

Many years ago, there was a commercial on TV for a hamburger chain. Three elderly ladies come up to the counter upon which sits a very large hamburger bun. It was about eight inches wide and five inches thick. The women comment on how big it is, how fluffy looking it is. Then one lifts the top half of the bun to reveal a very small hamburger, about 2 inches in diameter and maybe a half inch thick. And one of the ladies complains several times, "Where's the beef?" Some of you remember that commercial. It was so popular that the expression, "Where's the beef", came into popular use for other things that did not live up to what was expected or promised.

Today we are looking at a parable Jesus told. In it a farmer has expectations of a good crop from the seeds he is spreading. But not all the seeds land on good soil. Some seed failed to live up to the farmer's expectations.

Matthew 13:1-9 (NIV) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

Later, when they were alone, Jesus' disciples asked him why he spoke to the crowds only in parables with no explanation of what they meant. We looked at Jesus' answer last week. Today we are going to consider the meaning of this parable. Jesus explained the meaning to his disciples. He said that the four soils in the parable represent four different responses of people to the good news. It is those different responses that we will consider this morning. We begin in verse 18.

Matthew 13:18-19 (NIV) "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom (of heaven) and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The first soil type of person rejects the good news.

This first type of soil was the hardpacked dirt. It was not unusual for a community pathway to go right through the middle of a field. Instead of fields with paths going around the edges, the

path went through the field. The owner of the field knew that seed that fell on the path would not grow. So he would try to not spread any there. But inevitably some would fall there. Jesus used that hard-packed ground to serve as an illustration of people who hear the good news but do not receive it favorably.

Jesus gave two reasons they reject the good news. First, they do not understand it.

Some people have never been interested in God or religion. They never pay attention to religious teaching or preaching. They don't try to understand the good news.

A phrase we read in the Bible is "hard hearted." They have a hardened heart towards God. If they would soften their hearts towards God, he would give them understanding.

Let me share an example of a hardened heart. Some of you have been burned by salesmen or politicians often enough that you have a hard heart towards them. No matter what they are selling you are very resistant to even listening.

Well some people have that kind of attitude towards anything to do with God or religion. They feel nothing positive towards God. They are not receptive to Him. They came out to see Jesus the miracle worker, but turned their backs to him when he started teaching about the kingdom of God. Some people still respond this way to the good news. They do not understand our message and do not want to.

Such people are easy prey for the devil. **The work of the devil is the second reason they walk away from the good news.**

In the Bible, Satan is called a liar. We are not told all the ways he speaks to people. But he is a liar and uses lies to try to keep us from God. In the case of the good news, such lies can include some of the following.

"You don't need that."

"They are just after your money."

"You can get to that later."

"You already believe in God. And you are a good person. That is enough."

"You are too modern, sophisticated, and educated to believe that."

Most of you reading or watching this sermon are already Christians. Yet, we are still open being lied to by Satan. He tells lies to Christians too, lies like the following.

"You aren't good enough to be a Christian."

"After what you did, God can't love you."

"God won't forgive that sin."

"If you were really a Christian, you would never sin. So you must not be saved."

These and other lies are the stuff Satan deals in all the time. Our defense against such lies are the truths God has revealed to us in the Bible. Knowing, well, the spiritual facts revealed there we will be able to recognize and resist Satan's lies.

Now let's look at the second soil.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The second soil type of person lacks commitment to Jesus.

I saw this happen when I was in high school. A national high school ministry organization sponsored a weekly meeting at my high school. Someone I knew started attending the meetings and quickly became enamored with the whole thing. This person was bubbling over with enthusiasm about the group and Jesus. But after high school the person was no longer a disciple of Jesus.

This is a common reaction to the good news. And there are several reasons that may play into this response.

One reason is that those presenting the good news may not present it fully. They are so focused on getting people to say yes to Jesus they water down the gospel, leaving out the hard parts. Remember it is the bad news that makes the good news good. Some leave out the bad news of sin and repentance. Or they do not emphasize them. They do not emphasize turning your life over to Jesus as Lord. They may not present the cost of being a disciple of Jesus.

A second reason some have no commitment to Jesus is that they did not listen well to the good news. People have a tendency to only hear what they want to hear even if other things are being said. So when they heard the good news, they heard forgiveness of sins, but failed to hear repent of sins. They heard eternal life in heaven, but failed to hear receive Jesus as Lord. They heard fellowship of believers, but failed to hear of possible criticism or persecution from friends and family for believing the good news. And when they experience such responses from others they turn their back on the good news.

Still another reason is that some are only interested in the good news as a new, temporary fad. Such people are always looking for the next, new thing. Paul encountered such people in the city of Athens.

Acts 17:21 (NIV) All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.

Such people are early adopters. But they are also early droppers. Once the newness wears off they move on to something else.

This superficial convert to Christianity accepts the word with great enthusiasm and joy. They are like someone who falls quickly in and out of love. They love the emotional high of the new love. But such emotions always come to an end. When they do so the person starts looking for the next new thing to produce that emotional high.

When such people encounter the gospel they become the most enthusiastic church attenders, wanting to be at everything. Everyone is excited with them and marvel at the great change in them. But then we are left wondering what happened when the person suddenly stops attending. We wonder how someone could be so filled with the joy of the Lord and then walk away. This is the second soil type of person Jesus described. Now let's see the third.

Matthew 13:22 (NIV) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

The third soil type of person is a distracted follower.

Some people hear the gospel, make a profession of faith, get baptized, join the church, and are active at first. But their first love is something else. Their priority is to something else. Whatever was the focus of their life before they heard the good news soon becomes once more, the focus of their life.

Jesus says that they become wrapped up with worries and desires for the things money can buy. They have not learned to live a spiritual life. They are still focused on living a material life. And so they bear no fruit.

Let me ask you a few questions this morning.

> Have you been so worried this year that you have drifted from fellowship with Jesus?
> Have you sought solace from material/worldly comforts and luxuries this year instead of leaning more into Jesus for peace of mind?

These are characteristics of the third soil type of person.

Matthew 13:23 (NIV) But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The fourth soil type of person displays the fruit of his kingdom.

We are taught by Jesus that we cannot produce spiritual fruit in ourselves. Only he can do this. Only Jesus can produce his character, his faith, his love for others in us. But he only does so to the extent that we have put our lives in his hands to be used as he sees fit.

He leaves us with this question this morning. Is he producing spiritual fruit in you? Examine yourself for signs of neglect of faith in Jesus, obedience to Jesus. And repent.