



Ears Up-Part 5

The Hard Work of Fruitful Hearing

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Good to see you. Grab your Bibles. Turn with me to Luke chapter eight.

As we finish up this interpretation from Christ on the four soils, this is one of the most familiar parables of Christ that even people outside the church are familiar with—four soils, which of course is analogous to four kinds or categories of people who encounter the truth of the Bible. And we watch the response of these four people that Jesus analogizes with these four kinds of soils.

Now, if you're a farmer, the only one that really matters is the one producing fruit. Don't care about the other three—they are not useful, they're not productive, they're not good, you do not value them. You care about the fourth soil. Fourth soil, of course, is representative of people that are really Christians who hear the truth, they respond to it rightly. And that's who you want to be. Those are the Christians.

Think about this. Now they're forgiven. They're reconciled and right and have a genuine relationship with their Creator. They are people secured with God to have an inheritance when they die. They are never to bear the shame and guilt of their sin. And I mean that—if you have a preference, I want to be in group number four, category four. That's where I'd like to be, where you'd like to be, am I right?

The odds aren't good. That made you look up—the odds aren't good. Well, statistically, just think it through. We just take these as equally proportioned: you've got 25% that hear it, don't really care; it goes in one ear and out the other—to cross our metaphor here for a second—and they hear it, they don't really hear it, and they don't care. You've got 75% now, think about it, who accept the message—at least at some level—they have some acceptance and response, or they agree with the facts, or they assent to the reality, some more so, some less. But 75% that get it, and yet in reality, 50% of the total—they're not really Christians. They're not forgiven, they don't have a real relationship with their Creator. They are not people that have a secured inheritance, they are not people that will be free from the burden of shame and guilt when they die. That's 50%—a lot of deceived people in that group. Only 25% have this right.



Now, of course, I'm just assuming here—taking a little license—that I'm proportionally laying these out equally. But it's not far from American statistics in religion today. On the latest polls on American religious belief, is it 24% of Americans don't really know what's going to happen when they die? They have no real firm opinion on it. They're not really sure. Do you live when you die? Not sure. I think so. I hope so. I don't know what's gonna happen—don't really care. It's like a lot of people. In a book I was reading this morning, we don't want to think about it. We're not interested. For them, the paradigm of heaven and hell they're not interested in; they don't think about it, they put it off, they care not to think about their own mortality.

Seventy-one percent in the most recent poll—on this incredible poll—at least 71% believe there's not only heaven, there's also a hell, and that when you die, 71% of Americans now believe you're gonna go to one place or another. Now think about that. They get that grid—that framework—from the Bible. So they're embracing at least the fundamental facts of what the Bible teaches: that there's an end of this life, you face another life, and you go to one of two places. And if you ask them, "Are you going to The Good Place or the bad place?" You know the stats on that, don't you? What do you think out of that 75%? 99.5% say, "Well, I'm going to heaven." And that's what most people think, right?

You don't go to funerals and say, "Well, really sad as we start this funeral, isn't it, that Charlie's in hell right now? It's a real bummer. I wish we had better news for you, but he's lost." I don't care what kind of scoundrel—you're going to his funeral, he's in heaven. He's playing golf. He's hanging out with God. He's singing songs, whatever. That's what we hear because everyone wants to think that they and their friends are going to be in heaven. It's only one half of 1% that think, "Well, I think I'm going to hell," and that—I'm assuming you just got them on a bad day. Ask them tomorrow. It must have been a Wednesday—Thursday, they're fine. "I'm going to heaven."

So out of that 71% of Americans that believe there's a heaven and hell, most of them think they're going to heaven. But what would the reality be? Really—what would the reality be? How many of those people, when they die, will truly be accepted, have their sins forgiven, have a real relationship with their Creator, and be what we call in the Bible "Christians"? Well, if you ask Jesus, he's always talking about "not many." Remember that line from the Sermon on the Mount, chapter seven? He keeps talking about narrow roads and small gates, and "few are those who enter by it." I mean, it's a small group.

We'll see this in Luke. As we continue our study of Luke, we will see that that teaching was so ubiquitous in Jesus's mouth that the disciples at one point said—here's the line from Luke 13:23—"Lord, will those who are saved be only a few?" And his response is not, "No, no, everybody makes it.



Most people make it.” No, no—you’re right. He says, “Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for there will be many who want to enter by it—they try, they seek to enter—but they won’t be able to.”

Now, that’s a sobering way to start a Sunday morning sermon. But I mean, we’re in serious territory this morning when we get to verse 15 in Luke chapter eight, because we’re talking about the only category of people in the analogy for the farmer and an agrarian society—the only soil that matters: the one that bears fruit; the one that is analogous to people that are genuinely right with God. That’s the only one that matters. So we’d better define—there could be very few things that are more important than defining this in terms that we can ingest and understand—and say, “I’m going to make sure I’m a part of that fourth soil. I don’t want to be a part of the second and third soil because they think they’re in with God, but they’re not. I want to make sure I’m in the fourth soil.”

That’s been a lot of what the series has been about. We’ve taken a week for each soil, as you know, and we’ve been saying in soil number two and soil number three, “Make sure you’re not in that soil category—make sure you’re not in that category.” Well, today I want to look at the description of Christ in verse 15 and say, let’s make sure we’re in that category. Christ’s description. Let’s look at it. And for the sake of context, let’s start in verse 11 and just kind of reread the whole interpretation.

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

“Verse 12: The ones along the path—that’s category number one—those are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Don’t want to be in that category.

“Verse 13: And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy—they’re into it, they buy the framework, the grid, they like it—but they have no root. They, quote-unquote, ‘believe’ for a while.” It’s not the kind of enduring belief that we’re going to see in the fourth soil; not the kind of real saving faith we learned about in James chapter two—it’s some other kind of faith. It’s the kind of faith that in a time of testing—it’s gone. They fall away.

“Verse 14: As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear; as they go on their way”—we looked at this last time—“they’re choked by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature,” and the farmer is not real keen on that.



“Verse 15: Today’s text—one verse. ‘As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.’”

So short—look at it again: “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

Now, if you read that text with any breadth of understanding with the rest of the Bible, it confronts you immediately with a theological mystery: these are people with an honest and good heart. Now, if you pulled out your worksheet yet—or you got it digitally on your iPad, or however you get our worksheet—you’ll see that I’ve laid out four elements to this sermon, four descriptions in this text. And I’ve got 15b, 15a, 15c, and 15d—point 1: 15b; point 2: 15a; point 3: 15c; point 4: 15d. And you’re going, “There he goes again; he can’t keep it straight. He’s taking it all out of order again.” And I must admit, sometimes homiletically, for the sake of the presentation of the truth of the text, sometimes we will rearrange things for logical reasons. And we’ll put the last first, or the middle last, or whatever—and you’re used to the craziness from the bulletin. But don’t say “Here he goes again,” because this time it’s not me that’s out of order—it’s you.

