

## KEY TO FRUITFUL REPRODUCTION

### Matthew 13:1-21

Matt. 4: "Leaving it all to follow Jesus"

–Dale Doron's thoughts concerning what it *could* mean for us!

I WALKED TODAY WHERE JESUS WALKED!

#### A LITTLE EMPTY BOAT

Recently I was walking along the beach on the shore of Galilee. Off in the distance I saw an empty boat, beached on the shore. As I neared the little boat, I noticed a single set of footprints in the sand leading up to the boat, but several sets leading away from the boat. Somehow instinctively I knew the prints leading to the abandoned boat were those of the Master Himself. Those leading away from the boat, I could only guess, that they belonged to the former owners of the small craft.

Approaching the silent scene, the Sherlock Holmes side of me kicked into high gear and I began looking for clues that might unravel the unwritten history here. O, if only the little empty boat could talk, I thought. What would it tell me about its abandoned state? Nets were draped over its sides. Fishing paraphernalia scattered along its hull. A few pieces of clothing were cast on the boat's floor. A strong fish smell still hung heavy around the bark.

I squinted my eyes as if to try to see the stage set, ready for action. I seemed to hear a faint sound of "Lights, camera, action!" Turning slightly to my right, I could see Jesus coming along the beach toward the area where I was standing. As He approached, I turned and looked back to find the beach empty. The boat was gone. The waves lapping up on the beach had taken away all the footprints I had just seen. I turned back again quickly toward Jesus and saw He was very close now and had stopped with folded arms. He, too, was squinting, looking out toward the sea's horizon. I think we both saw it about the same instant. Looking like it was coming up out of the sea itself, a little fishing boat began to appear on the horizon. With the soft orange sun behind, it became a sharp silhouette gaining in definition and size as it neared the shore.

Jesus reflected intently as he watched the fishing crew unload their catch and begin washing and repairing their nets. Soon He engaged them in conversation about spiritual fishing, about catching men not fish, about bringing them into His kingdom, not their boat, about giving life not taking life, about serving others not serving themselves. When He had planted His seed-thoughts in their minds, and watched them instantly spring into mature plants, He threw down His gauntlet: "Follow Me!" said He, "And I will make you fishers of men."

The drama of decision that took place on that sandy beach in the next few minutes defies description. In the minds of those rugged men of the sea, wheels were turning. The future of their lives were on the line. Each face was lined with seriousness that anyone could read. Some squinted, others rolled their tongues in their mouths, and some stroked their coarse beards. All struggled, grappling with the destiny of their future.

Then an amazing scene began to unfold. One by one they dropped or tossed their nets aside, or over the edge of the little boat, and moved toward Jesus. No words were spoken. But powerful conversations could be seen, yes heard, on their faces. Jesus' serious look relaxed, and a peaceful, pleasant expression swept across His countenance. Each fisherman's expression changed from contemplation to anticipation, or determination, or excitement. When the last one joined the group, without a word, Jesus turned and walked away from the boat. Immediately, all left their nets and the little boat, and clustered tightly behind the Master. Behind them in the sand were a group of footprints, leaving the little boat abandoned on the shore with their nets around, and in, and hanging over the sides.

As I looked back at the deserted fishing craft, I momentarily saw a sign leaning against the hull that read "Gone Fishing!" and under those letters, in parentheses: "(for men!)."

## A LITTLE EMPTY HOUSE

Last Sunday afternoon in Columbia City, mom and I turned and drove down Graber Court, toward the cul-de-sac. At the very end there was a little, abandoned, empty house. In the yard, a “For Sale” sign. Under those letters, “Jeanne List,” Realtor.

There were no lights on. No cars in the driveway. No sign of life. I pushed the button on the automatic garage door opener. An apologetic door slowly began to rise and revealed a few boxes of the discarded and abandoned items.

O little house on the cul-de-sac, if you could talk, what would you tell me of your deserted condition? And it seemed that the power of that thought-inquiry triggered a flow of explanation of recent events of its former occupants.

“Walls do have ears, you know,” was the little house’s engaging opener. “I’ve heard the conversations and prayers of my former residents’ talk about the possibility, and the personal cost, of going far away to fish for men for the Master. The conversations were numerous and deeply serious. Sometimes there were questions they didn’t have answers for. Other times there were doubts, and even fear. Sometimes there were hesitations and real weakness. Sometimes they just weren’t sure how it could all come together. But then there did come a time when the decision was made to go, to follow the Master and fish for men. Then there was no looking back. A long waiting period followed. After that, things did begin to gel quickly. Doors began to fly open, it seemed.”

The little abandoned house paused. sadness seemed to hang in the air. Then the house continued, “Day after day drawers and shelves were being packed. A day was set and a large sale took place. I lost a lot of my contents. Finally, a truck was backed up to my front porch and all my valuable contents were packed into the truck and the door was locked. You’ll never know my pain of rejection as that truck pulled away from my porch!”

