, rock bed underneath the soil. Those who when they hear receive the Word with joy. There's an immediate response. They take it in. They find a place in their mind, in their hearts. But they don't have any root. They believe for a while, that's the mark. The first didn't believe, couldn't believe and be saved. These people believed but they're not saved either. They just believed for a while and in a time of temptation they fall away. This is the superficial heart. There's some emotional response to the gospel for some psychological reasons. We went over those last time. But it's very temporary, very shallow. And I told you joy is never the distinguishing feature of true conversion. You can have all kinds of joy at the moment somebody makes a confession or profession or prays a prayer, you can have all kinds of joy, emotion can run wild. It doesn't signify anything. In fact, a truer indication of genuine conversion would be the opposite of joy...mourning, weep and mourn, James says. The Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn, that hunger and thirst after righteousness." Typically the superficial person is hungering and thirsting after something other than righteousness...a better life, happiness, belonging, friendships, whatever.

This is superficial and test is temptation...trials. Pressure in Matthew's account talks about pressure, tribulation, persecution because this is the person who thinks if I do this, and I, you know, commit my life to Jesus, my life's going to be better and I'm going to be happy and all my problems are solved, have a better marriage and better family and better career and all the felt need kind of thing. And, of course, all that felt need kind of preaching feeds this. And then when things don't get better on the temporal level and when you have trouble and pressure and tribulation and temptation and persecution, they're gone. They leave. They believe for a while and then they fall away because their assumption was that they were getting the end to all their problems. They were going to get delivered from all their felt needs, all the things that make them anxious and distressed...superficiality.

That's the good thing about trials, that's the good thing about tests, that's a good thing about pressure, that's a good thing about persecution...it does one of two things, it blasts away the false believer and it perfects the true believer, right? First Peter 5:10, "After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect." "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because the trying of your faith produces patience and patience has a perfect work," James 1. So when the trial comes and the test comes and the persecution comes, the false believer is blasted away, can't hold up under it because it has no root. But the true believer is strengthened, confirmed like the Apostle Paul who rejoiced in his suffering because when he was weak, the Lord was strong through Him.

Now that brings us to the third kind of soil, and that's the weedy or the thorny soil. We talked about that last time that sometimes when a farmer would plow, there would be the roots of weeds and thorns down in the ground. It's the same word, by the way, used for the thorns they put on the brow of Christ. Nobody would want a garden of thorns. You try to get rid of those because they are hardy

and strong and they literally choke out the fragile good seed that's planted there and that's this kind of soil. Unbeknownst to the farmer who thinks he's cleaned his soil out, there are these serious and deadly impurities still down in the heart. And so in verse 14 Jesus said, "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, they have heard," and the hearing there is like an acceptance of it "And as they go their way," they go along what appears to be a path of believing, "they're choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life." This is the worldly heart...the worldly heart, preoccupied heart. The reception looks good. On the surface the ground looks good, it's not hard. It doesn't have rock underneath it. It looks good on the surface. But the truth is crowded out, it's crowded out by the presence of sin. There are just impurities all through this heart.

Jesus said in the Matthew account, Matthew 13:22, "The worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word." This is not a stupid fool, hard-hearted, this is not a shallow emotional person, the rocky soil underneath, this soil appears good. But there are all kinds of impurities in it. There's other life there that's much more advanced, much stronger and natural to that soil. Whereas the seed which is the Word of God is unnatural. It is the foreigner to the already established weeds and thorns. The good seed can't survive in this double-minded man. Jesus put it this way, you cannot serve God and riches. It's the worries and riches and pleasures of this life, that's the key...this life. This person is consumed with the temporal, consumed with the world, sinful pleasures, sinful longings, desires, ambitions, career, money, home, car, prestige, whatever that crowds out the true seed. This is the preoccupied worldly heart swept up in the deceitfulness of riches.

At the end of his letter to Timothy, his first letter, 1 Timothy 6:9, Paul said, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, or a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction, for the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a sorrow or pain or pang." If you never deal with the love of the world, riches, all that the world has to offer, it will choke out the truth, the gospel.

In fact, turn in your Bible, for a moment, to 1 John chapter 2. This is a pretty clear interpreter of what Jesus meant. In verse 15 we have been learning that John is very matter of fact, very straightforward, very black and white, very absolute, and here is a perfect illustration of it. Verse 15, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." That's pretty clear, isn't it? If you love the world, the love of the Father's not in you.