How can that be? Because you do know the New Testament was not written in English. And you’ve been around long enough to know in church that the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written is a kind of language that is so inflected—the endings and the prefixes on those words tell what role it serves in the sentence—that they can be rearranged in the sentence, usually for the sake of emphasis. And the word order doesn’t matter as much as the endings on the words. So the word order becomes important in terms of presentation.

Now, here’s the thing. In English, in the ESV—if you’re reading the ESV—it starts by describing the fourth soil this way: “As for that in the good soil, they are those who”—first thing we hear is they’re “hearing the word and holding it fast in an honest and good heart.” That’s not the way the Greek sentence reads. Some of you with your Bible software—you see that what you see in interlinear is it starts with “the honest and good heart.” So you could read it this way—we want to use the emphasis of the original language: “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, in an honest and good heart, hearing the word, hold it fast; bear fruit with patience.” Since it’s initially put first—and since that really is the first thing we need to consider, the theological mystery of people that encounter the word with an honest and good heart—I want to start there. That’s a good place to start.



Before we fill in the point number one, let's think about why that's a theological mystery. You don't have to go to too many Sunday school classes to figure out what the Bible says about the human heart: it isn't that it's honest and good. You've noticed that—you start, you know, learning verses in the book of Romans and you find things about us being all sinners. Matter of fact, the first three chapters of Romans is trying to make that case with people that are good at lateral comparisons—"I'm better than this guy. Look at us—we have the law; those people don't, they're pagans out in the bush, they don't know anything about God." And at the end of the book—here's the summary right at the end of all of this argument in the first three chapters of Romans—he says this: "What then, are the Jews any better off than the Gentiles? Not at all. For we've already charged that all people—both Jews and Greeks—are all under sin, as it is written..." Now notice carefully: "None is righteous." Most of them are not? Now correct me if I read this wrong. Is that what it says? "None are righteous—no, not one." Well, huh. "No one understands; no one seeks after God. They've all turned aside; together they've become worthless; no one does good—not even one." We get it. No one's good. Calls them liars, deceivers, everything else.

Who are the people that respond rightly to the gospel? Well, according to this text, the first thing we encounter—in the Greek language at least—is that they have an honest and good heart. And it's worse than that, because the word that translates "honest" is usually not translated "honest." Now, I don't want to give you too much language—it's important for us to realize: if you looked at this text and you saw these two words, and you looked through your lexicon—your dictionary of the Greek language—to find out what word it translates into, you'd find for the first word *kolos*, you'd find it would be translated "good." It's used over 102 times in the New Testament, and it translates "good" most of those times, because that's the primary definition. The second word *agathos*—which some of you may say, "That sounds familiar"—*agathos* also is used just over 100 times in the New Testament, and it is translated primarily "good." Matter of fact, the average person would see this as really tight synonyms in the first century, and they would read it like this: "As for that in the good soil—those with a good and good heart—*kolos* and *agathos*."

If you had to make a distinction between those two words—maybe you've heard this if you've been around all your life in church—*kolos* in secular Greek language and literature is often referring to something that is beautiful or handsome. Your first encounter with it—like someone's appearance—is "good," it's positive. *Agathos* usually has to deal with what's inside—what goes through and through. It's like the picture of the apple. You look at the apple when you're in the supermarket, and you say it's *kolos*—looks good. Then you take a bite when you get home—hopefully you wait till you get home—you take a bite, and it tastes good, and you say it's *agathos*. *Kolos* and *agathos*. And now you're telling me what this is saying is that those who get it right with God, when they hear the message, they're receiving it with a good heart through and through. Is that what you're telling me?



That's a theological mystery, because not only in Sunday school do I learn this—I go to adult Sunday school and I start reading stuff like Jeremiah 17: "The heart—wicked, desperately wicked and sick and deceptive—who can understand it?" Well, that is Sunday school–level stuff. You read more of the Bible, and here's what you'll find: the descriptions of the heart change, because there's one side of the discussion regarding how we are in our fallen state, and then on the other side, something changes that changes who we are—and the pivot point in all of this is something Jesus described to Nicodemus as being "born again." As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17—it's about becoming a new creation. As Paul said, it's about the old man going away and the new man coming—the inner person, as a convert, being created in the image of its Creator, desiring to do things that are in sync with the will of God. This is called the regeneration of the sinner. Sinner becomes a saint from the inside out.

Now, if I'm reading a text that says, you know, the people that get it right—the fourth category people, the fourth soil—they are people who receive the message with a good and good heart—with a *kolos agathos* heart. See, those are people that have undergone regeneration.

Number one on your outline—let me just talk in terms of things that, if we're going to look at this and say, "Do I fit this?"—there had to be a point in your life, which I hope remains as a residual mindset, where you are willing to be transformed. Because no one—from a human perspective—gets transformed in the act of regeneration who is not willing to do it. I'm speaking in human terms here. But when God changes us, he's always calling us—particularly in the Gospel of Luke—to count the cost and consider whether or not I'm ready to give up the old me and become the new me.

So you want to make sure that you're in the fourth soil? "Yeah, I'd like to be, because I don't want to be in that 50% that's deceived and thinks they're right with God and aren't." Well, then you need to start with this: Was there a time in your life when you encountered God and said, "I'm willing for the old me to be gone and the new me to be created by you"? That is the act of regeneration.

When I say the word "self-denial," what do you think of? "Self-denial"—we usually think of something episodic, something that happens in our lives in terms of temptation. There's something I want—I really want it; that's my desire—at least my fleshly desire. I have to deny myself so that I can do the right thing. We think in terms of punctiliar events—things that happen. You want the ultimate picture of self-denial? Conversion. Think about it. Here is God saying, "All that you are—I want to replace it." The core of who you are—your old person—I want it to be gone. In the words of Ephesians 4, I want you to "put off the old self." Old self—that's me. Talk about self-denial—Christianity, for people in terms of human experience, begins by me saying, "I'm denying who I am, and I'm ready to become a new me. I'm ready to become a new 'I.' I'm ready to start fresh."



I mentioned Nicodemus and Jesus. And Jesus used the words “being born again.” He talked about being born of water and the Spirit. And then Nicodemus is either being facetious, or he’s showing he’s really ignorant by talking about, “Well, you can be born again—go back into your mom again?” And Jesus chides him and says, “You’re a teacher in Israel—you don’t understand these things?” The passage that Jesus is chiding Nicodemus for not understanding is, no doubt—I mean, arguably; it’d be hard for you to prove otherwise—Ezekiel chapter 36. And I’d like you to look at it real quick right now. If you’re going to understand regeneration, you have to understand Ezekiel 36.