Mom and I just sat and listened, and looked at the little empty house, and thought about what we had just heard. Then the emptiness and abandonment seemed to change slowly from what looked like a house to what looked like an altar. Around it were strewn clothes and things, and resumés, and fishing nets.

I glanced over at the “For Sale” sign, and the letters had changed. It now read: “Gone Fishing!” Underneath, in parentheses, I saw the words “(for men!).” I looked out at the yard and there were dual tire prints, heading away from the little empty house.

***If we are serious about following Jesus, it may cost us everything!***

We may have to leave it *all* to follow Him!

This week we want to continue to consider the issue of discipleship.

We’re going to consider **The Key to Fruitful Reproduction**

Most people desire to live a productive life—a meaningful satisfying life.

Our passage today shows us *how to live a productive, meaningful, life.*

**Two main presuppositions:**

1. Productive life doesn't come to us because we *WANT* a productive life.

Productive life is *result of hearing God's Word and doing what it says!*

2. Hearing/obeying God's Word flows out of the condition of our heart.

If we want a productive life we must respond appropriately to God's Word.

We respond appropriately to God's Word when *our heart* is ready to do whatever God says.

**THE CONDITION OF OUR HEART MUST BE RIGHT!**

## DIFFERENT RESPONSES PREDICTED 13:1-21 – PARABLE OF THE (SOILS)

*Acceptance or rejection isn't based on evidence but on the condition of the heart.*

### OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD'S WORD

#### WILL EITHER MAKE US OR BREAK US!

### PRESENTATION OF THE PARABLE 13:1-9 => FOUR KINDS OF SOIL

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."*

### WHAT IS DIFFERENT IN EACH CASE?

**The planter is the same!**

**The seed is the same—It's always good.**

*It always does what it's supposed to!*

The problem: **Good seed won't produce fruit in bad soil!**

### CONDITION OF THE SOIL MAKES THE DIFFERENCE!

### WHAT WAS THE FIRST KIND OF SOIL LIKE? 4

*As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.*

**Hard ground**—trampled down by the traffic.

The seed just lays there. It never penetrates.

The birds come along quickly and take it away.

An hour later, you'd never know it had been there.

**NO LIFE –NO FRUIT!!**

### WHAT WAS THE SECOND LIKE? 5-6

*Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.*

**Shallow soil**—Rocky underneath.

Barclay suggests: "Ground which was only a thin skin of earth over a shelf of limestone rock.

There was no moisture or nourishment, and the growing plant was bound to wither and die."

*Don't be deceived by this one! The soil never changed. It was always the same!*

Only thing that changes is what it *appears* the seed is going to produce.

There is a quick response. Almost too good to be true.

It looks like the real thing.

You get the impression that it looks *better* than the real thing!

It springs up quicker and looks better—at first!

The farmer rejoices because it looks like a rich crop.

The experienced sower, who knows the terrain, realizes what's beneath the surface.

*Spectators applaud because it looks real.*

*But, it's going to dry up and die!*

Why? *The soil is bad from the start.*

Sun is good for a plant if the soil contains moisture and the plant can put down roots.

Sun dries up a plant when the soil stops the plant from developing a healthy root system.

The soil never becomes life-producing.

It's all external appearance from the very beginning. Nothing has changed.

### **NO LIFE – NO FRUIT**

### **WHAT WAS THE THIRD KIND OF SOIL LIKE? 7**

*Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.*

**Weed-filled soil**     *How does it differ from the previous two?*

The soil receives the seed. The plant survives.

*There is real life here!*

However, the soil contains other stuff too; fruit is choked out!

It's real life; but it's unproductive life!

### **REAL LIFE –BUT, NO FRUIT**

### **WHAT IS THE FOURTH KIND OF SOIL? 8**

*Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*

### **GOOD SOIL!**

How does it stand out from the other three?

It's the only one that's fruitful–productive. Results are evident.

### **REAL LIFE – REAL FRUIT**

A plant born from good seed, in good soil, *WILL* produce fruit.

### **ISRAEL'S INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH 10-17**

Jesus warns all who hear the parable to pay attention.

He wants His faithful followers to understand why many reject the truth.

They're so committed to following Him, they can't believe *everybody* isn't!

So he relates the truth of the parable to *this* crowd.

*Jesus isn't impressed by the crowds.*

He tells a parable so the masses of "followers", who really aren't there to hear—who are just looking for a "show"—won't understand what He's talking about.

***You have to have an interest in hearing to think these issues through.***

They really don't care.

*If proportions are significant, only about 1 in 4 is a real hearer.*

### **EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE 18-23**

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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 his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 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. 21 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. 22 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. 23 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 proclamation of God's word will produce different results according to the condition of the heart of the hearer.

