

# 145. The Gospel of John—15:1-8

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## *“The Vine and the Branches” Part 6*

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In our study in the Gospel of John, we are currently in Chapter 15 where we have ‘camped’ on the first 8 verses to do a series we’ve entitled, *“The Vine and the Branches.”*

### **John 15:1-8 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

In this series, we have been stressing the importance of fruit-bearing in the Christian life—even as Jesus Himself did in this section of Scripture by telling us that this is how the Father is glorified—that we, as His children, bear more and more fruit.

Last time in our study we looked at—

### **1. The Nature of Spiritual Fruit**

#### **a. What Spiritual Fruit Is Not:**

- 1) Success
- 2) Emotionalism
- 3) Artificial (phony)

#### **b. What Spiritual Fruit Is:**

- 1) Christ-like character
- 2) Personal holiness
- 3) Christian giving
- 4) Christian service
- 5) Praise and thanksgiving to God

6) Winning others to Christ

## 2. The Necessities of Spiritual Fruit

### a. Good soil

This speaks of a heart that is *receptive*, a heart that *wants* to grow in the knowledge of God and bear fruit for His glory:

#### **Ezra 7:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

### b. Good seed

You might as well expect a harvest of wheat from a field sown with sand, as you could the fruits of righteousness from a heart that has not been sown with the truths of God's Word.

### c. Good cultivation

Spiritual fruit doesn't grow in our lives by chance—the soil of our hearts needs to be properly cultivated and constantly tended to.

This means to keep our hearts free from sinful desires through constant self-examination, confession and repentance.

#### **Jeremiah 4:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns.

#### **Hosea 10:12 (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

### d. Rain and sunshine

The farmer can cultivate the soil and plant the seeds—but only God can give the rain and the sunshine that actually produces the fruit.

Paul said, "*One plants another water's but God gives the increase*"—In other words, fruit is ultimately a grace gift from God.

I think *rain* and *sunshine* could represent bad times (storms) and the good times (fair weather)—and how that both of these can produce fruit in the lives of God's children. (Comment)

The Arabs have a proverb—"All sunshine makes a desert"—we need some storms (adversity) in life because it deepens our walk with God and causes us to bear more fruit for His glory.

Once again, spiritual fruit can't be manufactured through raw determination and hard work (not by the "works of the flesh")—it starts with life ("the Word of God is living and powerful") and is produced in our lives through the Holy Spirit ("the fruit of the Spirit") as we continually abide in Jesus.

Now at this point I would like you to turn to Matthew's Gospel Chapter 13—and the Parable of the Sower.

I'd like to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at this parable because, more than any other parable Jesus taught—this one gives us a look at the kind of soil that produces fruit and what kind doesn't allow for spiritual fruit to be born.

### **The Parable of the Sower Presented—verses 3-9**

#### **Matthew 13:3-9 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup>Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

As Jesus told the story of the Sower, since He was up in the Galilee which is a rich farming area—it's possible that His audience could have actually seen a man sowing seed in his field at that very moment.

In any case, the scene was familiar to them, whether they were farmers or not—a man with his seed bag slung over his shoulder as he went out to sow was a common image.

As the Sower walked up and down the furrows of his field, he sowed as he went, repeatedly reaching into his bag for a handful of seed to cast on either side.

The various kinds of ground on which the seed could fall in a field were also familiar—Jesus mentions 4 kinds of soil that the seed could potentially land on.

#### **A. The Wayside Soil**

When broadcasting seed by hand it was impossible to control accurately where all the seed fell—some seeds were bound to fall on the 'wayside soil'.

This refers primarily to the narrow paths that separated one field from another.

Farmers used these paths to walk between the fields, and travelers walked on them as they journeyed from one part of the country to another.

These paths would, of course, be untilled and packed down hard like concrete by the constant foot traffic which prevented any seeds that happened to fall on them from penetrating the soil and taking root.

Because those seeds remained lying on the surface of the ground, they were easy for the birds to get at and eat—which they did as soon as the farmer got a safe distance down the path.

## **B. The Stony Soil**

The second type of ground which Jesus said some of the seed fell upon was what He called '*stony places*'—where they did not have much depth of soil.

