



The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:18-23

1. Are You a Hard Soul? (verse 19).
2. Are You a Shallow Soul? (verses 20-21)
3. Are You a Crowded Soul? (verse 22)
4. Are You a Fruitful Soul? (verse 23)

I want to begin by reading the first nine verses of chapter 13,

On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matt. 13:1-9)

These words sound a bit strange to us because we live in an entirely different agricultural era. If Jesus would tell this story today to us in Illinois, He might say something more like this:

"Behold, the farmer went out to plant his corn and soybeans. He loaded up his tractor, put the seed in his planter, and drove off to his cultivated field. On his way to the field, none of his seed fell upon the road. He doesn't have any rocky soil in his field, because he has removed all of the rocks from the field. When the thorns and thistles rose up, he went through the field again with his herbicides and killed all of the weeds. One year, the rain came in abundance and flooded the field. The next year, the rain hardly came at all, and the plants were scorched by the heat. The third year, the rain came in moderation. It was a warm spring and hot summer. The corn was 'knee high by the fourth of July' and it was a bumper crop."

The point is simply this: farming is different today than it was during the time of Jesus. Jesus' description of the sower was typical of what took place in that day. Rather than a tractor, they had a big bag of seed that they would sling over their shoulders or would attach to their waist. They would reach into this bag and grab a handful of seed and fling it over the soil. They didn't have to worry about rows since they had no tractor to drive through their field. Then, after spreading the seeds, they would often try to cover them up. Sometimes they dragged branches over the soil, which acted somewhat like a rake. Sometimes they had oxen drag a log over the soil to cover up the seeds in the soil. Obviously, this method of farming was open to some inherent problems. As you walk near the beaten down path, reaching into your bag to grab some seed, some of it will naturally fall upon the path. As you scatter the seeds, some of the seeds will fly beyond where you wanted the seeds to go and will land upon the rocky soil of which there is an abundance in Israel. Weeds have always been a problem. They didn't have herbicides, but had to pull the weeds. But in the land of Israel, they were somewhat successful at farming the land that they had.

Jesus focused his attention upon why some of the seed wouldn't grow. Some of the seeds never made it to the soil. Some of the seeds made it to the soil and began to grow, but were destroyed, either through lack of root or too many weeds. And some of the seeds grew and increased a hundredfold.

Let's look at the four soils:

1. The Hard Soil (verse 4).

Look at verse 4, "as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up." Seed won't grow on the soil that is hard and packed. It can't penetrate the soil to germinate. It will remain on top of the path until it becomes bird seed.

2. The Shallow Soil (verses 5-6).

Verse 5 says, "And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil." When there is no depth of soil, plants cannot grow their roots down to get its nutrients. These plants will grow up quickly to get their nutrients. These plants do well until stress is placed upon them. Verse 6 says, "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." Plants can battle against the hot sun if they are equipped with roots that go deep into the soil, to bring up the moisture that the plant desperately needs. But, without deep roots, plants have no access to a source of water. Without water, they wither.

3. The Crowded Soil (verse 7)

Verse 7 says, "And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out." The problem with this soil isn't that it isn't fertile, like the other two types of soil. Rather, this problem is that it is too fertile. Everything grows in this soil. Seeds of any kind fall on this soil and it grows. The soil is rich. The soil is protected from the hot sun. There is a good source of water. In this soil, the thorns are more hearty than the plant can handle. The thorns take all of the nutrients from the soil. They suck all of the moisture from the soil. They get all of the sunlight. And the seed is choked out.

4. The Fruitful Soil (verse 8)

Verse 8, "And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." This soil is good. The weeds have been cultivated out of it. The sun shines upon it. The water moisturizes it. It produces a crop. Whatever grows on the other soils doesn't produce a crop. This soil produces a crop. Some plants on this soil are highly fruitful: bearing a hundred times what was planted. Some plants are less fruitful: bearing only thirty times what was planted. But, all of the plants grow in this soil.

Now, when Jesus finished telling this story, those who heard it must have thought, "I thought that Jesus was a religious teacher. But we didn't hear about religion. We just heard a lesson on agronomy." He accurately described the agricultural practices of the day. Yet, this story appeared to be irrelevant. Perhaps what was most remarkable about the story is in what Jesus didn't say. He didn't go on to explain the symbolism of the story to the multitudes. It was only afterwards, when He was alone with His disciples, that He explained to them what the parable of the sower meant (see Mark 4:10).

