

WHY SOME CHRISTIANS AREN'T FRUITFUL

Mark 4:1-20

Parable – Week 1

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Take your Bible and turn to Mark 4.
2. The word “fruit” has been used in a number of ways over the years that have nothing to do with actual fruit.
 - i. There’s a chewing gum called “Juicy Fruit.”
 - ii. There’s a snow cone flavor called “Tutti Frutti.”
 - iii. There’s are breakfast cereals called “Fruity Pebbles” and “Fruit Loops.”
 - iv. There’s an underwear brand called “Fruit of the Loom.”
 - v. Beans are called the musical fruit, because the more you eat the more you....
 - vi. “Fruit” also used to be a term for a gay man. “He’s a fruit.” That’s why California is called “The Land of Fruits and Nuts.”
3. Today we are going to look at what the Bible says about fruit, because while God doesn’t want you to be fruity, He does want you to be fruitful.
 - i. **John 15:6** “You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain....”
4. The Bible says that being fruitful is the way to glorify God, and the way to prove be a true Christian.
 - i. **John 15:8** “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”
5. What does it mean to be fruitful? Fruit refers to Christlike character, good deeds, and spiritual influence.
 - i. **Galatians 5:22-23** “22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control.”
 1. Here we see that fruit refers to Christlike character.
 2. To be a fruitful Christian is to act like Jesus in your character, conduct, and convictions.
 - ii. **Colossians 1:10** “so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God”
 1. Here we see that fruit refers to good works.
 2. What is a good work? A good work is an act of kindness that helps others and glorifies God.
 3. A fruitful Christian lives a lifestyle of good works. They are always doing acts of kindness, loving on people, helping people, caring for people, serving people in a way that helps others and glorifies God.
 - iii. **Romans 1:13** “... I often planned to come to you... in order that I might have a fruitful ministry among you....”

1. Paul was writing to the church in Rome about his desire to visit them so that he could have a fruitful ministry among them. In other words, he wanted to influence and impact them spiritually. He wanted to encourage them grow in Christ.
2. A fruitful Christian has a spiritual impact on others – encouraging believers to grow, and nonbelievers to believe.
- iv. So a fruitful Christian is one who has Christlike character, does good deeds, and has spiritual influence on others.
6. So, how can you be more fruitful? Today we are going to look at a passage that answers that question. We are going to look at a passage that will tell us how to be fruitful Christians.
7. Today we are starting a new sermon series called “Parable.”
 - i. When Jesus taught, He often told parables, or stories.
 - ii. What is a parable? A parable is an earthly story about heavenly realities. It is a story that uses something familiar – like farming – to explain something unfamiliar.
 - iii. Today we are going to look “The Parable of the Sower.”
 - iv. Matthew says this is the first parable that Jesus ever told.
 - v. We know it is an important parable because it is found in all three of the synoptic gospels.
 - vi. The NLT calls it “The Parable of the Farmer Scattering Seed.” That’s helpful, because that’s what a sower is – a farmer.
 - vii. The good thing about this parable is that Jesus explains it. Often with Jesus’ parables you have to sit and chew on it a while to figure out what it means, but after He told this parable, He explained it.
 - viii. In Mark 4:3-9, Jesus tells the parable. And then in He explains it Mark 4:14-20.
 - ix. Let’s begin with the parable.

II. TEXT:

1. **Mark 4:3-9** *3 “Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. 4 As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn’t deep. 6 When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn’t produce fruit. 8 Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times.” 9 Then he said, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”*
2. What’s going on here? The farmer planted the same seed on four different types of soil, but only one of them produced fruit. We can conclude then that the size of the harvest depends on the condition of the soil.

3. What does that have to do with you? As we study Christ's explanation of the passage, we can start to put things together:
 - i. The sower (or farmer) is God, or Jesus, or someone who is sharing God's word with you.
 - ii. The seed is God's word – the Bible.
 - iii. The different soils refer to different types of people. The first three soils don't produce fruit, but the fourth soil produces much fruit.
 - iv. As we look more closely at the different soils, we can learn why some Christians aren't fruitful.