When Jesus comes on the scene and says to Nicodemus, “Now’s the time—you’ve got to be born again. Let’s start with a new you,” he goes, “Oh, I don’t know—if I can be born again, what is that?” “You’re a teacher in Israel—you don’t understand these things? Don’t you know the Bible and the promise of the coming New Covenant which—as a foundational experience for every participant in it—has to be regenerated?” And that’s just a kind of cleaned up word for “born again.” Regenerated, born twice—by water and the Spirit.

“Well, down the street at the church they say the water part is water baptism.” It has nothing to do with water baptism. This is the text in view. Verse 25—Ezekiel 36—did you find it? Ezekiel 36:25: “I will sprinkle clean water on you.” And you didn’t feel the H₂O bead up on your skin, because this is a metaphor. There’s something God’s going to do—as he says in Isaiah 1—to take our life that’s dotted with crimson, it’s stained with sin, and he’s going to make it white as snow. That’s the picture. “I’ll sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from your uncleanness and all your idols.” What’s an idol? Anything that you search for supremacy in my life that’s not the Supreme Person—anything that I’m devoted to as an ultimate devotion that’s not the One who deserves our devotion. Something that plays God in my life—for Orange County, it’s your kids, your career, your pattern of life. It’s the comfort and conveniences of what you’re used to, what you want—and you would have that be your ultimate priority. Usually it’s our families. Whatever your idolatry is, real Christianity is going to begin with cleansing you of sin and getting rid of idolatry. “And I’ll cleanse you.” We’ll fix that. We’ll let God be God in your life.

That’s gonna mean a complete self-denial. You—the person in the control center of who you are—has to go away. “I will give you a new heart.” Just like water is an analogy—funny how people want to make that literal—but this one, no one goes in for open-heart surgery when they walk an aisle, or sign a card, or say, “I want to be a Christian.” This is also an analogy. And because in church this is such a common analogy, we think of it one-dimensionally—we get it tucked in our minds, and we’re done with it. But don’t let that happen. Clearly, we’re not talking about this pulmonary device that’s pumping blood through your body; we’re talking about the control center of your life—who you are, your personality. As Paul said, your “old self”—that’s got to go away. You’ve got to get a new self, a



new heart; “a new spirit”—that’s a parallel way to say it—“and I’ll put that within you.” Your old person is gone. “And I’ll remove the heart of stone”—it’s not literally stone, it’s not literally your heart—obvious is the analogy, is the metaphor—“and I’ll take that out of your chest, your flesh; and I’ll give you a heart of flesh—the one you should have; the control center—the ‘you,’ the new person that you should be. And I’ll put my Spirit within you, and I’ll cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” You’ll see a new trajectory of life that will be much more in keeping with the things that I’ve written for you to do in the Scripture.

Notice that this kind of transformation is not external conformity. It’s not saying, “Well, the church says this. Well, I can do that. I guess the church says ‘Don’t do that’—well, I guess I can give that up.” It’s not “cultural Christianity,” as I like to call it. It’s not conformity to the standard at church. It’s something that is organic—something because I’ve been changed from the inside out.

I got a new insurance guy last month. Just took the leap. He’s doing everything—home, auto. And what I found out about insurance guys—if you’re an insurance guy, I’m not knocking you—but you know it’s true: you’re really nosy. You want to know everything about me. You want to know how big my house is. You want to know all about things I’ve got in my house. “You have this kind of detector? Do you do that kind of—oh?” And then, “Car—what year is it? What kind is it? What’s the VIN number? How many miles do you drive every year?” Lay off, man. This is my life. I can do what I want. “No, you can’t—if you want insurance. You gotta tell me those things because I gotta cover your car when you crash it, or your house when it burns down. So you gotta tell me that.” I’m like, “Okay, I’ll reluctantly tell you all this information, and I’ll pay you the minimum payment so that I can pay my premium so that if there is a problem, you can pay for it, you can—be covered. I can rest assured.” It’s how most people view Christianity, isn’t it?

Can you imagine if my insurance guy—when I said, “Yeah, I drive a Honda, and it’s this year, and this many—it’s a lot of miles”—“I don’t know... Honda... maybe it’s time for a Prius, Pastor Mike—because, you know what, save the earth and all that stuff—and you driving too many miles; and your house—man, seems kind of small for three kids. I don’t know—and that area of ‘we’re going to hills’ you live in—you should really come over here to Aliso—be much better city to be a part of.” Shut up. I mean, I don’t want to hear you commentating on my life—let alone giving me advice about where to live—let alone commanding me to drive less miles, drive a different car. When I get insurance, I’m not signing up for a new boss of me—I just want insurance.

That’s how most people view Christianity. And that’s a kind of conformity from the outside in: “What do I have to do to be covered when I die? What do I have to give up? If I just do the minimum and pay the lowest premium possible so that I don’t go to hell.” I certainly don’t want you to take over in my



life. And yet, you want to know what it feels like to say, “I’m done with the old me; I want the new me”? It’s what we’ll get to in Luke 14:33, when he says, “So you, too, cannot be my disciple unless you give up everything.” What are you talking about? Here’s what he’s talking about: to be a Christian begins with a new heart which says, “Everything that you are, and everything that you value, and everything that you’re about needs to be laid on the altar. And I need to put inside of you a new heart, a new center of your thinking, a new personality. You’ve got to give up the old and embrace the new.” And that for most people is tough—and Jesus addresses it.

It’s an act of God—you know that. If you read Ephesians 4—keep reading into Ephesians 5—there are so many things that speak to this issue of the change of our lives. And that’d be a good homework assignment—particularly chapter 4, verses 18 through 24. If you’re a copious note-taker—Ephesians 4:18–24—just to deal with this as fundamental baseline Christianity. This is not varsity Christianity. This is not second-tier discipleship. This is not whatever was taught to you at some point in your past. This is how you were taught in Christ. This was the initial contact with the true gospel: that you would lay aside your old self that belongs to your former manner of life and put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. That’s how the Christian life begins for every real Christian. It’s not how it begins for soils two and three. That’s how it starts for us—with a *kolos* and *agathos* heart—a re-creative act of God.

Were you up for that? Did you experience that? Well, that’s a good sign if you did, because these others will fall into place now. In the English text it reads this way: “They are those”—the fourth soil, the good soil—“who, hearing the word...” Here’s the three words that translate one very important Greek word here: “hold it fast.” When they get the message of God—the authoritative gospel and all that goes with it—they “hold it fast.”