Last week, I tried to give you a sense of how the original hearers must have heard this parable. I told you the following story:

"There once was a very wise, gentle, and loving king, who ruled over his land with great skill. The people loved him very much. And as this king grew older, he had to determine who would rule in his place, as an honest and loving king. He had three sons from which to choose. So, he gave each of his sons a pack of flower seeds and told them that the one who grows the most beautiful flowers from these seeds will have his throne. Six months later, the king came and visited his sons to check on the progress of their flowers. Now, the first two sons had beautiful flower beds, while the third son had nothing in his plot but weeds and thistles. Yet, the king chose this child to have the throne."

After telling you the story, I left you hanging as to how this might be. On Monday I received several emails guessing why the king would give his kingdom to his flowerless son. They were right in their answer. I had several of you ask me this week, "Steve, will you tell me what the meaning of your story is?" Even my daughter, Carissa, asked me, "Dad, will you please tell me the meaning of your story?" She thinks that she has special privileges, being the daughter of the pastor. And I must admit, that she has a special place in my heart. But, I still refused to tell her. And so, according to my promise to tell you the solution to the riddle, I will tell you, because, "to you it has been granted to know the mystery of the story of the flowerless son, who became king." The king gave the kingdom to his flowerless son, because he was the only son who didn't cheat. The king had baked the seeds in an oven so they wouldn't grow, which means the first two didn't use the seeds from the packet he gave them. The king, being a righteous and honest king, wanted an honest son to rule in his place. The choice for him was easy. Without knowing that the king had baked the seeds, you were unable to determine the solution to the story. Likewise, Jesus' disciples would have felt somewhat lost in hearing the parable without having the key to unlocking the story.

Many of us have heard this parable enough and read our Bibles enough to know that "the seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11) and that "the sower sows the word" (Mark 4:14). Jesus wasn't talking about farmers. He was talking about those who share the gospel. He was talking about evangelists but was using the farmer as an illustration. The farmer reaches into his bag of seed and flings it out upon the earth; an evangelist opens his mouth to speak with others about the gospel of the grace of Christ. This is the key that unlocks the entire story. In my story the key was that the seeds were baked, and would never grow. In Jesus' story, the key is that the seed is the word of God. Don't think that the only place that the word of God is spread is in churches. It should also happen in the workplace, as you have opportunities to speak with your coworkers about Christ, perhaps over coffee during a break. This should also take place in your school, as you converse with fellow students about the differing philosophies in life. This should also take place in your neighborhood, as you talk with your neighbors about spiritual matters. This should also take place in the home, as you speak with your children about the message of the gospel. This should also take place on the playground, as children talk with other children about the things they are learning at church or AWANA.

Jesus says that each of the soils is like the souls of men. In English, it is neat how only one letter distinguishes the word for "soil" and the word for "soul." Jesus wasn't talking about S-O-I-L-S. Jesus was talking about S-O-U-L-S. Just as some soils are hard and can't grow anything, so also are there souls that are hard and don't receive the word and don't grow. Just as some soils are shallow and have no root and wither when the sun pounds on them, so also are there souls that are shallow and have no root, and falls away when affliction or persecution arises. Just as some soils are crowded by thorns and end up being choked out, so also are there souls that are so crowded with the world that God is choked out of their life. Just as some soils are fruitful and produce a great crop, so also are there souls that "receive the word implanted" (James 1:21) and produce abundant fruit from the Word of God.

We have seen the different types of soils. Let's now focus our attention upon the different types of souls. As we look at the different souls, I want you to identify yourself. I want you to identify your soul.

1. Are You a Hard Soul? (verse 19).

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road." (Matt. 13:19)

I have some seed with me in my pocket. Now suppose that I take that seed and spread it upon the ground of our auditorium, what will happen? Nothing will happen. The seed won't penetrate the ground, because it is too hard. It will only remain upon the surface. And after the service, Doug Sosnowski, our setup/cleanup chief, will come and clean the floor and put the seed into the garbage and it will eventually find

its way into a landfill someplace outside of town. This is what happens to the message of the gospel of grace when it comes upon an individual with a hard soul. The word doesn't penetrate. There is no view of the overwhelming glory of God. There is no conviction of sin. Judgment is thought to be a myth. There is no belief that Jesus' life was necessary at all!