III. THREE REASONS CHRISTIANS AREN'T FRUITFUL

1. They aren't receptive to God's word.

- i. The first type of soil is presented in **Mark 4:4**. "As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it."
- ii. It is the footpath. A farmer back then would plant seed by hand by tossing it, and some would inevitably fall on the footpath beside the field.
- iii. In **Mark 4:15** Jesus explained the meaning of the birds. "When they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word sown in them."
- iv. It may appear like the reason that this soil doesn't produce fruit is because Satan, like the birds, comes and takes away the word. So, it must be Satan's fault that some people don't produce fruit. But that's not what's happening here.
- v. If you look close, you can see that the first type of soil is the footpath. A footpath is hard and compact – so hard that the seed can't penetrate it. The reason why the birds eat the seeds on the footpath is because it is too hard for the seed to penetrate it.
- vi. The reason that some Christians aren't fruitful is because their hearts, like the footpath, are hard and closed toward God's word; they aren't receptive to God's word. Their mind is shut. Talking to them about God's word is like talking to a brick wall.
- vii. The reason that the devil can take away the word that some people hear is because their hearts are hard and unreceptive.
- viii. Now, if you contrast this first soil with the fourth soil, the good soil, the soil that produces much fruit, the key reason is because it was receptive to God's word.
- ix. **Mark 4:20** "And those like seed sown on good ground hear the word, welcome it, and produce fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown."
- x. The first reason that some Christians aren't fruitful is because they aren't receptive to God's word.
- xi. To be a fruitful Christian, you must have the right attitude, the right perspective, the right relationship with God's word.

xii. So, **how should you view the Bible?**

1. The Bible is God's word, so believe it.

- a. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."
- b. Notice that all Scripture is "inspired by God." In other words, God is the author of the Bible. He used different men to write it down, but He is the author. This is His book.
- c. Notice that "all" Scripture is inspired by God. Every single word in the Bible was authored by God. Not some of the words. Every single word. Every single book, chapter, and verse.
- d. What do we know about God? He does not lie; He does not lie, and He doesn't make mistakes. So, if every single word in the Bible was authored by God, and He does not lie, the every single word in the Bible is true. The Bible is truth, without any mixture of error. It is inspired, and it is inerrant.
- e. The Bible is true when it talks the creation of the world in six, literal, twenty-four hour days. The Bible is true when it talk about the origin of life, and how God created each animal according to its kind. The Bible true when it says that God created the first man from the dust of the ground, and the first woman from the rib of man. The Bible is true when it says that Adam and Even were tempted by a talking snake. The Bible is true when it says that God destroyed the human race with a global flood and started over with Noah and his family. The Bible is true when it says that there is only one God, and only one Savior. The Bible is true in what it says about marriage, and money, and morality, and sex. Believe it. Believe all of it.

2. The Bible is God's window, so look through it.

- a. Where do you go if you want to learn about God?
- b. God has revealed Himself to us through two books.
 - i. The book of nature. You can learn a lot about God just by looking at His creation. You can learn that there is a God, that He is super-intelligent, all-powerful, creative, etc. But there's only so much you can learn about God through nature. Thankfully He has given us a second book.

- ii. The book of Scripture. The Bible is God’s self-revelation. It tells us who God is.
- c. For example, look at just this one passage in the Bible in which God told Moses about Himself.
- d. **Exodus 34:6-7** 6 The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed: The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, 7 maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.
- e. You can learn so much about God from just that one passage of Scripture. But the Bible is filled with passages just like this one that tell us all about God.
- f. The Bible is God’s window. If you want to learn about God, read the Bible. It tells you everything you need to know about God.

3. The Bible is God’s will, so obey it.

- a. The Bible is not just a book to believe; it is a book to obey. It isn’t just a bunch of facts to know, or a bunch of doctrines to learn. It is filled with commands to obey. The Bible doesn’t just tell us who God is, it tells us what God wants. It tells us God’s will.
- b. **Deuteronomy 8:1** “Carefully follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and take possession of the land the Lord swore to your fathers.”
- c. The Bible tells you God’s will for your words, your relationships, your sexuality, your money, your attitude – for all of life. Obey it.

4. The Bible is God’s wisdom, so study it.

- a. One of the best chapters in the Bible that explains what the Bible is is Psalm 19.
- b. **Psalm 19:7-10**
 7 The instruction of the LORD is perfect,
 renewing one’s life;
 the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
 making the inexperienced wise.
 8 The precepts of the LORD are right,
 making the heart glad;

the command of the LORD is radiant,
making the eyes light up.
9 The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are reliable
and altogether righteous.
10 They are more desirable than gold—
than an abundance of pure gold;
and sweeter than honey
dripping from a honeycomb.

- c. This passage says that if you want to get the most out of life, to live the best life, to live a happy, success, fulfilling, and satisfying life, then you need to study your Bible.
- d. The Bible tells you how to succeed in every area of life – finances, family, marriage, parenting, relationships, friendships, sexuality, government, morality, etc.