Now, that’s a weird English idiom. Think about it: “fast”—what is that? What do you mean—“hold it fast”—has to do with speed? No, it doesn’t have to do with speed. But that’s our English idiom for what comes through in the Greek text as a compound word—again, too much language this morning, I understand, but I try not to give you language unless it really helps shape this for you. And I usually do that with words that have a preposition connected with it—in other words, compound words that have a preposition usually give us some visual on it. The word *echo* is the word “to hold on to.” The word *kata* is a preposition which—if you get the directional chart—means “down,” often an intensifier in verbs when it’s combined with it: *kata-echo*. It’s combined into the word *katecho* in Greek. *Katecho* translates the words “hold it fast.”

When it comes to encountering the word for those who have a regenerate heart, they pull it down—that’s the literal visual picture of it—they hold it down. If you want a non-analogy that uses this word



in a way that's very practical and real, you can look at chapter four in Luke. When he did all those miracles—you might remember in chapter four, verses 38, 39, 40, 41—it's in Capernaum up north, and he wants to go south into Judea (which it ends up saying in the passage he goes). But in verse 42 the people in Galilee come around and they say, "Hey, you're doing miracles and healing sick people. My Uncle Harry's sick, and my cousin—Thelma—really needs you." (Thelma—no, Thelma isn't in Galilee.) But what does it say? Here's how the text reads: "They went and sought him, and they would have *katecho*-ed him from leaving"—they would have held him down and kept him from leaving—"but he said, 'I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom to other towns as well.'" They wanted to—and you can see the visual—that they would hold him there if they could: "No, you're coming with us—we've got more sick people in Galilee we want you to heal," which was not the point. His point, he says, was to preach the kingdom. But "holding him down"—now picture that. If you don't want Christ to leave because you know he's the answer to your kid's health, you would hang on to him, and you wouldn't let him go. That's the picture of *katecho*—to hold him down.

In this text, what's the object of holding down? The word. When I hear the truth of God's word—when I hear the gospel, the authoritative message of repentance and faith and what it means to get right with God so that I avoid the punishment for my sin and enjoy the blessing and favor of God and forgiveness—that message, I hold it, and I hold it tight, and I don't let it go.

Let me read for you 1 Corinthians 15—oh, did I give you the point? I didn't. Number two—let me give you the point: "Hold tight to the truth." Do you want to say, "Well, am I the fourth soil?" Well, if you experienced regeneration—were you willing to say, "I'm ready to have the old gone and the new come"? How about this—when you get the message of the gospel, was it like you didn't just receive it or accept it or grab it—you held it down, and you hung tightly to it?

1 Corinthians 15:1–2 kind of shows the intensity of what it means to receive the truth: "Now I remind you, brothers, of the gospel that I preached to you, which you received"—that sounds really pleasant: palms up, "Give it to me. Put it on the platter; I'll take it"—"in which you stand"—okay, you're standing on it; I get it—"the truth by which you are being saved"—*being saved*, present tense: you are a Christian—"if you *katecho*—you hold down—the word that I preached to you." That's what real Christians do: they get it, they grip it, they hold on to it, and they don't let it go.

Now, there are a lot of people that warm up to the truth of Christianity, and we saw them in the second category of people—the second soil. And if you remember that weird sermon when I was preaching about the things that hit people—the "time of testing"—and make them say, "Forget it, I'm leaving this. I'm done with it," and they fall away. They leave the truth; they walk away. We said, "What kinds of things are those?" We looked at the parallel passages. We saw usually you can put them under the



rubric, or the heading, of “pain”—some kind of painful event. And we looked at painful physical—one of the weird headings that I gave you was “doctrinal pain.” Smile at me if you remember that phrase—“doctrinal pain.” “Pastor, that’s really weird.” But then we explained it, and you said, “Oh, that’s great.”

John 6—we looked at John 6. And remember, in John 6, when Jesus starts preaching hard things, they go, “I can’t take it anymore.” And then the really creepy verse—6:66—remember John 6? “Many of his disciples heard this”—right, this is the big crowd—“and they no longer followed him.” Because—why? It was too hard. Because my assumptions about what I think God should be, or what the gospel should be, have just come in conflict with what you’re telling me is the truth of the gospel. “I can’t take it anymore—too much pressure. It hurts me too much to hang on to this.” So they left him.

And then, you remember, we kept reading. We said, “What’s the right response to the doctrinal pain?” Peter—Jesus now turns to the Twelve. He says, “Are you guys going to leave too?” Remember that? And Peter says, “Where else are we gonna go? Where else are we gonna go? You alone have the words of life. We’ve come to believe, and we know, that you are the Son of God—the Holy One of God.”

Think about that. “I’ve got nowhere else to go.” And we even put it in these terms: If there is a God, and he has revealed himself, and he’s spoken in the Word—the Bible (and I know that’s a series of presuppositions you’ve got to be confident about)—but if you are, we’ve got nothing else to do but look at that Word that is punctuated by verification and prophetic words and prophecies, and to say, “That book, and what it says about life and death and heaven and hell—I’ve got to stick with that no matter how much pressure comes my way. I’m holding that down in my life, and I’m going to hang on to it—nothing’s going to get that out of my grasp.” That’s the kind of commitment to truth that real Christians have.

Now, I can tell you there are a lot of people here today that, I fear, won’t have that. And I say that not because I don’t think much of you, but because there are a lot of people that have stood on platforms and behind pulpits like this—dude on platforms and behind pulpits like this—that have said the same things that you believe right now. And because of time and pressure—doctrinal pain in their minds, the death of a non-Christian neighbor or friend or loved one—they’ve said, “I’m not going to hold on to that anymore.” I can tell you about evangelists that used to stand on stages in stadiums and tell people, “Jesus is the only way.” Because—as our third-graders down the hallway know—Jesus made that crystal clear: “I’m the way, I’m the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.” The apostles said it repeatedly, right? When it comes to salvation—“No other name given among men by which we must be saved.” And they taught that, and they preached that, and they had it in their hand, and they even delivered it to you for your ingesting. But today you ask them, “Is Jesus the only



way?”—“I don’t know. I’ve met some pretty nice people that don’t believe this stuff—surely they’re gonna go too.”

Or how about preachers—talking about preachers now; seminary graduates—who stood in pulpits saying what 71% of the people in America would almost seemingly intuitively know: that when you die, there’s heaven and hell, and there’s one or the other. And Jesus talked about it repeatedly: “You better make sure you’re going to heaven and not to hell.” And they—today, if you ask them or interview them in your cute magazines—“Hey, what about hell?” “I used to believe that. Don’t really believe that anymore. Not into that anymore. Seems too harsh. I can’t really see God doing that.”