The hard heart can be very deceitful, thinking, "Oh, I understand what Steve is saying." In fact, the hard heart might do well on a multiple choice exam with regards to the facts about the Bible, and so persuade itself that it understands the gospel. The hard heart might well say, "I know that Jesus came and died for my sin. Isn't that great!" The hard heart is a master at convincing itself that it really isn't hard at all. The hard heart will take any little evidence of spirituality and will say to itself, "See? Look there! I'm not a hard heart! I go to church each week. I sing the songs. I listen to the message. I like the people. I even have a few Christian music tapes on my shelf. I'm not a hard heart." The hard heart will take these things as proof that it isn't a hard heart, because the "heart is more deceitful than all else" (Jer. 17:9).

I believe that you can come to church week in and week out with a hard heart. I believe that you can be involved in many church activities with a hard heart. I believe that you can be a Bible scholar who teaches at universities and have a hard heart. If you doubt this, just think about the Pharisees. They were all of these things. They never missed a service in the synagogue and were diligent in their daily disciplines. Yet, we saw in our exposition of Matthew 12 how hard their hearts were.

You may have fooled yourself that your heart isn't hard. You may have fooled yourself that you have fooled others. But, it doesn't take rocket science to detect a hard heart. As I preach up here, I can see the expression on your face. There are some of you, bless your heart, who listen to the word preached with a smile and a delight on your face. There are some of you who are tracking with me all the time. There are some of you who are a bit sleepy at times, but I can tell that you are fighting it. But, there are some of you who don't like to listen to me. I can see the apathy on your face. I can see that you don't care anything about the word of God. But, it goes further than that. When you go home and live with your family in close quarters, it becomes even more obvious. The soul that never seeks out the word is hard. The soul that never speaks about the word is hard. The soul that has no affection for God is hard.

Here is the question: "When the word is sown, does it penetrate into your soul?" Has the word come into your life and changed the way that you live? We will see in the three other soils, that the word penetrates the surface of the soul and begins to sprout life. In the shallow soul, the word sprouts a joy. In the crowded soul, the word begins to grow. In the fruitful soul, the word grows to maturity and bears fruit. There is nothing wrong with the seed. There is nothing wrong with the sowing process. There is something dreadfully wrong with the soul. The soul is hard. If this is you, I plead with you that you will at least acknowledge this fact. Perhaps someday, God will change your heart. There are many who attend this church who used to have a hard heart. God is in the business of changing hard hearts into soft hearts.

In our family Bible reading, we read a portion of Scripture that demonstrates how God is in the business of changing hearts. He said concerning Israel, "I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God" (Ezekiel 11:19-20). God would take their heart of stone, which can't absorb anything, and replace it with a heart of flesh, which can absorb much truth.

If you have a hard soul this morning, cry out to God, who alone can change your heart.

2. Are You a Shallow Soul? (verses 20-21)

"And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no [firm] root in himself, but is [only] temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." (Matt. 13:20-21)

In those verses, Jesus describes the person who is confronted with the gospel, and receives it quickly and gladly. There is great joy in this individual. But as time wears on this soul becomes aware of the full implication of his newly found faith. This soul begins to realize that you can't be a drunkard and enter the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:10). This soul is later taught that those living in improper sexual relations won't enter the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9). This soul comes to know that the Christian life isn't a life of ease. Instead, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). But, this soul likes his alcohol, his girlfriend, and his life of ease and entertainment. So, with no root in himself, he falls away. He stumbles. What looked so promising at the beginning wasn't very promising at all. When this soul comes face to face with the actual cost of discipleship, he says, "I'm out of here."

The word had begun to stir in his heart. This soul knew that it needed a Savior from sin. This soul believed that Jesus could save him from his sin. This soul had great joy at the prospect of being forgiven. This soul quickly began to sprout. This soul begins attending church and Bible study. At first, everything was wonderful. But at the Bible studies, the new convert begins to realize that Jesus said that it will cost you your life to follow after me. He begins to realize that something has to give. He can't have forgiveness of sin and enjoyment of sin at the same time. He once thought that he could have his alcohol, his girlfriend, and his life of ease AND have Jesus; now he knows that he needs to choose between two masters. He chooses against Christ.

