

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATT. 13:1-8,18-23. – MAY 20.

**"The seed is the word of God." – Luke 8:11.**

JESUS and his disciples had just returned to Capernaum, his home, from a tour of Galilee, and the multitudes, many of whom had heard him before and witnessed his miracles, gathered about him as he sat on the beach of Lake Galilee, assuredly expecting that they would hear some gracious words from his lips. And the Master never seemed weary of presenting his message, although frequently, as in this case, the mass of his hearers understood but dimly his parables. There was a fishing-boat lying near, quite possibly owned by some of his friends or relatives, and evidently with the owner's consent Jesus used the boat as his pulpit, speaking to the multitude which lined the beach, which at this point is said to rise rapidly, and which therefore would give the general effect of an amphitheatre. A traveler once made an experiment, to see how well the voice would carry under such circumstances, at this spot, and says, "It was remarkable how distinctly every word was heard, though our voices were not raised, even at three hundred yards off; and it was very easy to comprehend how, in this clear air, a preacher sitting in a boat could address a vast multitude sitting upon the shore."

The Master had no difficulty in finding a topic. Quite possibly his eye rested on a seed-sower, and as a result we have this parable, designed to show that there are different classes of hearers, and that it is not merely the eloquence or force or truthfulness of the message that determines the result, but chiefly the attitude of the heart that hears; hence the importance of the injunction, "Take heed how ye hear" – see that your heart is in a right condition to receive the truth, if you would expect a benefit from it; do not expect that the mere hearing of the truth will profit you, irrespective of your own character conditions.

The good seed of the parable is the Word of God, the truth, even as false teaching, human philosophies and doctrines of devils, are not wheat-seed but tare-seed; our Lord is not showing in this parable what will be the result of sowing good or bad seed, but merely that the good seed can accomplish its work only in certain classes of hearts.

The class of heart that is like the "wayside," solid and compact with selfishness, not open and generous, is very unfavorable ground for the truth; nothing need be expected from such ground. The sower will let as little as possible fall on such, but whatever does fall upon it the Adversary will soon take away. "Wayside" hearers are not necessarily bad people, in the sense of grossly wicked, but they are bad in the sense of being unsuited to the Lord's present work and call. They will need to have the furrow run through them again and again, that troubles of various kinds may make them more generous, more open, more ready for the message. But in many instances the Lord will not run the plowshare of truth through such soil in this present age; rather, he will leave it for the Millennial age, when he will be dealing, not only with these hearts that were partially prepared and which have become unsuitable, but when also he will have a work to do with the great masses of mankind, which, like the virgin forests and prairies of earth, are yet uncleared, unplowed and unbroken. The great time of trouble at the beginning of the Millennial age will be a time, we believe, in which the Lord will run the plowshare of truth in every direction throughout the world, as it is written, "The plowman shall follow close after the reaper." (Amos 9:13.) And, "When the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9), and thus be prepared for the new sowing time of the new age, under circumstances more favorable in some respects than the present, though less favorable in other respects.

Another class upon which the same good truth falls at the present time is one that has a good appearance upon the surface – fine soil, etc., but underneath, and but a few inches from the surface, is rock.

The soil on the surface is but a veneer to hide the rock; it has the appearance of depth of character, sympathy and love, but this is merely a deception. Civilized customs have popularized at least an outward imitation of the graces of the holy spirit, and appearances of good heartedness, but down below in the real heart and intention is selfishness, that would merely follow the ways of righteousness because of popularity or because of some hoped-for gain, but thoroughly unable to appreciate self-sacrifice for anything or anybody. This class of shallow characters sometimes receives the truth with avidity, with joy, and seems to contain some of the truth's most enthusiastic followers; but this is merely for a little while, because of novelty or pride to show off, and not from love of the truth. The selfishness which is the substratum of their character will not permit them to endure hardness for the truth's sake. Consequently, as soon as they find that with the truth always goes something of persecution and tribulation they are surprised, thoroughly disheartened, and all their interest speedily dies out. This class has no hope for the Kingdom either. They are not of the kind that the sower expects will yield a crop to maturity in the present harvest.

The third class of hearers favored by the truth in this present time is referred to by our Lord as "thorny ground." This does not mean poor ground, for the thorns are to be found in the very best of ground, especially the thorns of Palestine, to which our Lord undoubtedly had reference. Of these Prof. Thomson [R2627 : page 141] says, "These thorns are not briar bushes or brambles, but are an after-growth of a variety of thistles, which come up quickly in every wheat-field of Palestine." We may say, then, that every Christian who receives the wheat or word of God into a good and honest heart during this Gospel age is in danger of having it choked with the thorns, and of thus becoming one of the class referred to in the parable, a class that was favored, that had every advantage, but which brought forth no crop worth gathering, because the thorns took possession of it to such an extent as to choke out the wheat-seed.