And as I said in the second soil sermon—when it comes to the fourth soil, I just want to make sure you’ve got a firm grasp on the truth, no matter what it costs you; no matter what kind of social pressure is put on you; no matter what kind of pain you have in your mind at the funeral of your lost loved one. Do you hold down the truth that was clearly delivered to you in the authenticated Word of God? If you don’t, then I’m saying—well, that’s characteristic of the fourth soil: they hear the word and hold it fast. *Katecho*—they hold it down; they don’t let it go.

By the way—as a sub, you know, footnote on this—1 Timothy 4:1 says, as time goes on toward the end of this epoch, it’s going to get worse. “The Spirit expressly says in latter times”—might be some—“that depart from the faith.” We’re going to have an increasing apostasy—a defection from the truth. As he says in 2 Timothy, there are so many people that just want to hear what they want to hear, and they’ll gather people around them that will tell them what they want to hear. And I talk about evangelists, and I talk about pastors—because certainly, if they can have a loose grip on the truth, do you think congregants can? Absolutely. I want to make sure you’re not like them, because there’s a lot of people who have a lot invested in Christianity that are still—with a little bit of pressure—willing to let it all go, or at least parts of it which seem to be integral to the message.

Thirdly—15c—only five words left in our sermon: “and bear fruit with patience.” You see that? “As for that in the good soil, they are those hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart”—there’s our English order—“and bear fruit with patience.” “And bear fruit.”

Now, I’ve kind of posited this issue of holding the truth as more of a doctrinal fidelity. Here comes something about bearing fruit, which I think you have to recognize—if not intuitively, at least contextually in chapter eight—has to do with behavioral fidelity, fidelity to what the Scripture says. And I say that because—much like “heart” as an analogy—“fruit,” like an analogy in the Bible,



sometimes it's just assumed that we know what it means, but we've never really proved it in our thinking. We haven't looked at it scripturally—"Yeah, that's exactly what fruit-bearing means."

Now, I want to spend a little bit of time looking at that, but before I do, let me give you the cheat sheet and get right to—in the context—the shorthand for what it means to bear fruit. Drop down to verse number 21—Luke chapter eight, verse 21. All of these pericopes—all these paragraphs, all these stories, these scenes of the four soils, the lamp under the bowl, and this thing about Jesus's biological family wanting him to stop teaching and come outside and talk to them—they all are under this theme that Luke is tying together in this chapter about hearing. "Let him who has ears to hear, hear." It doesn't end until verse 21. And in verse 21, we don't have the analogy of fruit; we just have an out-and-out explanation of what we're talking about. So here we'll get the answer, and give us our third point, and answer them: It's not my biological mother and brothers that are really my family. He says, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God"—that's the whole theme that's begun with the parable of the soils—"and [they] do it." Does it say "bear fruit"? No. It just gives us the truth of what this means without the analogy: "and do it."

Number three—something that characterizes real Christians is this: they obey God's Word. Do they obey perfectly? "Yeah, that's what I said." No—not perfectly. But they obey God's Word as the new trajectory of their lives.

Now let me explain why—under the banner of the word "fruit." Now, "fruit" is a word—if I gave you a little written essay: "Pastor gave us a test today in church. What was it? He passed out a piece of paper, and it said: 'In one paragraph define what it means to bear fruit.'" Well, I had to think about it, and then I wrote out my answer. If you had to write out an answer, I wonder what it would be.

I want to think biblically about this. And you could write a dissertation on just what is meant by bearing fruit—just in the words of Christ, let alone the words of the apostles. You can even go to the Old Testament and look at the idea of fruit-bearing to try and understand what it means when Jesus simply says, "Hey—fourth soil: they bear fruit. That's what people do." He can't even lose the analogy of the soils when he's explaining what the parable means—they "hold it fast with an honest and good [heart] and they bear fruit."

What does that mean? Let me just stay within Luke, because I could spend all afternoon on this—don't groan, we won't. But if we did, I would probably start within the concentric circles of just Luke's writings—Luke and Acts. But let me just stick with the Gospel of Luke, and let me give you three



things, and I'll put them under the banner of three different words, and they all start with "R"—just not to be cute, but hopefully memorable: replication, reflection, and reward. Let me explain these now. Replication, reflection, reward.

If you want to talk about the idea or the image or the analogy of fruit-bearing—what are we talking about? Number one: replication. If you track the word in Luke and you just start in chapter one—right around verse 40 through 42—you've got a discussion there between Elizabeth and Mary about the baby that's being born. A couple babies being born in chapter one—John the Baptist and Jesus. And Elizabeth says to Mary, "Blessed are you—and [blessed is] the fruit of your womb." Now, that's a pretty common Jewish and Old Testament idiom, and it has to do with this: when people have babies, that's called the "fruit" of the womb—the fruit of this relationship; the fruit of this marriage—it's the replication of people having little people who grow up into big people. In the Old Testament, you'll even see this in other categories: your cattle—speaking of the "fruit of your cattle," or the fruit of your herds. The fruit is they have more cattle; cattle have more cattle; sheep have more sheep; people have more people—they replicate themselves. And you can see why "fruit" makes sense, because a tree bears fruit; that fruit has seed; seed goes in the ground; produces another tree—it's replication.

So if I'm thinking about fruit, and I'm thinking about what this means—not talking about having babies—but clearly we're talking about where we're going in verse 21: having the word, holding fast to it, and bearing fruit—you must mean we are replicating what the Word says. If the Word says, "Don't covet," then you should see in my life less coveting, because my life is replicating the words on the page. I'm replicating what it says. If it says that I should be a generous man, then you should see in my life more generosity, because I'm bearing the fruit of what the Word says. It says this, and so my life replicates that—I do what it says; I follow the instructions. Replication.

As Romans 6:17 says—that's one of the descriptions of our conversion—"Thanks be to God"—Romans 6:17—"that though you were once slaves to sin, you've become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed." The description of fruit-bearing clearly put there is that I obey the written instructions. If it says "jump," I respond—I'm replicating the directions of the Word on the page in my life.

Secondly: reflection. Turn with me to Luke chapter six, verse 43. The analogy of fruit is more than just doing what the instructions on the page say—although that's clearly what we mean by fruit-bearing. But you may quickly in your mind go to this aspect of it. Verse 43: "No good tree bears bad fruit"—6:43—"nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, and grapes aren't picked from the bramble bush." Therefore, if I want



figs, I go to the fig tree. If I want grapes, I go to the grapevine. I'm looking for the kind of product that reflects the source. Okay—reflection.