What do you mean by the world? Do you mean like mountains and flowers and...good food and comfort? No...no, those are some of the things God has given us richly to enjoy. We enjoy them. They're not the priority of our lives. And he defines what he means by the love of the world in verse 16, "All that is in the world...here it comes...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world and the world is passing away and also its lusts. But the one who does the will of God abides forever." Very clearly what it means to love the

world is to have as your primary hankering, your primary longing, your primary desire, your primary lust, those things which gratify your flesh. The lust of the flesh, simply to pander your physical, fleshly appetites, the things you feel. Lust of the eyes, pandering to the desire of what you see. And the boastful pride of life undergirds everything, self-fulfillment is everything to you. If you live that way, if what drives you is what your flesh wants and what your eyes see and what your pride longs for, then you don't know God whatever you may claim.

Am I saying you can't enjoy the beauties of the world? Am I saying you can't enjoy the comforts of the world, the good things that God has given us richly to enjoy? No. What I am saying essentially what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." I can enjoy what's in the beauty of the world. I can enjoy the comforts of the world. I can enjoy all of the amenities that God has placed in this incredible world. They're not what I seek, there what He gives in response to me seeking Him. I see everything as a good gift from God coming down to me to show His love and His grace. All the glory, all the honor goes to Him. But like Paul in the end of the day, I know how to be abased and how to abound. I know what it is to have and not to have. I can be content in whatever state I am because to me it isn't about the world, it isn't about loving the world, it is about loving God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and in loving God, receiving what He gives is a gift of His grace. It's just that perspective. It's that single-mindedness that we're talking about here. The single-minded person who loves God above everything else and everything that God gives or takes is a cause for thanksgiving

You remember when the rich young ruler came to Jesus, it's recorded in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, and he said, "What do I do to receive eternal life? And Jesus knowing him knew that he loved money and what money could buy." Nobody just loves money for money's sake. They love money for what it purchases. So they knew...Jesus knew he was a materialist. He was in love with his own ability to indulge every fleshly desire and every visual desire and to fulfill all of his personal hankering for self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction. He knew that he was a lover of the world. And so Jesus said to him, "You want to have eternal life? Sell everything you have, take the money and give it to the poor." Now that's not how you get saved, but that was a great test to see how willing he was to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and to change his focus from loving the world to loving the Lord.

And he..the Bible says...he went away sad because he was very rich. He decided that he would not exchange his love of the world for the love of God. And that's the issue. When you witness to somebody, when you present the gospel to somebody, it is that clear cut. We're talking to people not about simply believing a little formula, we're talking about people who are willing to give up everything as the parable of the treasure hidden in the field and the parable of the pearl indicate when the man

found the treasure hidden in the field, it says he sold everything to buy that treasure, when the man found the pearl of great price, he sold everything to buy the pearl. What was basically going on there was in each case a man who sees the true value of the gospel would let go of everything to possess it. That's...that's the salvation heart. That's the heart ready to receive the seed. This is a heart still cluttered up with the stuff of the world. And that's not the heart that the seed can survive in. No fruit is produced and it's not because of the sower and it's not because of the seed, it's because of the soil filled with impurities...you know, as long...and the implication.

As long as the weeds are there, as long as the thorns are there, they're going to grow faster. They've already established themselves. You've just got one little fragile seed of truth in there, but you've got strong roots of weeds native to that soil whereas the Word of God is not native to that soil. It's not natural to that soil. The weeds are. That's their home. The sinner is at home with his sin and his sin finds a home in him. Very natural, the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That is true. And as long as those weeds live, they grow. And as they grow, the thorns tear and lacerate the fragile life of the seed and it can't survive.

So if you're hanging on to some sin...people say to me through the years, "If a person's going to come to Christ, do they really have to be willing to give up all their sin?" Yes. That's what it's about. You can't love the world and love the Father. If you love the world, the love of the Father's not in you. And, you know, that's...we've said it all along, when we give people the gospel, it's critical that we explain the sin issue before we start explaining the forgiveness offer. You could get people to make superficial responses to the gospel on the premise that this will take care of their eternity and they'll never have to worry about hell again if they don't have to change anything in their life. And, you know, there are those who preach that? That preach that? That's part of the no-lordship salvation issue that I've addressed through the years and continue to address even as we speak. But the truth that Jesus is giving us here is that the seed doesn't survive unless the heart has been purged.

