

[R3746 : page 92]

"TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR."

– MATTHEW 7:15-29. – *APRIL 1*. –

"Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." – Jas. 1:22

OUR lesson follows the Sermon on the Mount, and was evidently intended as a parable, to impress upon the minds of the Lord's people the importance of what they had heard – the importance of obeying as well as hearing the good tidings. It sets forth the good results of careful obedience, in contrast with the unsatisfactory results to those who would fail to obey. It is evidently not evil surmising if we are on the lookout for false teachers, who our Lord declared would come amongst his sheep to mislead them. Neither can it be evil speaking to call the attention of the sheep to such false teachers. The Master and the apostles foretold and forewarned against them and so should all who are faithfully following the Master's example. [R3747 : page 93]

But we are to distinguish them in the manner which our Lord and the apostles clearly indicated: however smooth, polished, educated, gentle, they may be on the surface, we must get to know them better than by surface indications before we may dare trust them as leaders of the flock – we must become intimately acquainted with them, their motives, ambitions, private life. This our Lord intimates by telling us to beware of them if they are ravenous, greedy, selfish, even though outwardly they may have a sanctimonious air. The Apostle speaks of these, saying that "grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock": "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you": "even denying the Lord that bought them." – Acts 20:29; 2 Pet. 2:1,3.

We are to balance the matter, however; and while vigilant to detect and resist the wolves in sheep's clothing, as well as out of it,

we should remember our Lord's teachings on the other side of the question – that those who are not against us are on our part, and that we should neither reprove as wolves nor disown as brethren those whose hearts, whose characters, give evidence that they belong to the Lord, even though they follow not with us in respect to his service, the promulgation of his message, etc. In other words, we are to love all and wish God-speed to all loving the Lord and manifesting his Spirit, whether they associate with us or not. In a word, the divine rule is very broad and very narrow at the same time. It is narrow as respects discipleship and character: faith in the redeeming blood, consecration to the Master, and a manifestation of his Spirit are the lines of discipleship – broad within themselves, but narrow as compared to the lines of the world.

"KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS"

Anticipating our query respecting how we may know the true from the false our Lord says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." He illustrates this by suggesting that grapes are not to be expected on thorn-bushes nor figs on thistles, although it is said that there is a thorn-bush in Palestine which grows a fruit somewhat resembling grapes, and a kind of thistle with heads shaped like figs. Nevertheless, no one was in danger of being deceived thereby, nor should any among the Lord's people be in doubt respecting the character and the fruitage of the life of those who are the followers of Christ.

The thought is that the Lord's true people are of such a kind that the fruit of their lives is nourishing and refreshing toward all who have fellowship with them. On the other hand there are persons who, thistle-like, are always scattering seeds that will cause trouble – false doctrines, evil surmisings and errors; and there are some who, like thorn-bushes, instead of bearing refreshing fruit, are continually reaching out to impede, to irritate, to annoy, to vex, to poison, to injure, those with whom they come

in contact. The intimation clearly is that the Lord's people ought to have little difficulty in distinguishing between the false teachers who would mislead them and the under-shepherds who gladly lay down their lives in the service of the flock. The one class are continually mischief makers, underminers, destroyers. The other class are helpers, builders, strengtheners, peacemakers.

Not content with giving us a word-picture distinguishing between wolves and sheep, between injurious plants and fruitful ones, our Lord next institutes another illustration still more searching – contrasting a healthy fruit-tree with a diseased or evil one, contrasting a healthy Christian with a perverted and misguided one. He declares that a sound tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt or diseased tree brings forth undesirable, evil fruit. How we have all witnessed this in nature – the sound apples come from good apple trees that are in healthy condition. The knotty, wormy, unsatisfactory fruit comes from trees that are diseased, under-nourished, uncared for, unpruned, attacked by worms, etc.

In this illustration our Lord seems to refer to the fact that those who are his disciples, sound and proper enough to begin with, might become evil, might lose their spiritual strength and fruitfulness – their carefulness. Lack of nourishment in the soil would expose a tree to disease, blight. So the Christian who would add to his attainment in knowledge is liable to decline in spirituality unless he have spiritual nourishment of the right kind. As without pruning the tree would develop suckers, which would corrupt it and ultimately destroy its fruitfulness, so the Christian needs the disciplines, the prunings, that he may develop in character and the graces of the Spirit. Our heavenly Father is the great husbandman and has promised us the proper care, yet it is not exactly with us as with the trees; for because of our higher endowment, our godlike quality of individuality, will, we are dealt with differently.

To a considerable degree it is for us to determine what nourishment we will have. The Lord supplies the good soil of Truth, the refreshing showers of grace, and the nourishment of precious promises, but it is for each of his people to use these and thereby to grow in grace, knowledge and love. We cannot, then, blame the Husbandman if we come short, and be unfruitful from lack of nourishment. None of his good promises can fail; whatever failing there may be must be in ourselves. Likewise with the pruning – the Lord will send the chastisements, trials, difficulties; but with our independent will it is possible for us to pass these by and, failing to use them, fail to correct the weaknesses, shortcomings and wrong developments of our nature. It is possible with us, notwithstanding all the development or pruning we may receive, to set our affections on houses, lands, or earthly aims, objects or individuals, which, like the suckers in the illustration, would draw away our vitality and hinder our bearing of acceptable fruit.

