**The Reason** **For Unfruitfulness Matthew 13:18 – 23**

Fruitfulness in the Bible is a metaphor for productivity. When fruit tree seeds are planted in the ground they grow to become a fruit tree. But this is not where it all ends. The purpose of this tree is to yield good fruit that is edible and nourishing. When it does it is a tree that is productive. This truth applies to Christians also. When seed is sown in the heart of the Christian, he or she should at some point become productive. They are to produce fruit of Godliness. Unfortunately, there are some who are unable to produce fruit. Their lives are fruitless. Why is this so, especially considering every Christian should be producing fruit? Some people are not true Christians. They speak of God is spiritual ways but are not real Christians. Some people are carnal Christians. They are true believers but are living according to the ways of the world. But real Christians are living joyful and fruitful lives. Therefore…

**Lesson to learn from this study**: If you are to produce fruit you must soften your heart. **Hebrews 3:15 NIV** **says, *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”*** Those in the rebellion of Moses wandered and died in the wilderness. There are some who are rebelling against God and wandering. Do not be a wanderer. Draw near to God, allow the Holy Spirit to change you, and begin producing fruit.

**Background**

The background of this lesson is inspired by a question the disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 13:10. ***“Why do you speak to the people in parables?”***  Jesus answered, ***“The Kingdom has been given to you but not to them.”*** The Kingdom implies the principles and teachings that leads to eternal life. Why was this given to some and not to others? Jesus explains the illustration or parable he used earlier to make His point. There are four types of soil in this parable. The soil represents the human heart. The seed represents the Message of the Kingdom or the Word of God. The principle taught is the receptivity of the human heart. In other words, How receptive is the heart when the Word of God is spoken?

**Bible Study**

1. **The Seed Along The Path Vs. 19**

The Message of the Kingdom is preaching and teaching that explains the principles of Kingdom living. The first place the seed is sown is along the path. This is the apathetic heart. The seed is sown but it does not have a chance to develop. The reason is because the birds who represent Satan, come along and pluck it from the soil. There are some who hear the message and understand what is at the surface. But the person has no true interest in hearing it. Before it has a chance to develop, Satan snatches away the Word of God before it has an opportunity to develop. He does this through deceptive teaching, see 1 Timothy 4:1 – 4; 2 Timothy 2: 2:16 – 19. Deceptive teaching can create a greater interest because what is said appeals to the person though what is taught is false. This form of deception can lead to a heart that is hard towards the Gospel and truth from God’s Word. Satan is the God of this world, see 2 Corinthians 4:4. We can stand against his deceptive ways. To do so, we must put on the whole armor of God, see Ephesians 6:10 – 18.

1. **The Seed On Rocky Places Vs. 20 – 21**

***“The one who received the seed 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 persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”***

The next person in the parable is the person with the offended heart. This person hears the word and receives it with joy. Somewhere at sometime by someone they heard the message of salvation. They may have attended a worship service, Bible Study, or met a believer in Christ. After hearing the message, they received Christ. They may have been tired of their life’s direction and wanted a change. Or maybe they had done some things and felt shame. Regardless, they respond with a “yes” to the invitation to be saved and seemed to be sincere. But after a while things changed. Something caused the person to lose interest and the feelings fade, or the conviction leaves, and the person falls away.

**Defining Falling Away** The words “**falls away**” is used in the NIV, and “**offended**” in the KJV describe the person’s action. The Greek word to used to describe the two words is “**Skandalizo**”. The English word **“scandal”** comes from it. The English definition of scandal is a moral or illegal action that causes public disgrace or uprising. The Biblical definition is a stumbling block that causes a person to sin or fall away. So a person who is caused to sin by someone or something within themselves is a person who has been “Scandalized”. They are either offended by someone or caused to fall away from something by someone else. It is certain that the person Jesus is speaking about here has fallen away from claiming a position as a Christian. They started well but they were offended by something and fell away. So then, what made them fall away?

**The Cause For The Fall** The passage speaks of what it is: trouble or persecution because of the Word of God. When a person becomes a new Christian they are changed, see 2 Corinthians 5:17. The Lord changes us from the inside out. Yet, what he uses to change us is the truth from His Word through the Holy Spirit, see John 16:7 – 11; 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17; 2 Timothy 4:2 – 4. Hearing the message of truth can be painful, see Hebrews 4:12. For the person with a sincere heart, it is good news though painful. But for the insincere person it is a “rock of offense”, a **“Skandalizo”** see 1 Peter 2:7 – 8.The person with an offended appears to be a Christian but they are not, see 1 John 2:3 – 6, 18 – 19.