*Stony* does not refer to loose rocks, because the farmer always removed all rocks, sticks, and other debris from his field before sowing the seeds—but instead it refers to the underground bedrock that runs beneath the soil throughout the land of Israel.

This limestone bedrock was often buried deep underground—but every once in a while, it jutted up where it was only a few inches below the surface.

The seeds that fell on this area of ground, when they germinated, the roots began to grow *downward* but as soon as they hit the bedrock they could go no further—and so all the growing energy was directed *upward*.

Consequently, these plants would then spring up quickly and dwarf the other plants in the area giving the impression that they were healthier and hardier than the rest of the crop in other parts of the field. But as summer got closer and the sun became hotter these plants, because their roots couldn't go down very deep (they had no way of reaching down deep enough into the earth to absorb moisture)—and so they withered and died.

## **C. The Thorny Soil**

The third type of ground on which some of the seeds fell was '*thorny soil*'.

This refers to ground that had been cultivated and prepared to receive seed but hidden in the soil, unbeknownst to the farmer, were very small fibrous roots of these thorny weeds.

And once the grain began to sprout—so did the thorns.

Now plants that are indigenous to a piece of ground are much stronger than those that are introduced into the soil from an outside source, and so as you might have imagined when both began to sprout—the cultivated crop never stood a chance.

The tough, thistle-bearing weeds came up and choked out the good plants by taking most of the space, moisture, nourishment, and sunlight for themselves.

## **D. The Good Soil**

The fourth type of ground on which some of the seeds fell was '*good soil*'.

It was away from the walking path and was loose and soft.

It had sufficient depth to support the plants and it was free of weeds—because of those favorable conditions, it yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

## **The Parable of the Sower Explained (verses 18-23)**

### **Matthew 13:18-19 (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup> "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not

understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Here Jesus reveals that the “**seed**” is a metaphor for the “*word of the kingdom*” or in other words—the Gospel (in Mark’s Gospel Jesus simply said, “*The Sower sows the Word*”—Mark 4:14).

We need to understand that the life and power to bring forth fruit (life) resides in the ‘seed’ and not in the ‘Sower.’ (Finish)

The different types of “**soil**” represent the different kinds of **hearts** that the Gospel is sown into.

### **A. The Wayside Soil—Explained**

The **wayside soil** is representative of a **hard heart**.

- This is the person who hears the word of the kingdom (the Gospel) and does not understand it.
- The reason he does not understand is not due to any difficulty in the message (even a child can understand the Gospel)—but due solely to his own hardheartedness.
- He is the person often referred to in the Old Testament as “*stiff-necked and rebellious*”.
- He is unconcerned with the things of God and is often completely indifferent to anything spiritual.
- He doesn’t give the Gospel the slightest consideration, thinking it to be total foolishness.
- Because of his constant rejection of the Gospel this person’s heart becomes so hard that it is, over time—rendered impervious to the Gospel.

So, without being able to penetrate his hard heart, as soon as the Gospel is presented—the devil snatches it away.

One author said of this kind of person,

*“His lack of repentance or of any sense of guilt and shame insulates him from God’s help and leaves him utterly exposed to Satan’s attack. His heart has never been softened by remorse, never broken up by conviction of sin, never cultivated by the smallest desire for anything good, pure, and holy. [This kind of]...person is the fool who hates wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7) and who says there is no God (Psalm 14:1). He is self-sufficient, self-satisfied, and often self-righteous...”*

### **B. The Stony Soil—Explained**

#### **Matthew 13:20-21 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> “But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> “yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

The **stony soil** is analogous to a **superficial or shallow heart**.

This soil represents the man who hears the word, and “**immediately receives it with joy.**”

- In contrast to the person with the hardened, unresponsive heart—this man accepts the message of salvation with open arms and is overcome with joy and enthusiasm.
- He is certain he has found the answer to his *felt* needs!
- Because his emotional response to the Gospel is so immediate and positive—this sort of person’s “commitment” and “walk” with God grows quickly and seems to ‘dwarf’ others in the church.
- He is often more vocal in talking about his experience and may even be zealous in church attendance, Bible study, and prayer—at least for a while!