Perhaps this soul even began to make a stand for Christ. He knows that he can't join in on all of the sexual talk at work. So, he is bold and says a few things to his co-worker, "You know what guys, I don't want to hear about that stuff anymore. I'm following Jesus now." Then, the guys at work say, "Oh, look at Mr. Goodie-tooshoes now? Gotten religious huh?" Then, the talk is piled on more than ever. He faces the ridicule of a disciple of Jesus. Rather than standing firm in the persecution, he gives in. He chooses his flesh, rather than Jesus. He chooses the path of least resistance. Jesus said that "when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." What looked so attractive to him at first, took no root in his life. Everything was on the surface. There was nothing deep inside his heart.

There are many people who make a decision, but never follow through on the decisions they make. This often takes place at big crusades or big evangelistic meetings. They fill stadiums with crowds of people. Then, the message comes, "If you know that you are a sinner, get up out of your seat right now and come down to the front and come to Jesus." And in the euphoria of the moment, with others going forward, the

shallow soul stands up, comes down to the front, and prays with a counselor to receive Jesus." This soul comes home from the weekend very excited about his new-found faith. And then, Monday morning sets in at work or at school and this soul faces the realities of what it means to follow Christ. And many fall away.

Perhaps the next year it happens all over again. They attend the retreat or the crusade and come back as excited and joyful about the word as ever. Yet, within a few weeks or days, the same thing happens. They wither up and fall away. This is mountain-top Christianity. This is the Christianity that I grew up in. The conferences were great. The retreats were great. But, when it confronted the real world, the real world wins. There is great joy and excitement and enthusiasm. Emotions are great. But, ungrounded and unrooted emotions will lead to a fall out, because something more than emotions is needed to endure the afflictions and tribulations that arise when one follows Christ.

I am concerned for the church in America that this often takes place because of a faulty gospel message. The message only presents the good things of Christianity -- the blessings that come. You want a better marriage? Come to Jesus. Are you having difficulty with relationships? Come to Jesus. Are you feeling guilty? Come to Jesus. These things are true, but often the difficult things of Christianity are neglected -- the persecutions and afflictions and hatred of the world. Jesus said, "He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:38, 39). Our message should be something like that of Jesus, "You want to come to Jesus? Hate yourself, deny yourself, lose yourself, be willing to die." But when messages are preached that is only part of the message, shallow souls grab onto it. Shallow messages produce shallow souls.

This week at home, I ran into a great illustration of this. Last time we were out in California, we were flying home and the little television screens didn't work. So at the end of the flight, they gave us these \$25 discount travel certificates. They were giving them to everybody. We ended up with 11 of them. If you do the math, that comes to \$275. We were elated! We said that we would gladly endure a flight with no television in exchange for these certificates. We kept them for awhile, intending to use them later. This past week, Yvonne has been on the Internet looking for a ticket for me for January when I return to California for a week to take a class. She hasn't found a cheap fare yet. Then, she remembered these Discount Travel Certificates. To use them, we need to book our flight through United Airlines, which is more expensive than you can find through the internet, because you have the fees for the travel agent added to the price of the fare. So, we decided that we would call United Airlines and book through them in order to use the certificates. Even an expensive ticket would be reasonable with \$275 knocked off the price. But then Yvonne read the fine print on the back of the certificate. The last line of fine print on the back of the ticket said "Only one discount certificate, discount voucher or discount may be used per ticket." In reality, the discount certificate was not much of a discount at all. In fact, they were worthless to us. Too often, Christianity is presented as the front side of the Discount Travel Certificate without mentioning the fine print on the back. We didn't get what we thought we would get. When we sow the word, we need to sow the entire message. Don't sell it short. Selling it short creates short-lived, emotional converts. When they discover the truth of what the Bible says, they don't like it and take off.

Sometimes sowing even a full message can create shallow hearts. Paul was concerned that those in Thessalonica were shallow souls, though he certainly was straightforward with them of the truths of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:3-6). When Paul spent three Sabbaths in the city of Thessalonica, he saw a great revival take place there. Some of the Jews and a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks came to faith in Christ (Acts 17:4). When Paul sowed the seed, there were many in Thessalonica who sprung up immediately with joy and became zealous Christians. They were so zealous for their faith that they stirred up the Jews, who stirred up the city authorities and drove Paul out of town (Acts 17:5-9). A few weeks or months later, Paul visited Corinth wondering how exactly it was going with the Thessalonian believers. He was very worried that they were shallow souls, who would fall away when the persecution came. He had sent Timothy "to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain" (1 Thess. 3:5). Paul was worried that Satan would come and afflict them, and their shallow soul would wither up and die. But when Paul saw them endure the persecution, he rejoiced that they were good soil Christians. Later, he would write, "We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. [This is] a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering" (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5). Paul saw their endurance, and he rejoiced that they weren't shallow souls as he had feared.