1. **The Seed Among Thorns And Thistles Vs. 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 deceitful news of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”***

There were moments when seed was sown that some of it fell on soil where thorn and thistles were located. This is the entangled heart. As plants that grew were mingled and entangled among the weeds, thorns, and thistles, so it is the entangled heart. The entangled heart hears the word. They understand it, it makes sense, it has gotten their attention, and are becoming convinced to devote themselves to Christ. But the the thorns and thistles choke it out. Thorns and thistles represents two causes that choke out the word. **1. The worries of this life.** The KJV says, “Worries of the world”. The world means “age” or “time period” within his lifespan. Therefore, the cares of the world means entanglement by worry because of certain issues in his life. One in particular is the need for food, clothes, and shelter. Often times we criticize worrying though it is a natural human emotion. When our health, family, or jobs are threatened and we fear losing them, they can make it tough remain faithful to the Lord; see John 11:21 – 27. **2.** **The deceitfulness of wealth.** There is nothing wrong with having wealth or even many material possessions, see 1 Timothy 6:17B. The problem is when we become covetous. This is an evil desire for possessions. This involves possessions of others or possessions like others. 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the Love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” An unrighteous desire for money can produce all types of evil. When this happens the seed or Word of God gets choked, suffocated, drowned or strangled and become unfruitful or mature. Every Christian should be producing fruit, see Matthew 7:15 – 20. We must keep in mind Hebrews 12:1 to help prevent us from developing an entangled heart. We must lay aside the things that easily entangle us by embracing the promises of God. When we worry He tells us to cast every care upon Him, 1 Peter 5:7. When we are tempted with covetousness we are to learn to place our hope in the Lord, learn contentment, and be generous 1 Timothy 6:6; 17 – 18.

1. **The Seed that falls on Good Ground Vs. 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 last person in the parable is the one with the good heart. The good hearted person hears the word and understands it. Understanding means that after they have heard the Word they are able to “bring together” all of the facts and make sense out of them, see Matthew 16:5 – 12. In this example, Jesus was teaching them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. After telling them the story, they understood some of the facts but not everything. Therefore they could not comprehend His message. But after he explained everything they were able to put the facts together and make sense of it. This is when Spiritual Enlightenment occurs. When a person experiences Spiritual Enlightenment, they don’t only understand some of the facts, they understand the entire message because they have been given light to make sense of it, See 1 Corinthians 2:14 – 15. This is true of the person with the Good Heart. Once they hear the Word, they are able to put all of the facts together (maybe not at once but over time) and make sense of it. They become spiritually enlightened to God’s will. Once enlightened their attitude and behavior are changed and they begin to obey God. Their obedience is seen before all people. This is descriptive of the person who has a good heart. Their spiritual enlightenment is seen before all and they produce good fruit, which is the fruit of the Spirit, and characteristics of the divine nature, see Galatians 5:16 – 22; 2 Peter 1:3 – 7.

**Conclusion**

There three principles to apply in this lesson. Firstly, The unbelieving person has a hard heart. They lack the ability to understand or make sense of all of the facts pertaining to the Gospel. They may be a good person according to the world’s standards but their lack of understanding makes it impossible for them to produce fruit. Secondly, the Christian can also have a hard heart when they are carnal. To be carnal means to be worldly. It is to be a Christian but behave like someone who is not saved. The reason for this is they too do not understand certain spiritual truths because they are not maturing, see Hebrews 5:11 – 14. Lastly, when a person becomes a Christian they will produce fruit, see John 15:16. This is not a theory nor hypothesis, but a fact. When a person becomes a Christian they will experience a transformation process, see 2 Corinthians 5:17. They will be gradually changed from the attitudes and practices of the old person they once were and will be renewed in Christ. So if you are not producing fruit you must ask yourself one of the two questions: Am I really a Christian? Or, If I am a Christian, am I producing fruit? If you are not a Christian, you must believe that Jesus Christ died for your sin and by believing you will be saved. Then join a local church where you can grow. If you are a Christian, you must continue to mature. You must commit yourself to the disciplines that will help you to be obedient to God’s will. It is His will for you to join a local church, be taught by a qualified pastor, be encouraged through the fellowship with other believers, use your gifts for service others, and share what God is doing in you with others. If you do these things you will begin to grow, you will begin to produce fruit.