**The condition of our heart  
Determines the fruitfulness of our life!**

Those who reject Him don't do it because of lack of evidence, nor some deficiency in His message—*their heart is not willing to receive it!*

### Key elements of the story:

**The planter is the same**—our Lord uses it of Himself.

"Who" isn't important—story relates to universal principle.

**The planter => anyone who proclaims God's Word!** (Christ, others)

**The seed** is always the same => **the Word of God.**

**The soils => the condition of people's hearts.**

[The first three examples introduce . . . ]

### THREE IMPEDIMENTS TO FRUITFUL LIVING:

**1<sup>st</sup>, 18-19** 18 *"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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 his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.*

**When the Word of God can't penetrate the heart** (=hard heart)

It produces nothing. Eventually these people forget the whole thing!

Might as well hang out a sign: Not interested! Go away!

**2<sup>nd</sup>, 20-21** 20 *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. 21 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.*

**When the Word of God appears to be productive –but never takes root!**

Looks good on the outside—just as hard under the surface as #1!

Appears to have real life. *Never was good soil!*

*We've all seen it, haven't we?*

Bruce Larson: " . . . those impressionable ones who hear the word and have an instant positive response. They join all the groups, buy all the books, come to all the courses. They never miss worship." [suddenly one day you look around and notice they're gone].

"A great beginning and no finish. One of my friends in seminary was a gifted evangelist who while still in seminary converted thousands. He could preach and expound Scripture with dazzling skill. Today he is a militant unbeliever."

Cecil—the drug convert.

Ruthie—the enthusiastic youth group leader

Missionary friend sexually abusing his daughter, who later, angrily, decided to chuck it all!

Some of my most promising seminary students over the years.

*The list goes on and on . . . . It will include some of US sitting here this morning!*

For each of these, day comes when the cost becomes more than we're willing to pay!

Why them? Why not me? Am I better than they are?

Will I someday turn and go down the same path? How can I be sure?

What makes the difference? ***QUEST to hear and obey God's Word!***

***Do you want to know and do the will of God, more than anything ?!!***

**3<sup>rd</sup> Impediment to fruitful living: 22** *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.*

**When the Word of God is choked out 22**

Larson: "Sincere believers, who make a solid beginning. Then God begins to bless them. They prosper. They have children and grandchildren. They succeed in their

job, pursue hobbies, acquire land, summer homes, friends. They join clubs and receive honors. The first thing you know, all these good things choke out their primary commitment. They're too caught up in the good things of life to be concerned about the things of God."

*What might cause a person who has received the Word of God to live a fruitless (unproductive) life?* They're "choked out," by . . .

- By the worries of life!
- By the deceitfulness of wealth
- By pleasures - comfort of the good life! **Luke 8:14**

**Key to fruitful reproduction: 23** *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."*

**When the Word of God finds a receptive heart.**

The passage doesn't define what the plant produces—*But it is productive!*

Witness      Converts      Fruit of Spirit, etc.

What is different about this kind of "ground"?

**When we sow seed over and over again, we should never assume that the crowd will listen.** - *Your hearing is not my problem.*

Some of you walked in here today with **hard soil** in your hearts.

You have no intention of listening.

Satan wastes little time in whisking away what God says to you!

Others will respond at first, but eventually drop out; there's **no real life**.

Some will hear what I say, believe God's Word trust Christ, receive life; but *never start a productive life* because that life will be **choked out** by worry, pressure, pleasure, and other concerns.

Some will hear the Word, respond to it, do what God says, and your life will be **transformed** into a fruitful, faithful follower of Christ!

**How do I know that? God said it would be like that!**

So when we don't walk out of here with a transformed, productive life, I know that's just how God said it would be.

It's not my problem.

*This isn't fatalism. You can do something about it, if you want to "hear" - to know the truth and do whatever God wants. The choice is yours!*

God is only telling us how people *will* respond!

**Our attitude toward God's Word  
determines the fruitfulness of our life!**

**What does this passage teach us about our own need to hear?**

We need to examine our attitude toward God's Word.

Are we really desirous of hearing and obeying God's Word?

***That's the only way to lead a truly fruitful life!***

**What does this passage teach us about evangelism, preaching or teaching?**

Be realistic in your expectations.

Even our Lord didn't win them all!

Some will not even listen.

Some will listen, respond, and later dry up.

Some will listen, believe, but get choked out by life and its pressures.

Some will listen, believe, get turned on, and lead exciting, productive lives!

The difference is in the condition of the heart.

***What condition is our soil in this morning?***

Parable explains the different responses.

It doesn't "lock you in!"

Exhortation to hear—*WE can let God's Word do its thing in our life!*

***GOD WANTS TO TRANSFORM US—into faithful, fruitful, followers of Christ!***

*It's a matter of the heart! What do YOU want out of life?*

*Do you want to FOLLOW JESUS more than you want anything else?!!*