Verse 45—now he applies it to people: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart”—there you go; you can put in the margin “Ezekiel 36:25”—oh yeah, we get a new heart; that new heart is a good heart, as Paul put it—it's created in the image and likeness of God; it's now in sync with the will of God—“and that good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.” What comes out of his life reflects what's in his life. What comes out of his mouth reflects what's in the control center of his life. The things that he does reflect who he is—it's a reflection. And it works the opposite way: “The evil person”—bottom of verse 45—“out of his evil treasure”—what's inside of him—“produces what is evil.” It reflects the interior of his life, “for out of the abundance of the heart—and remember, that's the center of my thinking, not the center of my feelings—his mouth speaks.” What's in your imagination, what's in your thinking, who you are, how you're wired—that comes out of your mouth; it comes out in the things that you do; it's evident through your behavior. Reflection.

Now, I've got to take the second one and kind of break it in two, because regeneration means that the good in my life that comes out—bearing fruit—is a reflection of my new regenerate heart. But you've got to be careful, because you've got other desires. You've got desires still that are enveloped in that encasement of your fallen humanity. We all have the flesh. I have new core desires, and I want to reflect those core desires in my behavior, my words, my priorities. I still have the battle that Peter talks about that's waging war against my soul, because my desires of the flesh are still there, battling.

But there's another thing—interior in my personality—and that is that I have been given, as Ezekiel 36 says, not just a new spirit with a small “s,” but his Spirit with a capital “S.” Is that right? I now have his Spirit. And the Bible speaks of the reflection of the Spirit in the interior of my life coming out. Here's a famous verse you know—Galatians 5:22—and I now bear “the fruit of the Spirit.” I'm now reflecting the Spirit. Guess what—he is the Holy Spirit. Guess what my behavior looks like now, more and more? Holiness. I am reflecting the interior activity of the Spirit. The reflection of my exterior is nothing more than some kind of picture of the interior—which is not only a new heart, but it's also the Spirit of God. Bearing fruit—fruit of the Spirit; fruit in this text of my newly made good heart. Reflection.

Now, those of you probably know the first one—I don't know, maybe not. We usually go to the second one. I gave you the third word. What's the third word I gave you? Reward. Now that's weird. “Okay, sorry you feel that way.” Luke 13. Luke chapter 13—let me take you there. This is the one we don't normally think of, and let me explain it. Reward—reward for who? Jesus explains it—the analogy this way: Luke 13:6—“And he told this parable: A man had a fig tree, and he planted it in his vineyard.” Now, the man had the fig tree—that was his fig tree. He planted it in his vineyard—that's his real



estate, his soil, his yard (I'm thinking suburban here), but his field (from a farmer). "And he came seeking fruit on it." Now, he watered it, he cultivated it, he planted it—it's his property; he wants the fruit of it, because that makes sense. The Bible talks a lot about that—the farmer should get from his own land the reward of his farming; he should get the fruit that he's invested in the soil. Problem is, in this text, "he came seeking fruit on it, but he found none. And he said to the vinedresser"—he's got a guy out there working the plants, the field, the tree in this case—"Look, for three years now I've come seeking fruit on this tree." Why are you so demanding? "Well, it's my tree. It's my property. I've invested—I want the reward of it. I've come seeking fruit on this fig tree; I find none. Here's the deal: cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" And you can take that article "the" and you could turn it into a possessive pronoun—it's *his* land, right? "Why should it use up *my* ground?" It's my ground, and my tree, and I planted it, and I want the reward from it.

Now think of it this way: bearing fruit—Jesus says real Christians bear fruit. We reflect the interior of my life, remade—the presence of the Spirit. I replicate the words on a page—I do what the Bible says. And I also—this may sound weird—but my fruit-bearing is some kind of behavior or life that "rewards" God. It brings to God some kind of good from the good he's given to me. Now that sounds too unbiblical for you—how about the phrase you're used to but we often don't understand, and that's this: "We live to glorify God." God has recreated me as a new person in Christ so that I might bring him glory. "What are you saying?" God has done things in me—changing who I am—so that what I do is—here's how he puts it in the Sermon on the Mount—*teleios*—is "just right." I say just the right thing in a situation. This is not a continued description of my whole life because no one's perfect, but it says, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Why—how? Because in the right moment, I reflect the grace of God, the mercy of God, the kindness of God, the generosity of God, the virtue of God. And when I do it, God says, "Oh, that's *teleios*—that's just right. That's what I wanted. That fruit tastes good." He "consumes" that. That's the glorification of God. And when we bear fruit—which is the description of real Christians—we're not only being beautifully obedient to the written code of the Bible (which, of course, that's what bearing fruit clearly is), we're not only reflecting the new man within me and my core desires that want to please God (although you are), not only reflecting the interior presence of the Spirit (which of course you are), you're also bringing glory to God by "rewarding" God, if you will—like a farmer who's invested in you.

If you think that's too bizarre—and I know often it's not thought of—I want to turn you to another text that says it clearly: Hebrews chapter six. Look at this text with me—beginning in verse seven; we'll go through verse twelve. Hebrews 6:7—same thing; sounds a lot like Luke 13, but it gives us some words that may be helpful in defining all of this. And I say that because it helps us see what it "feels" like, not just what it looks like or what it "does" to God, but what it feels like for us.

Hebrews 6:7: "For the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it"—okay, I can see that—"and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated"—here's a little parable, a little



illustration in the middle of this book—“that land receives a blessing from God”—that gets the thumbs up, *teleios*—God says, “That’s the way it ought to be—that land, for that owner, to produce that benefit for that person.” As it’s put in 2 Timothy 2—the farmer ought to receive the reward of his work by enjoying the fruits of his labor. Great. “But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”

Now, verses 7 and 8 are the illustration, the parable. Verse 9 now is the application. Okay, think about it: we are the field; God has invested in us; we should be bearing fruit, not thorns and thistles. And he says, “Hey—though I know I kind of gave you the negative side of that, and it feels a little harsh, I gotta tell you—though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things”—we’re confident this isn’t you, bearing thorns and thistles—he says, “things that belong to salvation.” What’s the point? Real Christians bear fruit—not thorns and thistles. What is that? Fruit that is supposed to benefit “the one useful to the one who cultivated it.” Well—stuff like this: verse 10—“God is not unjust so as to overlook your work”—there’s a word worth circling—“and the love that you have shown”—there’s another phrase worth bracketing—“for his name in serving”—there’s another hard word—“the saints, as you still do.” So when I work, when I show love, when I serve the people of God—see, those are the kinds of things that are a crop “useful to those who have cultivated”—who cultivated it? God did. God did this work. He invested in my life so that I would work and love and serve.

