

# Soil Improvement – Preparing for Fruitfulness

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- I. Introduction
  - a. Parable of Sower (Mark 4)
    - i. Three of the four types of soil were unfruitful
  - b. Key Question: What can be done if the soil is not good soil? Is it a hopeless case?
  - c. When soil is not good for planting, we improve the soil
- II. Key Thought: The hearts of men can be improved to better accept the word of God, and therefore become more fruitful
- III. Our work
  - a. There are things that we can do to improve the condition of our hearts to be fruitful for God.
  - b. Wayside (Mat 4:15)
    - i. Problem: The ground has been used for many other things than serving God, and is therefore hardened and unfit for receiving God's word
      1. Our hearts can not simultaneously be a field fruitful for God, while being a highway for the traffic of the world.
      2. And too often, it's not just a footpath, it's an interstate highway or an airplane runway for worldly thoughts and deeds
    - ii. Solution: Improve the ground by plowing and tilling
    - iii. Hos 10:12 – break up your fallow ground
      1. We are a mix of soil types
      2. Our goal is to make our whole life fruitful for God
      3. Bring it all under cultivation to be part of the garden of God
      4. Understand that this will make your heart useless for the traffic of the world
  - c. Thorny Ground (Mark 4:18-19)
    - i. Problem: Worldly riches and pursuits consume all the time and attention. The pursuit of spiritual things is choked out.
      1. Thorns and weeds are not something that you can take care of once and be done. They keep coming back, so we have to keep removing them.
      2. If God and his kingdom has to settle for second or third place in our time and affection, we will have stunted spiritual growth and little if any fruitfulness.
      3. If I have a desire for other things, I better watch out, because if I want something more than Jesus, I might just exchange Jesus for that thing
        - a. If I do that I have made a horrible exchange
        - b. With eternal consequences
    - ii. Solution: The thorns and weeds must be pulled out
    - iii. Jer. 4:3 – Get rid of the thorns BEFORE you plant the seed

1. Repentance before baptism – Conviction of sin and determination to use our time and energy for God
2. Continual repentance when a Christian
- iv. Is 5:6 – Prune it and hoe it
- d. Stony Ground (Mark 4:16-17)
  - i. Problem: A shallow faith and commitment to God
    1. The underlying attitudes must be changed
    2. Habits of thought and deed that are contrary to God's word
    3. Makes fruitfulness a steep, uphill struggle
    4. Jesus says, many give up
    5. For many others, they are satisfied with the meager harvest that a superficial faith can provide, never digging deeper to address the fundamental problems of the heart and live a half-starved spiritual life
  - ii. Solution: The rocks must be removed
  - iii. Amos 6:12 – You cannot be fruitful when the soil is full of rocks
    1. What are the underlying wrong beliefs or wrong attitudes?
    2. What habits of life represent a rocky ledge under the surface of your life, preventing a deep faith and deep relationship with God and fruitfulness for Him?
    3. We can identify our error through God's word, but identifying the problem is not the same as solving it. In Jesus day, earth that was too shallow was not used for agriculture.
    4. This is the most difficult soil to improve

#### IV. God's work

- a. There are things that God does to improve the condition of our soil so we can be fruitful for Him
- b. Wayside
  - i. Mic. 3:11-12 – God will plow
- c. Thorny ground
  - i. Heb 6:7-8 – Burning
- d. Stony ground
  - i. What man finds difficult or impossible, God specializes in
  - ii. Eze 11:17-20 – God will change the stony heart
  - iii. Eze 36:25-27
- e. Good Soil – Mark 4:20
  - i. God is not satisfied
  - ii. Pruned and fertilized – John 15:1-2
  - iii. Longing to be pruned by God to become more fruitful is part of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.
- f. SUMMARY: What God does to prepare the hearts of men for fruitfulness
  - i. Is varied - Isa 28:24ff - God does many different things to make us fruitful. He knows the human heart and how to make us pure and holy before Him.
  - ii. Is effective (Turned Saul into Paul, turned a member of Pharaoh's court into Moses, turned a shepherd boy into King David, turned the

son of a Baal worshipper into Gideon, turned what you were into what you are now (even if there is much work left to do))

- iii. Is disruptive – painful
- iv. Is more effective and less disruptive with our permission
- v. Is ongoing - When it comes to soil improvement, God is a hard worker. He does not stop until the job is done.
- vi. Does not override our free will
  - 1. Continued unfruitfulness
    - a. The barren fig tree – Luk 13:6-9
    - b. The unfruitful vineyard – Isa 5

V. The Joy of Fruitfulness

- a. Amos 9:13 – One harvest runs into another
- b. Hos 10:12 – reap steadfast love
- c. Is 55:10-13 – Instead of thorns, a cypress, seed for the sower

VI. Conclusion

- a. Are you fruitful for God? Do you want to be?
- b. Make sure your heart is right before God.
  - i. Plow up your fallow ground and get your whole life in service to God
  - ii. Pull out the thorns of worldliness and anxiety
  - iii. Dig deep to get rid of the stones that make your commitment to God shallow
  - iv. Keep sowing to the Spirit by
    - 1. Filling your ears, your heart, your mind and your lips with the words of God, the seed of the kingdom
    - 2. Allowing the word to be fruitful by living it out in your life
  - v. Allow God to do His work in making you more fruitful. Even if it is unpleasant to be pruned, plowed and fertilized
- c. If you are not a fruitful Christian, be warned
  - i. Does God view you as a rebellious vineyard?
  - ii. One on whom He has poured out a multitude of blessings
  - iii. While getting nothing in return
  - iv. If we do not produce fruit for God, we will be judged
- d. Invitation