Are you a shallow soul? Is your Christianity founded upon your emotions? Is your Christianity only part of the message? How well are you facing persecution? It might just be that you are backing down out there during the week, but come back each week out of habit, or because you are forced to do it. Is Christ your everything? Do you have roots to your faith? Or is it all on the surface? If this is you, pray for God to give you roots to endure the afflictions that you face. It is the testing of your faith that produces endurance (James 1:3) and demonstrates the depth of your root system. The promise of Scripture is that the one who endures tribulation successfully will receive the crown of life. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). If your soul is shallow, pray for God to change your soul.

3. Are You a Crowded Soul? (verse 22)

"And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." (Matt. 13:22)

In some ways, the problem with this soil is that it is too fertile. All types of plants have an opportunity to grow in this soil. It doesn't matter whether it is a productive plant or whether it is a weed. Everything can grow, because there are opportunities. This is the problem. When this soul hears the word, it thinks, "Now, that's interesting. I think that I'll try this church thing." They come back. They begin to attend church regularly. They get involved somewhat. But, the problem is that they have all of these other things spinning in their lives, which end up distracting them. As a result, God is not the one who gets their full attention. The world takes up their time, their heart, and their thoughts. Jesus here identifies two things that consume this soul: the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches.

a) The Worry of the World

There are plenty of things to worry about in this life. You can worry about the well-being of your children. You can worry about the prospect of your retirement, or the mortgage payment, the mounting bills, or the debts you have accumulated. You can worry about tensions in your marriage, strained relationships with others, the future of your job, your performance on the job. You can worry about the lawn that needs mowing, the snow that needs shoveling, the fence that needs building, the faucet that needs repairing. This "worry" list goes on and on.

Sometimes, we wish that we could be free from all of the cares of this world. I read this week about a man named Joe who was known by all of his friends as a worrier.

One day Bill saw his worrying friend bouncing along as happy as a man could be, whistling and humming and wearing a huge smile; he looked as if he did not have a care in the world. Bill could hardly believe his eyes, so he had to find out what had happened.

"Joe, what's happened to you?" he asked. "You don't seem worried any more."

"It's wonderful Bill, I haven't worried for several weeks now."

"That's great; how did you manage it?"

Joe explained, "I hired a man to do all of my worrying for me."

"What?"

"Right."

"Well," Bill mused, "I must say that that is a new wrinkle; tell me how much does he charge you?"

"A thousand dollars a week."

"A thousand dollars a week? How could you possibly raise a thousand dollars a week to pay him?"

Joe answered, "That's *his* worry."

(from *What do you do when you worry all the time?* by Jay Adams).

On the one hand, this may sound quite unrealistic. Yet, the Bible says that God cares for us and we ought to "cast all of your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). God doesn't charge \$1000 per week for this service. See, we all have worries and anxieties about the future. There is not a thing that I just mentioned that you don't have to be concerned about. If you own a house, you have to pay the mortgage, mow the lawn, and fix the stuff that breaks. If you are married and have children, you have to be concerned for the relationships with your wife and your children. You have to work somehow to earn a living, which means worries on the job. But, the issue is that you need to keep things in perspective. A small weed in the garden isn't the problem. It still should be plucked. But it is when the weeds grow bigger and begin sucking life out of the plant that there is a problem of life and death.

Concern and planning and foresight are not a problem. Jesus said that the man who refused to plan before building a tower was foolish, because he couldn't finish (Luke 14:28-30). We need to plan and think of the future. But, it is when your concerns for the things of this world, become so consuming that they pull you away and distract you from a whole-hearted love for God. We are called to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt. 22:37). The crowded soul will be consumed with the things of this world, and God will be neglected. God will be forgotten. Whatever life was once in the plant will die. And the plant will be unfruitful and worthless.

I want you to think about your time. Do you spend more time worrying about the future and your problems and your difficulties than you do about God? Or, is your trust in the Lord and the cares of this world are but little weeds that are easily plucked. If the worries of the world tip the scale, you might be a crowded soul.

You should take this seriously. One man called this soul, "the American soul." In America, we have so much stuff, that we have that much more to worry about. Even the poorest among us in this room have more stuff than the vast majority of the people in this world. Every time I accumulate some big object, such as a couch, a dresser, a bed, or a bike, my father usually says something to the effect, "Well, Steve, you have more burdens to care for now." With more burdens come more worries. And with more worries come less room for God.