So what should be going on then in this kind of person? What should happen in this kind of person in order for the seed to survive? There should be a hunger and a thirst after righteousness, not after a different life, comfort, or whatever. And we'll see that as we look at the last soil.

The fourth soil Jesus talked about is good soil. And you will notice in verse 15 what He says. "The seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the Word in an honest *kalos* Greek and good, *agathos*, heart and they hold it fast and they bear fruit with perseverance." Boy, this is so important. Now you've come to an honest and good heart, a *kalosagathos* heart, both words mean good. One means inherently good and one means sort of visually good. I mean, it's good on the inside and it looks good. This is a heart without duplicity. It's good and good. It's all good, it's only good. There's no hypocrisy there. There's no rock bed underneath. There's no weeds there. This is the truly prepared heart. Matthew 13:23 Jesus talks about the good soil and He says, "It's those who understand the Word." And Mark 4, it is recorded that it's those who accept the Word. And here it's

those who hold it fast.

Now this is important. In the good soil the heart is so well prepared that there is a true understanding of the gospel. There is a true acceptance of the gospel, both its message of sin and judgment as well as grace and eternal life. And in the good heart, not only is there at that time an understanding and an accepting, but there is a holding tightly, there is a gripping of these truths. And there is fruit permanently with perseverance. Sometimes you hear an evangelist say at one of these big evangelistic events, "Come forward and pray this prayer and now we're happy to tell you we're all in the Kingdom of God." They don't know that...they don't know that. You can't tell that because they prayed a prayer. You can't tell it because they had a lot of joy. You can't tell that. How do you tell? Fruit with perseverance. Come back in a year, come back in five years, ten. The good soil, the clean soil, the honest and good heart holds permanently to the truth and manifests fruit with *hupomone*, with endurance. What does that mean? *Hupomone* means to remain under, *moneis* is to remain, *hupo* is under. So this is the person who can remain under any trial, remain under any temptation, any pressure, any difficulty and continue to persevere in bearing spiritual fruit. That's the test. You can't tell somebody because they pray a prayer that they are now a Christian, you don't know that. You can say if you were sincere then believe me, God heard and answered the prayer and we will know whether you are or not. And again, 1 John 2:19, John says, "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us. They went out from us that it might be made manifest they were not all of us."

When people abandon a profession of faith in Christ, it simply means it never was real. The proof is perseverance. The proof is continuity. Jesus said, "If you continue in My Word then you're My real disciple," John 8. People say, "Well, that person used to be a Christian but they lost their salvation." No, no, no. You can't lose eternal life, it's eternal life. You can't lose that.

Well what happened? Well, they were rocky soil, weedy soil, believed for a while. And then the tests came, they fell away. "They went out from us because they never were of us." In the end, salvation is indicated by bearing fruit, okay? Only one of these four soils bore fruit.

You say, "Well, what is the fruit? What are you talking about fruit? Well we could do a whole New Testament study on fruit. Let me just give you a condensed version. There's two kinds of fruit...attitude fruit and action fruit...attitude fruit and action fruit. I mean, it can't be anymore than that. The fruit that's demonstrated in your inner man and the fruit that's demonstrated in your outer man, this is what I mean by that. You can see the fruit of transformation, the fruit of conversion, the fruit of regeneration in the attitudes of people, such as, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, faith, meekness, gentleness, goodness." That's fruit, you look at attitudes. You see in their love for God, love for Christ, love for others. You see it in the joy and trials, the peace in tribulation. The fruit of

attitude is manifest, you get to know a person and you know whether you're seeing evidence of transformed life in how they deal with all the stuff that comes in life. Attitude fruit, it's really a mark. And, you know, you can do a little spiritual EKG on yourself by just taking inventory of your attitude. Are you compelled by the love that you have for Christ? Are you compelled by the love for God? Is it the heart cry to worship God, to honor God, to serve God, to love others? Do you find your heart is filled with hope? Do you find yourself at peace in the midst of disappointment? Is there a constant undergirding of incessant joy because everything in the end is controlled by the sovereign purpose of God for your well-being and His glory? That's evidence of transformation.