5. The Bible is God’s weapon, so wield it.

- a. The Bible says you have an enemy named Satan who is trying to take you down. He is trying to prevent you from living a fruitful life. And his primary weapon is to lie to you. If he can get you to believe a lie, then he can prevent you from being fruitful. If he can convince you that...
 - i. God doesn’t love you,
 - ii. God won’t take care of you,
 - iii. The Bible can’t be trusted,
 - iv. Sin isn’t dangerous,
 - v. Obedience will make you miserable,
 - vi. Then he has defeated you.
- b. But God has given you a weapon to defeat Satan.
- c. **Ephesians 6:17** “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.”
- d. God’s weapon for you is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, the Bible – God’s truth. As long as you study and arm yourself with the truth of the Bible, the devil can’t deceive you. His lies are impotent against you.
- e. Before Jesus began His ministry, the devil tempted Him in the desert three times. Every single time, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. The Bible is God’s weapon, so wield it.

6. The Bible is God’s wonder bread, so feast on it.

- a. **1 Peter 2:2** “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation”

- b. The Bible is your spiritual food. If you want to grow up in Christ, read the Bible. If you want to build up strong spiritual muscles of faith and love and hope, read your Bible. If you want to grow more useful to God, read your Bible. You want to have more spiritual influence and make a bigger impact on others, feast on God's word.
- xiii. The first reason some Christians aren't fruitful is that they aren't receptive to God's word. They either don't believe it, or they don't read it and study it. If you want to be fruitful, read it, believe it, and obey it.
- xiv. Let's look at the second reason Christians aren't fruitful.

2. They aren't resilient in the face of adversity.

- i. Jesus described the second type of soil in **Mark 4:5**, where he described it as "rocky ground."
- ii. What happened to it?
- iii. **Mark 4:5** Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly, since the soil wasn't deep. 6 When the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.
- iv. Jesus explained in **Mark 4:16-17**. 16 And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. 17 But they have no root; they are short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately fall away.
- v. The rocky soil has to do with adversity, trials, suffering, affliction.
- vi. It refers to Christians who aren't fruitful because they aren't resilient in the face in adversity. When they go through hard times, they crumble.
- vii. Some Christians are great at following Jesus when life is good, but when life is bad, when things go south...
 - 1. They try to comfort themselves with sin or other unhealthy behaviors.
 - 2. They look outside of God's will for a solution.
 - 3. They doubt God's love.
 - 4. They doubt God's word.
 - 5. They get angry with God.
 - 6. They drown in depression.
 - 7. They drop out of church.
 - 8. They get mean and take it out on others.
- viii. You can't be a fruitful Christian if you can't handle adversity, because adversity is a regular part of life. Not constant, but regular. Life moves in seasons. Winter represents adversity. Your life won't be a constant winter, but winter will come regularly. If you can't handle adversity, you can't be a fruitful Christian.
- ix. The Bible tells us how to handle adversity:

1. **Expect adversity.** God doesn't promise that if you have enough faith and obedience, that He will keep you out of trouble. That is not in the Bible. Both Christians and non-Christians face difficult times. Many Christians struggle with adversity because they assumed that as their devotion increased, their troubles would decrease. "I've been tithing for six months, and now my air conditioner breaks." "I've been going to church every Sunday, and I just got laid off." "I've been working so hard to be obedient to God, and I just found out I have cancer." And they think God has let them down. That's not true. Expect adversity. It's a part of life.
2. **Endure adversity.** Understand how God wants you respond to adversity. Adversity is not an excuse to compromise. It is not an excuse to sin. The Bible tells us how to handle adversity. **Romans 12:12 (NET)** "Rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, persist in prayer." Endure. In Greek it is a compound word that means to remain under. It means to remain faithful under suffering. When you go through hard times, God wants you to keep obeying, keep praying, keep believing, keep serving.
3. **Reach out to Jesus for help.** **Philippians 4:4-7** "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Sometimes God wants to get you out of trouble, and sometimes He wants to give you strength and wisdom to endure it. The way to receive His help is to pray. If you don't ask, He won't help.
4. **Give praise and thanks to God.** **Philippians 4:4** "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" **1 Thessalonians 5:17** "Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Even though you are going through hard times, keep praising and thanking God. Praise will remind you that God is bigger than your problems, and thanksgiving will remind you that as bad as it is, you still have it better than you deserve. Praise and thanksgiving will keep you from sinking into depression.
5. **Ask other believers for help.** **Galatians 6:2** "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The word for "burden" here is a crushing weight that cannot be carried alone. God did not create you to handle your problems all by yourself. He will give you problems that you cannot get through without Him, and without other Christians. When you go through hard times, don't isolate yourself, don't drop out of church, and don't be secretive. Ask other believers for help. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

When you don't ask for help, you deprive other believers of the blessing of helping you.

6. **Trust in God to work it out. Romans 8:28** "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." This verse teaches two truths you must believe when you go through hard times. First, nothing can happen to you unless God allows it. And second, if He allows it, He will use it for His glory and your good.

x. So, the second reason that Christians aren't fruitful is that they aren't resilient in the face of adversity. If you crumble every time you face hard times, you can't be a fruitful Christian. Now let's look at the third reason for barren Christianity.