And you know what that takes? Verse 11: it takes some diligence—earnestness. “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness”—diligence—“to have the full assurance of hope until the end”—keep doing this—“so that you may not be”—here’s a powerful Greek word, *nothros*—“sluggish,” translated elsewhere “lazy.” We don’t want to be lazy. You can’t just lay back and just be plopping out Froot Loops—“This is great; it’s easy; passive.” No, you can’t be lazy—you have to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Those with the inheritance—those that are promised heaven—those are people that bear fruits, because they’re bringing to God, as an offering if you will—as a reward—they’re bearing fruit to the One who invested and cultivated and blessed them with the rain that falls on it. Can’t be sluggish.

Doctrinal fidelity. Behavioral fidelity. Fair to put together the second and third points of this message. I’ve got to hold on tight to the truth. I’ve gotta obey God’s Word. Real Christians—they’re transformed by regeneration; they are concerned about doctrinal fidelity for the rest of their lives; and they’re concerned about behavioral fidelity for the rest of their lives.

Two words left in our English text—verse 15: that’s all done “with patience.” Now, we just read the word “patience” in Hebrews 6:12. I’ve got to say—if I compare the two words for patience (usually



translated “patience”—*makrothumia*, which we see in chapter six of Hebrews, the common word for patience) and this word, which you hear a lot about from this pulpit—the word *hupomone*—this is a much stronger word. *Hupo*—“under”; *mone*—from *meno*—“to stay.” That’s the picture—as I always like to make you think of—is that burro down in Tijuana who sits there with that arched back and holds up under all the weight of the stuff that’s packed on the back of that donkey or that burro. Think about it—that’s the picture of perseverance, often translated “perseverance,” usually translated in the ESV “endurance.” Here it’s translated “patience.” But those who hold down the truth with doctrinal fidelity, and those who live out the truth with behavioral fidelity—they do it for the long haul. And they need endurance to do that. Even, by the way, the English word “endurance” comes from the Latin compounds *in* (for us: “in”) and *durus*, which is the word “difficulty” in Latin—*in difficulty*—even under pressure—*hupomone*—even in the hard times.

Now, how does this contrast to what we’ve learned? When the pressure hits—soil two—they’re gone. When the fatigue and the ongoing chronic pressures of life in soil three keep wearing down those people who claim faith—they’re gone. But the real Christian endures. The real Christian, in difficulty, maintains doctrinal fidelity, behavioral fidelity—they remain under the difficulty. I put it this way—number four: you’ve got to be prepared to go the distance. Prepare to go the distance.

I’ve tried to explain what it looks like if I am the fourth soil. There is a point I realized when I was willing to be transformed—and I still am. I hold tight to the truth—that’s how it started, and that’s what I continue to do. I’m obeying God’s Word—albeit not perfectly, but I’m doing it—and I continue, by God’s grace, to do it. And I’m prepared to go the distance for the rest of my life—persevering, enduring.

Now, if you’re still in Hebrews—even if you’re not, flip to Hebrews chapter three. This is a great combination of these two thoughts in one passage. Speaking of the word *katecho*—remember *kata-echo*—“hold it down”? Same word used three times in Hebrews. Look at it in verse six of Hebrews 3—Hebrews chapter three, verse six: “We—I’m sorry—Christ is faithful over God’s house as a Son.” Good—he’s the leader, he’s the Master, he’s the Lord of this group of people called “the house” here—he’s the Son of God, but he’s managing the people of God. “And we are his house”—you’re part of the group; you’re the fourth soil; you’re in the kingdom; you’re forgiven; you have a real relationship with God; you’re going to heaven when you die—“*if indeed we katecho*”—we hold down—“hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

Now, if that phrase alone didn’t give us a sense of what real Christians do for the remainder of their lives, look at verse 14—it clearly shows the time element. Hebrews 3:14: “For we have come to share in Christ”—perfect tense; finished work: you are a real Christian—“*if indeed*”—here’s how it’s



demonstrated—"we *katecho*"—there it is again—"we hold down our original confidence"—for how long?—"firmly until the end." We do that. Don't know the future; I don't know what's going to come—what kind of tests are going to come. You didn't know what kind of tests were going to come to your marriage either when you got married, did you? Did it start, though, with this idea of "I'm in it for the long haul"? I'm prepared to go the distance. Notice those words in the ceremony, don't you? "For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; till death do us part." Did you hear that in your wedding ceremony? I hope you didn't get some funky, modern, contemporary service—you heard something like that, did you not?

And when you heard those words come out of the pastor's mouth—or the next wedding that you're at, when you hear those words—here's the response you don't get from the participants: the groom and the bride don't say, "Well, I'll try. Hope so. I'll work on it." If so, get up. Go to the gift table. Grab your gift. Go back to your car. Go home. It's not a wedding—it's not a real wedding. Real wedding is a covenant that you make that says "better, worse; richer, poorer; sickness, health; till death do us part." You don't know what trouble's coming, you don't know what temptations, sicknesses, poverty, "worse" might be—but you, from the beginning, understand it is a covenant and you say, "I'm going to power through this to the end."

Now, usually you don't see the word "endure" on anniversary cards, am I right? But that's a part of it—because there are the sickness—the times of sickness; there are the periods of poverty; there are the times that you might say are the "worst times." And you have to, under that difficulty—or to use the Latin phrase, in that hard time, that difficulty—*hupomone*—under that load of weight—you say, "I'm in it for the long haul." And by God's grace, that's what real Christians do—they bear fruit, and they hold fast to the truth, because they have a regenerate good and good heart; they do all of that with endurance.

Can I add just one more point here with the little time I have left? You're in Hebrews still, I hope. I think—Hebrews 10:23. I talked about three references to *katecho* in Hebrews. Look at this one. Not sure that's the totality of *katecho*—I think it is, though, in Hebrews—just these three. Open to correction on that. But verse 23: "Let us *katecho*—hold fast—the confession of our hope without wavering." Don't want to sit there and waver. Why? Because—we think about covenant here, think about God—"for he who promised is faithful." The inherence—hang in there.

Now here's the thing—verses 24 and 25 are usually quoted out of context—not that there's not a truth that can stand on its own (there is), but you see it starts with a conjunction—can't you see that? Whenever you see a conjunction at the beginning of a verse, you think, "Well, this is tied to whatever came before it," and sure it is. Holding fast the confession of our faith—holding down that confidence



without wavering—is now something that is aided by the body of Christ: “And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds”—to fruit-bearing—“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

I’m preaching to the choir if you’re actually here—unless you only show up for an hour a week. Certainly those that listen on the radio—you need to understand, if you’re one of those Christians trying to live a Christian life on your own, and you’re not part of a fellowship, and you don’t have this kind of relationship with people in the church, there’s a problem. Your *katecho*-ing the truth is aided, bolstered, helped, enhanced—bolstered by the body of Christ. Don’t leave that out, the Bible says—because it harmonizes so well with 1 Timothy 4:1—because as we come near that Day (capital “D”), it’s going to get worse and worse and worse; therefore we need this all the more as we see the Day approaching.