God is often choked out in America. God is often choked out in American churches. We have it all! We want God also. But, in the mix, God gets crowded out. So, when I ask you whether or not your soul is crowded, I'm asking you a serious question.

Jesus also warns about...

b) The Deceitfulness of Riches

Riches are deceiving. They deceived the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, "What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16). He asked the right question to the right person. There is no better question than the one he asked. There is no better person to whom you could ask this question. After a bit of discussion, God incarnate told him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). This man wasn't dumb. He knew who was standing before Him. He knew Jesus as a miracle worker who was turning the religious world upside down! He knew that Jesus had answers from God. Yet, this man "went away grieved" (Matt. 19:22). I believe that this man was grieved because he wanted eternal life, but he wasn't willing to pay the price to get it. Jesus said that it would cost you everything, but this man refused. I believe that his riches deceived him. He thought it more pleasurable to keep his possessions upon the earth than it would be to give them all away and enjoy God forever.

Riches are deceiving. They have a way of making this world seem all important and the world to come seem of little importance. In Luke 12, Jesus told the story of the rich man, who had so much of the world's riches that he planned on tearing down his barns and building bigger ones to store his wealth. Then, he would be at ease. He would "eat, drink, and be merry." God said, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what You have prepared? So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20-21).

Take out a dollar bill from you pocket, and look at it. I'm not sure whether or not you have noticed this before, but George Washington has a

smirk on his face. He is known as an honest president, but he looks deceiving on the dollar bill. In fact, if you are real quiet and listen to your dollar bill, you will realize that it is speaking to you. Right now, your money is telling you some lies. Here's a list of some of the lies that you are being told....

You will be fine if you only had just a little bit more of me.
If you could get just one thing that you want, then you would be happier.
What you have now is OK, but you really need a better one.
If you have money, you should spend it.
When you have more money, you will feel better.
If you are feeling bad, then you should go buy something.
If it's on sale, you should buy it—just think of the money you will save.
Once it is paid off, it is time to get a new one.
All you need is a higher spending limit on my credit card.
All you need is another credit card.
If you can afford the monthly payment, then you should buy it now.
Maintenance of your possessions won't take much time, energy or money.
The best way to impress people is by spending money.
Your possessions show everyone who you really are.
You need to have what they have.
Bringing home a paycheck is the same as loving your family.
Having more stuff will draw your family closer together.
Having more money will make your life less complicated.
One day you will feel completely, financially secure.
When you meet your financial goals, you will have more free time.
When you get rich, then you will start being generous.
(This list came from a sermon by Steve Madsen, delivered on 11/2/03. You can find it at www.cornerstoneweb.org).

These are all lies. Don't believe them. The problem with riches is the fundamental problem that worry has. People can become so consumed with their riches, that they choke God out. Think about what takes place when a person is choking. A chunk of meat went down the windpipe instead of down to the stomach. The meat is blocking the air that needs to get into his lungs. You have to get that chunk of meat out of the way before he can breath again. So, you perform the Heimlich maneuver by going around that choking person and jerk real hard on their stomach, so that the meat can be dislodged, and so that the air can flow freely once again. You may need to do the Heimlich maneuver on your stuff to get it out of your life, so your lifeline with God can be restored.

For some of you, this may be the case: your riches are blocking your access to God. Your riches are deceiving you to focus your attention here upon the earth, and not upon God. The things around you that you can touch and feel are the things that are grabbing your attention. And God, whom you can't see, is a far distant thought. As they say, "out of sight, out of mind."

Let me ask you, Do you believe these lies? Or do you believe the word of the gospel? Do you believe that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:17). If your soul is crowded by worry and riches, and not bearing fruit, again, I beg you to pray for God's help to get your mind off of the present world and to focus it upon the riches of Jesus Christ.

4. Are You a Fruitful Soul? (verse 23)

"And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matt. 13:23)

Jesus gives us a picture here of the soul that hears the word, soaks it in, meditates upon it, understands it, and acts upon it. This is a fruitful soul. Notice that this is the only soul that produces fruit. The hard soul doesn't even begin to grow anything. The shallow soul and the crowded soul both sprout up. One withers because of lack of "root in himself." The other withers because of the pressures of the world. Yet, they both are fruitless. Jesus makes this point clear at the end of verse 22, "and it becomes unfruitful." But, the good soil produces fruit.