Not only that attitude fruit, but action fruit. Action fruit is what you say, what you do. John says, 1 John 3:9 and 10, you know, "If you're born of God you don't continue in sin." Oh there will be sin there but it won't be that unbroken pattern of sin that's characterized in an unregenerate life. You're going to look at the life and you're going to see righteous deeds. Philippians 1:11, "Their life will be filled with all the fruits of righteousness." They will be as Hebrews say, the fruit of lips praise to God. As Paul said when he was going to the Romans, I want to come and have some fruit among you, you'll be leading people to Christ, spreading the gospel. Oh, the fruit we're talking about here is attitude fruit and action fruit. You can put on the action fruit, you know, and without the attitude fruit that's legalism. The Pharisees were good at that. They could do the action, they were painted white on the outside but inside they were full of dead-men's bones. So action fruit without attitude fruit is damning legalism. Action fruit is a result of attitude fruit is true spirituality.

This is not a new concept. The way you know that somebody is a believer is not by what they said somewhere or sometime, what they prayed somewhere sometime, and, parents, don't hold on to that. You know when your child is in the teen-aged years, or their twenties or older, or whatever, and they're out living a life that disregards God all together and pays no attention to Jesus Christ and demonstrates no love of righteousness, no consuming desire to worship and honor God, don't think they're Christians because some time in the past they prayed a prayer. That doesn't mean anything. This is not new, as I said. Psalm 1, you can go all the way back to the beginning of the Psalms, "How blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, his delight is in the law of the Lord." You find somebody who's been regenerated, he will love the Law of the Lord. In His Law he meditates day and night. He's like a tree firmly planted by the streams of water which yields its fruit in his season. He's going to have a love for God. He's going to have a love for the truth of God, the Word of God. It's going to show up in the fruit of his life.

Now, in Matthew's account of the parable, which is the same parable which Jesus probably told on a number of occasions, Matthew says that Jesus also added, "Some bring forth fruit thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some hundredfold." All of those would be immense amounts of fruitfulness since tenfold

was considered a huge harvest...thirty, sixty, one hundred is beyond imagination. What Jesus is saying is we're not all going to bring forth the same amount of fruit. We're differently gifted. We're differently devoted. And we have differing opportunities. But we're all going to bring some fruit forth and Jesus said, you ought to bring forth more fruit. In fact, He said you ought to bring forth much fruit, John 15, because that's what glorifies the Father. So for every true believer there is manifest fruitfulness in attitude and action. There should be more, there should be much because we were created in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:10 says, unto good works. And every branch that abides in the vine, John 15, brings forth fruit. If you don't bring forth fruit, Jesus said, cut off, burned. That's a non-believer, that's a Judas branch.

So, in looking at these soils, we're looking at the heart. In the first one, the hard soil, we understand that we have to engage Satan. He comes along and snatches it away from some hearts. We also have to engage in that stony ground, the flesh because they fall away under temptation. And in the case of the weedy ground, we have to engage the world because they're consumed with the pleasures and worries and riches of this life. The battle then is to bring the truth to bear upon the hearts of men who are influenced by the world, the flesh and the devil. This is what our spiritual war is about. And again I say, it's not the talent of the sower. I've illustrated it this way in the past, if a father wanted to teach his little six-year-old boy to sow, training him to be a farmer, he might give him a little bag, make a little bag that would fit over his little shoulder and fill it with some seed and tell him to take a little corner of the field and sow it while his dad was doing the bulk of the work. And that little boy with his fat little hand and his short little fingers would reach in and throw seed everywhere...in his hair, down his back, who knows where? But in the end, every time that seed thrown by him hit good soil, it would produce fruit because it's not the skill of the sower, it's the state of the soil. When it falls in the place it's prepared, it grows and produces life.

The issue is not the difference in the nature of the heart. Everybody's got the same heart. What do you mean by that? Well, hard soil, rocky soil, weedy soil is all made of the same dirt, it's all the same components. All people's hearts are the same. The differences are due to the influences that prevail upon the heart. Some hearts just get hardened. They're under the influence of philosophers, anti-Christian propaganda, or just the love of iniquity. But somebody comes along and influences them toward resolute hardness. And then there are those people who stay a little bit tender and a little bit soft and they're more emotional, but they're superficial and shallow and self-absorbed and they're at the center of their universe and it's not righteousness they want, it's more personal fulfillment. There are all kinds of influences to produce both kinds of people. Then there are those who are just full of evil, weeds everywhere.