Prepare to go the distance. I want to be the fourth soil—that’s the soil I prefer to be. According to this parable, there’s a lot of people that aren’t the fourth soil, but they think they are—at least for a while. What’s the fourth soil look like? Regenerate heart; hold fast; bear fruit with *hupomone*. They’re willing to be transformed—and they are transformed. They hold tight to the truth. They obey the Scripture. And they prepare to go the distance.

Now, I said to someone this week—I was talking about this passage and studying this passage and getting ready to preach it—and I said, “What would be great: if we were all—if I were a farmer, and I were preaching to a bunch of farmers—that’d be awesome.” Then I caught myself and I stopped: I don’t want to be a farmer. But I thought, it is problematic because we talk about farmers and sowers and seeds and soils and bearing fruit and plants and all the rest—the roots and all the things we talk about. To us, I don’t know—we don’t have the sense that our food depends on the success of all that. We don’t have the breadth and the richness of this parable. So in some ways, it’d be better if we were all farmers—which I’m sure everybody in the original audience had a real intimate acquaintance with the idea of “my food coming from this process.”

But even if I speak to Orange County suburbanites—at least my original audience here in this building—I mean, if you head out of Orange County, and they take that steep climb over Newport, and they bank over our area here, and you look through the window, you look down and you realize, we may be city dwellers, but there’s a lot of plants down there. And even at your apartment wall, or you’ve had some kind of endeavor, I assume, to try and grow some things—because we just intuitively—it’s natural and important and good and aesthetically pleasing and helpful. So all of us are trying to grow something, I assume. And if not, I don’t want to come to your house—because we need stuff in our yards.



So we've tried. And I've confessed before in illustrations past that Carolyn and I are not real good at this. We do not have a proverbial green thumb. A lot of things we plant die. But I found one thing that we plant that generally does really well—so well, it's scary. And we did it when we had an apartment; now we have a house—we have planted palm trees. I don't know what it is—you know what it is? Don't write me and tell me; I don't care what it is. But it's just an illustration. But it's true—and they grow like crazy. I have to move physically things that are attached to the house because that thing is going to blast through this. I mean, these things thrive, and they grow and grow. Of course we water them, but we don't do much else. Everything else around them dies—palm tree.

When I thought about that—the reason I thought about that is reading Psalm 92. You don't need to turn there. Let me read it for you, just in closing. The songbook of the Israelites—talking about us, the righteous—God's adopted people—and it describes us this way (verse 12): “The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like the cedars of Lebanon”—which you hear a lot about in the Bible, but you've got to picture that: giant trees—“They are planted in the house of the Lord”—now that has kind of some double entendre there, but certainly this is a work of God—is not regeneration? I know it's a picture of assembling there—“and they flourish in the courts of our God.” There is a reference—at least a secondary reference—to the fruit that we bring to God—right? The reward that our fruit-bearing brings. I love this—talk about endurance—“They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the Lord is upright”—now the psalmist puts it in first person—“He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”

Like palm trees—flourishing; planted before God; growing and flourishing before God; bearing fruit even in their old age; ever full of sap and green; praising God—declaring that God is upright; the Rock; the Holy One.

My fear, in preaching on the four soils, is that a sermon series like this will engender fear and anxiety. Is this the way it's preached? In part, right? “Oh—you don't want to be soil two; you don't want to be soil three; you better make sure you're soil four. Who am I? Am I...?” That's not the intention—unless, of course, you're not the fourth soil. Really, for the fourth soil people among us—and I don't know what the percentage would be in a big crowd like this—but my goal in my heart—my stated purpose (and even with my prayer team)—I said, “My goal is to engender a peaceful assurance.” If, of course, you've been transformed, you're holding down the truth, you see the pattern and trajectory of obedience, and you're prepared to go the distance—that's the experience. And if it's true, and even though our lives are dotted with all kinds of trials, difficulties, stumbling, and periodic failure—I want you to have the assurance that you are the fourth soil; that even in your old age you'll be bearing fruit.



If you're not, today's the day to get it right. You've been around our church very long—you know there's no aisles to walk, no hands to raise, no cards to fill out. But if you've been sitting through a lot of this going, "I'm soil one. I haven't really given much to any of this. I don't really care." But now God has gripped your heart and you're starting to care—time to get right with the living God. Maybe you're soil two or three—you're starting to see your faith is humanly generated, artificial—you know it will not survive the storm. And it's time for you today to say, "I'm ready, God. Old self—gone. Make me new. I'm ready to hold tight to the truth—no matter how bad and difficult or unpopular it may be. I want to obey your Word, and I'm prepared to go the distance—better, worse, sickness, health, richer, poorer—till death do us part." But the good news for us is death doesn't part us when our faith is sight—so when we see him face to face, and everything that we've hoped for, everything that we've trusted in, becomes the reality for us.

Would you stand with me? Let us close this with a word of prayer, and I'll let you go.

Let me pray for you.

God, I confess many times to my congregation here—I love this church, I love these people. But my fear is that passage I think about late at night—it's on my mind periodically—that many will say to you on that day, "Lord, Lord," and they'll start quoting their resume like those people did: "We did this, we did that." And you'll say, "Depart from me—I never knew you." Not "I used to know you," not that I knew you at one time—"You thought you knew me; I never knew you."

God, for those here where this has been some kind of cultural adherence to a standard—it's been cultural Christianity, there's been no heart change from the inside out—I pray for them today that you'd grant them the grace and the re-creative miracle of being born again—a new person starting today. We can't conjure that up, can't be manufactured; we can beg you for it. You said, if we would plead for the Spirit of God, you—as a gracious Father—would not give a stone, but give the Spirit. So we pray for those in our midst that need to be right with you.

And those that are—God, we pray there would be that peaceful assurance, because we look at a text like this, we see words like "hold it fast," we see words like "with patience," "bearing fruit," and we know that's a description of our lives. As imperfect as our lives are, we see this pattern. And if so, God, bring us that sense of assurance that gives us even more enthusiasm and motivation and energy to live for you.



We love you, God—and like Psalm 92 says, in our old age we want to still be bearing fruit. Make that a reality for many in this church—proportionately as many—do more than I could ever ask or imagine. May it be that our church is filled with fourth-soil people. Do this, God, that it may bring glory to you as we bear fruit.

In Jesus' name, amen.