One Commentator had this to say,

*“But because the soil of his heart is shallow, he has no firm root in himself. The Gospel prompts an immediate positive reaction, but it is temporary, and all the change is on the surface, rather than in the depths of his heart. His feelings were changed but not his soul.*

*When this person hears the Gospel, it brings a religious experience, but it does not bring salvation-evidenced by the fact that when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.*

*He has come to Christ for what he thought he would get in the way of personal benefit, but when confronted with the high cost of salvation, he will not pay the price.”*

### C. The Thorny Soil—Explained

#### **Matthew 13:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

The **thorny soil** represents *the worldly heart*.

- This third kind of soil is **infested with thorns** and represents the man who hears the word of the Gospel and receives it—but his heart is too worldly for it to take root and bear the fruit of salvation.
- In other words, his so-called profession of faith isn’t genuine and so it takes a back seat to his one true love—the world and all it has to offer.
- His love for the world is just too powerful and it eventually chokes out whatever token faith he had—and he falls away from Christianity and whatever church he was attending.

Such was one of Paul’s co-laborers for the Gospel—Demas of whom Paul lamented—*“for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world”*. (2 Timothy 4:10)

There are few barriers to the Gospel greater than the love of riches in particular and of the world in general.

One author said,

*“A person who comes to church but never becomes committed to serving, who is continually preoccupied with money, career, fashions, sports, and everything but the Lord’s work is a person with a weed-infested heart”*.

#### **Luke 12:15 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

## D. The Good Soil—Explained

### Matthew 13:23 (NKJV)

<sup>23</sup> "But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

The **good soil** represents a *receptive and sincere heart*.

**The only barrier to salvation is unbelief**, and anyone who is willing to accept Jesus Christ into his or her heart (on Jesus' terms)—is good soil.

This parable is considered *controversial* as many pastors and teachers have different interpretations as to what exactly is Jesus' teaching through it.

Look, the first and last soils are easy to interpret—it is the middle two 'soils' (hearts) that present the problem.

Many interpret Jesus to be teaching that—the first soil person (hard-hearted person) remains in unbelief while the other 3 soils (hearts) represent those who received the Gospel and were saved (albeit the '*shallow soil*' and the '*thorny soil*' represent carnal Christians).

But listen, these men lived in an agrarian culture—and they knew the whole point of agriculture was fruit not *foliage*!

Furthermore, they had just gotten done hearing Jesus say earlier (Matthew 12:33)—that they would be able to determine the genuine Christian from the phony Christian by their *fruit* (only the genuine would bear true spiritual fruit).

Therefore, when they heard Jesus explain this parable—I believe they understood what He was saying.

They understood that this parable doesn't teach that 3 out of the 4 hearts get converted—one definitely does, one definitely *does not*—and the other two are counterfeits.

Counterfeit or phony Christians make up more of a segment in the church than you may realize—especially in these last days.

This is due in part to the last day's deception that Paul and others warned us about—deception that was around in Paul's day but would reach monumental proportions in these last days.

This would include those who preach *another* Jesus and a *different* (false) Gospel (cults—2 Corinthians 11:1-4; Galatians 1:6-9).

But also those who would preach a '*Gospel*' that would feed into worldly desires for material wealth while deleting the message of the cross (self-denial and sacrificial obedience to God—1 Timothy 6:3-10; 2 Timothy 4:1-5)

In Matthew 7 Jesus warned that one day these counterfeit Christians would stand before Him on the Day of Judgment, and He will say to them—"*Depart from Me I never knew you*".

But then there are those who have good and receptive hearts—like Cornelius in Acts 10.

Cornelius had a sincere and receptive heart to the things of God.

**Acts 10:1-2 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup>a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

It is interesting to see how religious a person can be and still not be saved.

My view is that Cornelius is an example of a man who lived up to the light which God gave him and while that amount of light was not sufficient to save him—God made sure he was given the additional light of the Gospel so as to be saved.

God never lets a person who wants to know Him go to hell for lack of information (the Gospel), but will somehow and someday get them the information they need.

I believe there are a lot of people in this world who are like Cornelius—they are not atheists or agnostics nor overtly wicked or immoral.

They are loving people, good parents, faithful spouses, law abiding citizens who believe in God and yet really don't understand what it means to be born of the Spirit and therefore heaven bound—and that's where we come in.

Where do you fit in this morning—what kind of soil characterizes your heart?

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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