We have heard Christian people describe the thorns which threaten the good seed in the hearts of God's people to be theaters, card-playing, carousals, etc., etc., but this is a great mistake; the hearts that are beset with such things are probably not good ground in any sense of the word, and probably have never received the good seed. But how reasonable is the interpretation which our Lord himself gives – the **[R2628 : page 141]** thorns are the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches – just exactly what every Christian realizes. The cares of this life are not gross immoralities, but the home duties, family cares, business cares, etc. The deceitfulness of riches is not merely the baneful influence which is exercised upon those who possess riches, but especially it represents the snares, the difficulties, the entanglements, the misleadings of efforts to become rich. How many Christian people can testify that their spirituality, their love for the Lord and for the truth and for the Kingdom have been choked in great measure by wealth-coveting and wealth-seeking! How many can testify that the cares of this life have crowded out their fellowship with the Lord, and the power of his word in their hearts, and how as a result their lives are barren, unfruitful of anything in the way of character development, service of God and for the "brethren" and others.

What can such as realize that thorns are growing in their hearts and choking the Word of the Lord do to get rid of them? How can they overcome this difficulty of permitting the cares of this life to absorb their time, their talents, their influence? How can they get rid of the false allurements and attractions of riches? How can they become fruitful toward God in good works, in riches of grace in their hearts and characters, in riches of the knowledge of the divine Word and plan?

It is a difficult matter to get rid of these thorns, if they spring up and get well under way after we have received the wheat, and it will probably be a slow and tedious business to root them out; and one in which we could not hope at all for success by ourselves, unaided. All such must go to the Lord himself for the aid which he alone can give,

and the method and process by which the Lord will assist them will be in the transforming of their minds so that they will mind not earthly things but heavenly things, set their affections on things above, not on things beneath, set their affections upon true riches of the divine nature and high calling, instead of on earthly riches, which are but transitory and unsatisfactory, even if attained. – Matt. 6:19-21.

And the way to effect this transforming of the mind, this uprooting of the thorns, is to draw time and attention away from the earthly things in a compulsory manner, limiting the time that we will give to earthly things, and devoting more and more time to spiritual interests in our own hearts and in the hearts of our families and friends. This will mean more time for the study and practice of the truth; and as the truth comes in it will be found to be the sanctifying power of God which alone can uproot the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and keep our hearts in the right attitude to bear much fruit to our Master's praise.

The "good ground" hearers are those whose hearts are in good condition, ready for the word of the Lord, plowed and furrowed by experiences. This class, free from thorns, is ready to bring forth an abundant harvest, and yet even of this class all may not yield the same amount of fruitage to our Master's sowing, for he represents that some will bring forth thirty, some sixty and some an hundred fold. He does not speak slightingly of those which bring forth but the thirty fold, but leaves it to us to discern that those who bring forth the hundred fold are the most pleasing in his sight. We have much to do with this matter of the amount of fruitage which we yield to the Lord; it will be measured by the degree of our zeal, our love for him; consequently the class bringing forth the hundred fold represents those Christians who love the Lord the most fervently, whose hearts are warmest for him, his truth and his people. The Apostle Paul was undoubtedly one of this hundred-fold class, the Apostle Peter was another, and no doubt there have been many in humble positions unknown to fame, whose love for the Lord, and zeal for his cause have been counted to them as

hundredfold return for every seed of truth they received. Let us each with more and more care seek to bring forth much fruit, and as one means to this end to keep down the thorns and everything that would choke or hinder the influence of the truth in our hearts, in our daily lives, and in our words. Let us cultivate the seed and not the thorns.

### **THE MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM.**

Luke says, "The seed is the Word of God"; Matthew says, "The word of the Kingdom." Our Lord no doubt used both expressions – the good seed is God's word or message of the Kingdom. Indeed, the message of the Kingdom may be said to be the only message God has yet given to mankind as a message of hope. He intimated the Kingdom to Abraham when he promised him that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed; the intimation was that Abraham's seed should be blessed by being granted Kingdom powers which should prove a blessing to the world at large. Israel, at the time of this parable, was hoping to attain this very promise.

All the promises through the prophets pertain to the Kingdom, the time when it shall be established, the blessings which shall flow from it to the uttermost parts of the earth, when all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest, when righteousness shall flourish throughout the world, and when sin and sinners and Satan himself will be subjected to the powers of righteousness, in the hands of the Messiah. At **[R2628 : page 142]** the time of the utterance of this parable the seed, word or message of the Kingdom had taken on a special form, viz., an invitation to some to become joint-heirs with the Messiah, the heir of the Kingdom.

Whoever has never heard anything about the Kingdom has never heard anything about the gospel, for it is the "gospel of the Kingdom," as our Lord declared. Hence we see that much of the preaching of eternal torment and other things falsely called the Gospel of the Kingdom, are delusions which are not of God, not his word, not the good seed that would bring forth the good fruit. The false messages

have brought forth "tares" in abundance. This good seed of the Kingdom it is that rightly received into a good heart cannot be easily choked with earthly hopes or ambitions – for the Kingdom hope is above all, grand, pre-eminent, soul-satisfying. The Kingdom hope is as an anchor to the soul, and does not permit the cares of this life to seem large and to crush it out. On the contrary, to honest hearts which have received the good seed of the Kingdom the cares of this life are merely incidental trials which are to be overcome, that thereby character may be formed, much fruit brought forth, to the Lord's praise, and a share in the Kingdom attained. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself," and bringeth forth much fruit.

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