But the soil is all the same. Man's heart is all the same. Deceitful and desperately wicked, but that wickedness takes all kinds of forms. No everybody is as bad as everybody else. Not everybody is

consumed of materialism. Some people are consumed with their own emotional needs. Not everybody is a hard-hearted agnostic atheist. But the issue is this, the soil is all the same and it has the capacity to receive the seed if it can be properly plowed. And I told you last time, and I'll say it again, the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit does the plowing, but what does He use to do the plowing? He uses the Word of God. And so, in the opportunities that we have to present the gospel, we have to bring the Word to bear upon the heart so that the Spirit of God can use it to convict. How can He convict of sin and righteousness and judgment if people don't know what sin, righteousness and judgment means? If they don't know that their sinners, they have violated the righteous standard of God and can't do anything about it on their own, therefore they're under judgment? That has to be told to them. It's the same thing as the gospel. The Holy Spirit saves sinners but not without the gospel. That's why we have to proclaim it.

So when you're giving the gospel, you've got to work on the soil before you put the seed in. It's got to be all the bad news before you deliver the good news. Some people want to rush to the good news because they think people will respond to that first. Maybe so, but that's just to produce somebody superficial. So you have to present the truth and pray that God by the Holy Spirit will take the truth and plow up the heart and reveal and disclose the sin and bring about a true brokenness, a true contrition, and a true repentance. Proverbs 20 and verse 9 says, "What can...or rather, who can say I have made my heart clean, pure from sin?" Nobody can say that. But you can say I want it clean. I want it plowed deeply. You can say with the psalmist in Psalm 51 verse 10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." That's where you want to take the sinner. You don't want to take the sinner to a point where they want Jesus to fix their life, you want them to take them to the point where they need Him to cleanse their sin. That's the issue...that's the issue. You want them to cry out as in James 4, "Purify your hearts, you sinners, you double-minded." You want them to beat on their breasts and say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." You want them to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Now they're ready for the gospel.

So you give them the Word about their true condition. The Spirit of God sovereignly plows the heart with the truth. All the sins dealt with, a person comes to a point where they say, "Look, I want righteousness. I want holiness. I want deliverance from sin more than anything else." Then you can say to them, "And that's available to you if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Him as Lord and you'll be saved." And then you explain how that Jesus died for their sins, rose again and God provided the satisfying sacrifice to take care of His justice and He's free to forgive the penitent believing sinner. We need to tell people that they must ask God to clean their hearts. And He will, absolutely He will.

In Hebrews 10:22 and this is a good place to stop, do you want to come to Christ? Here's what it says. You want to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, you want to come into the presence of God, then here's how you come, verse 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart, a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." So you want to come, do you? You want to come to Christ? Then you have to cry out for a cleansing...for a true and sincere heart sprinkled clean and washed. That's the issue, folks. It's about the heart.

And I grieve to say to you that so much evangelism just doesn't even address this except very superficially. You want to bring the sinner to the place where the consuming desire is for mercy and forgiveness and washing and cleansing and being made righteous. And then you can show them how that is provided for them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And God will respond, as Jeremiah said, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, I will not turn away from doing them good, I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will never depart from Me."

When a person comes with a true and a sincere heart, God will make an everlasting covenant with them. He will put His fear, His worship, love for Him in the heart and it will never go away. So, what kind of soil are you? I think you need to be sure that you know and that your own heart has been plowed deeply and there has been a true and genuine repentance and hungering after righteousness before there has been a genuine cry for forgiveness and salvation. Let's pray together.

Lord, we are ever grateful for this wondrous message. We know now why it is that people don't respond. For those who are here who have not responded to the gospel in a saving way, may either the hardness or the shallowness or the worldliness of their hearts be made clear to them and help us, Lord, to be able to observe those around us whom we love and to make a right assessment of their spiritual EKG so that we aren't under any illusions and don't perpetuate any deception. Help us, Lord, to present the gospel in its fullness even as Scripture clearly commands us to do. On the one hand, it's all about sin, and then the wonder of forgiveness. Use us as we employ the Word to plow the hearts of sinners for a saving reception of the gospel. That would be our highest and most privileged calling. May we give our lives to that end and for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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