3. They aren't resistant to worldliness.

- i. The third kind of fruitless soil is described in verse 7 as having thorns.
- ii. **Mark 4:7** "Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it didn't produce fruit."
- iii. What do the thorns represent? Jesus tells us in verses 18-19.
- iv. **Mark 4:18-19** 18 Others are like seed sown among thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.
- v. The thorns represent the worries of this age, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things. In other words, worldliness.
- vi. The reason some Christians are barren is because they are worldly.
- vii. The Bible says that Christians must not be conformed to the world (Rm 12:2); they must not love the world or be friends with the world (1 Jn 2:15-16; Jas 4:4).
- viii. The Reformer Martin Luther said that the Christians three main obstacles are the flesh, the devil, and the world.
- ix. What does it mean to be worldly?
- x. The Bible describes the world in 1 John 2:15-16 (NIV) with three terms:
 1. The lust of the flesh: The desire for pleasure.
 2. The lust of the eyes: The desire for possessions.
 3. The pride of life: The desire for position and praise.
- xi. The things of this world are not evil. Pleasure is not evil. Possessions and money are not evil. Position and praise are not evil. But worldliness is when you put the things of this world before the things of God. When your love and desire and pursuit of the world trump you love, desire, and pursuit of God. Worldliness is a preoccupation with the world. Worldliness is when you focus on the temporal at the expense of the eternal. It's when you pursue

material things at the expense of spiritual things. Worldliness is when you love the world more than God.

- xii. **William Barclay** says, “This [the thorny soil] stands for the life so crowded with other things that Christ gets crowded out... This is a warning that life must not be so full of other interests that the main interest is neglected.” *The Parables of Jesus*, 23
- xiii. When you become worldly, you can’t produce fruit because your love of the world crowds out your love for God and your love for others.
- xiv. You must beware of worldliness.
- xv. How can you overcome worldliness? One thing you can do is learn to detect the signs that you are worldly, or becoming more worldly.
- xvi. How can you tell if you have become a worldly Christian? I’ll give you eight signs that you may be worldly.
 - 1. You are no different than nonbelievers. Unbelievers, in general, are worldly. They are not running after God; they are running after the world. They don’t love God; they love the world. As a Christian you should be different from nonbelievers. You should be different in the way you talk, in the way you spend your money, in your goals and dreams, in the way you act at work, in the way you act at school, in the way you treat your spouse, in the way you raise your kids, in the way you treat your parents, in the way that you date, etc. If you values and interests and behaviors and pursuits are the same as nonbelievers, then you are probably worldly.
 - 2. You are too busy for the things of God. You are too busy to attend church; to serve in church; to build relationships in church; to have a daily quiet time; to read your Bible; to pray.
 - 3. As your income increases, so does your spending, but not your giving. I once heard someone say that greed is the assumption that the extra is for your consumption. It’s the assumption that when God blesses you with more, it’s so that you can use for yourself instead of giving it to others.
 - 4. You are more impressed with people of wealth and talent than people of character and faith. Who are your heroes? Who are do you most admire? Is it people of deep faith and character, or people who are rich, people who can sing really well, people who are really good at pretending (actors)?
 - 5. You are deeply concerned about how you look, and about what people think about you. You pay careful attention to styles and trends. Image and reputation are very important.

6. You keep going back to your pet sins – drugs and alcohol, sexual sin, unhealthy eating. You are so addicted to physical pleasure that you can't make a permanent break from your bad habits.
 7. You require the things of this world to be happy. Your emotions are closely tied to your possessions. God is not enough.
 8. Your self-worth (how you feel about yourself) depends on your physical appearance, your net-worth, or your achievements – rather than your relationship with God.
- xvii. There's a story about Mithridates, the King of Pontus (modern Turkey) in the first century BC. When the Romans defeated him in battle and were pursuing him, he scattered a large amount of silver and gold in the road. The Roman soldiers focused on gathering the money and forgot all about Mithridates, and he got away. That's what often happens to Christians as they are running after Christ. The devil puts the things of this world in their path and they get distracted. They focus on accumulating and enjoying the things of the world, and they forget about the things of God – the things of eternal significance.
- xviii. If you want to be a fruitful Christian, you must avoid worldliness. Don't be conformed to the world. Don't love the world. Don't be friends with the world.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. God wants you to be a fruitful Christian, to produce much fruit – to be Christlike, to do good deeds, to have spiritual influence on others. But to be fruitful you have to do three things:
 - i. Be receptive to God's word.
 - ii. Be resilient in the face of adversity.
 - iii. Be resistant to worldliness.