

**Sermon title:** Are we fruitful?

**Sermon text:** Matt 13:23

## **Introduction**

A. This parable describes one aspect of the “kingdom of heaven”. The “kingdom of heaven” has an earthly setting.

B. Jesus tells of 4 different soils – these soils are only illustrative and not exhaustive.

C. Jesus provides the explanation of the parable; i.e. we don't need to guess the meaning of the parable. (Matt 13:18)

D. We measure ourselves against this parable and ask if we are fruitful.

# Symbolism

**The Sower** – Jesus Christ or the preacher

**The Seeds** – The Gospel or the Word of God

**The Bird** – The evil one

**The Soil** – We who are presented with the Gospel or the Word of God

## Sermon outline

1. Jesus tells the parable to the crowds and his disciples (Matt 13:1 – 3a)
2. Jesus explains that the parable is about the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt 13:11a)
3. Jesus uses an agricultural picture and explains the meaning of the parable (Matt 13:18 – 23)
4. There are 4 types of soil – “path”, “rocky places”, “among the thorns” and “good soil”.

**19** When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

## **Observation**

1. “path” –As people tread this path, the soil is always compacted and becomes hardened over time. Because the path is hardened, the seed (word) will not sink in.
2. This is a picture of a person with a hardened heart – a heart which not receive the good news into their hearts. There is an instant rejection whenever they hear the Gospel or the Word of God.
3. They may be present when the Gospel is proclaimed or regular at the Worship sermon, but they do not make any effort to hear or understand it.
4. The Gospel or Word of God does not enter into their hearts. Then it’s easy for the evil one to come and snatch the Gospel or Word of God away.

## **Application**

1. We regularly attend Gospel outreach services or attend Sunday sermons, yet it has no impact on our lives.
2. We hear the Gospel and immediately dismiss it as impractical.  
We hear the Word of God and immediately dismiss it as irrelevant for us but relevant for others.
3. Do we have hardened hearts? No need to look at others; no need to think that the message is for others. Rather, look into our own hearts.
4. Have we responded to God's Word? When was the last time you heard a Sunday sermon or Bible Study and decided to change/improve your personal life for the coming week?

<sup>20</sup> The seed falling on **rocky ground** refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

## Observation

1. “**rocky ground**” – this kind of soil is very shallow because there is rock underneath it. The seed falls and germinates immediately, but its roots don’t get very deep.
2. This is a picture of a person with a shallow heart – a person with only temporary growth. “tribulations and persecutions because of the Word” (the seeds) and then falls away (rejects the faith). Examples: Alexander & Hymaneus
3. The Gospel or Word of God brings no fruit in him because He does not yield to it. He has not read or studied the Word of God nor let it build his foundation.

## **Application**

1. There are people who come and attend the Gospel outreach or Sunday worship service.
2. They hear the Gospel or the Sunday sermon preached, they are initially enthused/fired up by it.
3. Then when persecutions (1 Tim 3:11 – 12; Matt 10:16 – 18), social ridicule (1 Pe 1:6 – 7; 4:4; 4:12 – 13) come, they gradually drop away. They think that the Gospel is not worth the trouble/persecution they have to endure.
4. Examine ourselves, have we failed to deepen our knowledge/understanding with constant, regular Bible study. During life's trials and tribulations, what is our response?  
Do we gradually fall away? Do we neglect Worship, Bible Study, Ministry?

**22** The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

### **Observation**

1. This is a picture of a man who has a crowded heart. He initially hears the Word, but the thorns (the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches) choke the Word of God and he is eventually unfruitful.

2. Here, the hearer allows his environment (worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth) to adversely affect his spiritual growth.

3. “worries of this life” means back-breaking sowing and harvesting activities and worry about the vagaries of weather (drought, floods, pestilence etc).

4. “wealth” – the wealthy in Jesus’ day were usually oppressors (tax collectors, religious leaders who did business in the Temple, etc ).



## Observation

5. The “worries of this life” refers to the desire for a life of ease as opposed to the back-breaking agricultural activities.
6. “wealth/riches” : the desire to be wealthy was the desire to rid themselves of oppressors.
7. Taken together, people who are striving for a life of ease simply don’t take the time or energy to commit to Jesus and participate in the kingdom of heaven.

# Application – “deceitfulness of wealth”

## 1. Deception – Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1 – 12)

- a. deliberately lying (deceiving) the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3b, 4c) by claiming to give the entire proceeds from selling their land to the church, while secretly keeping a portion for themselves
- b. deliberately deceiving others (Acts 5:2c) around their attempt to appear more generous than they truly were.

## 2. Love of the world – Demas (2 Tim 4:10)

- a. “loved this world” means love the things this world could offer (e.g. ease of life, honour etc)
- b. “deserted” : implies that Demas had not merely left Paul but had left him “in the lurch”. I.e., Demas had abandoned Paul in a time of need. The apostle was in prison, facing a death sentence, and that’s when Demas chose to set sail.
- c. Paul was deeply let down by Demas. Demas was Paul’s co-labourer (Col 4:14 and Philemon 24). Demas deserted Paul in his time of need.

# Application

## **3. Blinded by earthly wealth – Rich Young Ruler (Lk 18:22 – 24)**

- a. he was seeking the kingdom of God; he was also a Law-abiding Jew
- b. he just could not prioritize the spiritual wealth before his earthly wealth.
- c. his earthly wealth blinded him to the greater spiritual wealth.

## **4. Oppression of the vulnerable – Warning to the rich (Jas 5:1 – 6)**

- a. Your ill-gain wealth will be a witness against you (5:3b)
- b. Your hoarded wealth which were intended as payment to the poor (5:3c)
- c. You have lived a life of luxury and self-indulgence.  
You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter (5:5)

**23** But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

## **Observation**

1. Farmers call this a bumper crop. A bumper crop is plentiful and it is also uncommon. Not every harvest is a bumper crop. Therefore, not every message preached will be received.
2. This is a picture of the rare situation where a person who is fruitful.

## **Application**

- a. Let's examine ourselves today. Are we fruitful in our ministries for God?
- b. Compare ourselves a year ago, 3 years ago, any positive change for God?

# Summary

1. There is a progression of the seed taking root.
  - a. Initially, the seed does not even penetrate the soil because it is hardened.
  - b. Next, the seed does penetrate the soil, but the penetration is shallow
  - c. Later, the seed does penetrate the soil, but its growth is crowded out by the thorns
  - d. Finally, the seed does penetrate the soil and take root in good soil.
  
2. deceitfulness of wealth
  - a. Deception – Acts 5:1 – 12
  - b. Love of the world – 2 Tim 4:10
  - c. Blinded by earthly wealth – Lk 18:22 – 24
  - d. Oppression of the vulnerable – Jas 5:1 – 16
  
3. The kingdom of heaven is NOT some far away, imaginary kingdom.  
The kingdom of heaven is invisible/spiritual but is very present in our midst.
  
4. This parable is a personal challenge – are we fruitful for God?  
Let's determine to be fruitful for God this week.