The question that comes up here is, "What is the fruit?" You can look up the various uses in the Bible for fruit (as I did). I found that there are three types of fruit given in the Bible.

1. There is inward fruit. This is the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in the life of a believer in Christ. Attitudes are changed. Gone is the boasting and the arguing. In comes the "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). A hateful man becomes a loving man. Grumpiness becomes joyfulness. Anxiety becomes peace and patience. A mean-spirit is transformed into a kind spirit. A liar becomes a faithful person. Harshness becomes gentleness. An angry person learns self-control.

2. There is upward fruit. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." When the word falls on good soil, praise to God will result. God has put within the soul of every believer a desire to worship Jesus Christ and see Him magnified and adored. This is what we will do for all eternity.

3. There is outward fruit. Fruit signifies spiritual influence on others. Paul said that he wanted to come to the church in Rome "that I might obtain some fruit among you" (Rom. 1:13). This could mean more converts from those in Rome. This

could mean spiritual growth from those in the church. It probably means both. It is Paul's fruit that he might obtain through his efforts in the spiritual benefit that he gives to others.

When Jesus uses this analogy of bearing fruit, I believe that He was referring to all of these. He was referring to inward fruit, upward fruit, and outward fruit. The point is simply that the word comes into the soul, germinates, grows, and continues on to maturity. The plant produces. This is all that Jesus is talking about. The word received in a fruitful soul will produce good effects. It will grow and abound and be fruitful. And it will be evident. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, "You will know them by their fruits." Jesus also said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

Does this describe your soul? Is your soul receptive to the word of God? When you hear the word of the cross, does it produce an effect in your life? When you find a quiet place at home and read your Bible, does it produce enduring fruit?

Yesterday in Men's Equippers, we looked at the core message that Paul proclaimed. Paul preached "that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). We are to bear fruit that is appropriate to repentance. John the Baptist told the Pharisees to "bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8). The Pharisees weren't bearing fruit. They had lots of activity, but no fruit. This demonstrated that they didn't have repentance.

What happens to the three types of souls (hard, shallow, crowded) that are not fruitful? The Bible says, "Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into fire" (Matt. 3:10). Luke 13 contains this similar teaching....

And [Jesus] began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.' " (Luke 13:6-9)

Perhaps God has been patient with you, waiting for fruit to come. If no fruit comes, you will be cut down. Why? You are useless to the vineyard keeper! You are dishonoring to God. This will happen to the hard soul, the shallow soul, and the crowded soul.

Suppose that you invited me over to your house one day and were very proud of the apple tree that in the back yard of your house. You love apples, and you have big plans for your apples that you are going to get out of the tree (though it hasn't started to produce any yet). You are going to eat the apples. You are going to make apple sauce. You are going to make apple pies. You are going to make taffy apples. You are going to bob for apples! You are excited about your apples, when they would come. Next summer, I visit you, and again you are still excited about your plans for your apples. You have even told me of a few more things that you are going to do with your apples. You purchased a juicer and are going to make apple juice. You purchased a slicer and you are going to have apple slices. You purchased a peeler, so you can peel your apples better. And I ask you, "So, where are your apples?" You say, "Well, they aren't any now, but they will come in next summer. And boy, will we have apples then." So, the next summer, I'm at your house. I again hear of all of your plans for apples. Since it has been several years of anticipation, you have even more plans for all of your apples. You are going to make apple bread. You are going to make apple cider. You are going to make apple strudel. You are going to make apple crisp. You are going to put your apples on your pizza. And I ask you, "So, where are your apples?" You say, "Well, they aren't any now, but they will come in next summer. And boy, will we have apples then." At this point, I might say, "Friend, you may want to call this tree an apple tree. But if it doesn't produce apples, it's not an apple tree. I don't care how excited you are about your tree. I don't care how many plans you are making with your tree. Until an apple come off of that tree, it's not an apple tree." (The seed for this story came from an illustration used by James MacDonald in a sermon on Mark 4:1-25 entitled, "The Servant Examines My Heart").

Some people can talk a lot about religion, Christianity, God and Christ. But, talk is cheap. You need to ask, "Where's the fruit?" Apple trees produce apples. Good souls produce fruit. Hard souls, shallow souls, and crowded souls are fruitless and await destruction. Which are you?

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For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