The sound tree cannot bear poor fruit, nor the corrupted or decayed tree bring forth good fruit. While each of the Lord's people is to examine himself before the mirror of God's Word, to ascertain his own character, disposition, likeness or unlikeness to divine standards, nevertheless, in this matter of deciding about fruit, whether it be good or bad, each of the Lord's people is called upon to exercise judgment in regard to others as well as to himself – what are the results, the fruitage, the token of my own life, and what is the fruitage, results, token of my brother, my neighbor. Our Lord's intimation is that these tests are specially applicable to those who would be leaders of his flock. They should all be examples, bearers of good fruit, and these good fruits should be looked for as a test of good, sound character – a character fully in harmony with the Lord. True, all are imperfect, **[R3747 : page 94]** and with the best of intentions we cannot do all that we would, but the weakest of the Lord's brethren must bear some fruits that other brethren could discern, and these fruits should be accepted by the brethren

according to the divine standard, viz., not of the flesh but of the spirit, the will, the intention. So, then, every true child of God should manifest before the brethren and before the world honesty, faithfulness of intention, a consecrated heart, mind, will, which would seek in all things to do the will of the Father in heaven.

In Palestine, to this day, fruit trees are taxed, and hence a tree which will not bear, whose fruitage is poor, cannot be tolerated, for it would entail a loss instead of a revenue. Similarly, the assurance that the Lord will ultimately cast away every unfruitful one – "every branch in the vine that beareth not fruit he taketh away" – while every branch that beareth fruit is purged, that it may bring forth more fruit, is a further lesson along the same line.

Our Lord used a fig-tree to represent the Jewish nation, and pointed out that it was not bringing forth the desired fruitage, and that therefore it would be cut down and destroyed. The symbolical "fire" which utterly destroyed the Jewish nation made an end of their tree. The Jews will indeed receive a further blessing at the hand of the Lord, but, as he declares through the prophet, it will be "not by your Covenant." The blessing to come to Israel and all the nations in the future will be the New Covenant. Similarly, in the end of this Gospel age, not only will there be an individual test of the Lord's people as respects good and bad fruit, but Christendom as a whole, as a system, will be found unfruitful, unsatisfactory; and when the true saints of the Lord shall have been gathered out and glorified, the tree, the system as a whole, will go down, in the great time of trouble with which this age shall close and the new dispensation begin. Christendom will indeed be favored and blessed under the New Covenant of the Millennial age, but its special privileges and opportunities of the present time under the Abrahamic Covenant will be forever gone.

"I NEVER KNEW YOU"

Continuing his discourse, our Lord implies eventually a great number of nominal followers devoid of his Spirit, not bringing forth the fruitage that he desires, not members of his called and chosen and faithful class, though outwardly, nominally, all of these. Of this class he says there shall be many. He points down to our day, saying, "in that day" – in the closing of this age, in the testing time, in the time when he shall come to make up his jewels and to glorify them as his Bride, his members, his associates in the Kingdom. Many at that time – in our day – will profess that they know the Lord, that they are prophesiers or teachers, that they are casting out devils, opposing sin and multitudinous forms of evil, and that they are carrying on mighty works, benevolent institutions, colleges, seminaries, etc., in his name. The Revised Version gives, "by thy name," intimating [R3748 : page 94] that the name of Christ is used rather as a charm, to conjure by.

How true is this picture to the conditions of our day! How many take the Lord's name in vain, associating it with their enterprises, which are often in direct conflict with the Master's Word and Spirit. Why do they use his name? Simply as a talisman to conjure by, to increase their influence, to satisfy their own minds, to make themselves believe that in doing their own wills they are working the will of God. How true this is in respect to nearly all religious institutions of our day! Take the churches, for instance, recognizing more or less clearly the divine opposition to their sectarian spirit and creeds and methods and organizations – they, nevertheless, are not satisfied unless they somehow connect the name of Christ with their institutions and arrangements.

But the testing time is near – the Lord will inquire respecting the fruit of these systems; he will not be deceived; yea, he will expose the bad fruit, that all may see that his judgment is just. It will be manifest that neglect of his Word has led to degeneracy,

decay – that the suckers of worldly ambition, pride, wealth, show, etc., have been cultivated, notwithstanding all of the trying experiences which might have served to prune these. It will be shown that many of the prophets of Babylon are false prophets, whose teachings have misguided the people and, instead of blessing, have done injury, instead of enlightening have blinded. It will be manifested that many of them are ravening wolves in sheep's clothing, hungry with ambition for fame and prominence and honor of men, and willing to barter the interests of the flock for their personal aggrandizement. It will be shown that much of this conjuring in the name of Jesus has been merely a cloak under which, deceiving and being deceived, sectarian fruitage, and not the love, joy, peace and holy Spirit, have been cultivated. The day will declare it, will show it, will manifest it. The whole world shall be witness eventually that God's name was proven a dishonor, and his Word misrepresented, because false teachers were looking every one to gain from his own quarter – his own denomination. – Isa. 56:11.

The Lord never knew the sects – he never recognized them, he never authorized them; they are of men, and for men, not of the Lord nor for the Lord's glory. Claiming that all there is of Christianity is due to themselves, they are proud and boastful and realize not that the Lord's true cause would have flourished far better without them in the simplicity of the early Church, one in redemption through the precious blood and in consecration to the Redeemer. The gathering out of the Bride class and the leaving of the remainder will be saying in effect, "I never knew you, never recognized you, never authorized you;" and these unauthorized sects will go down in the great time of trouble. We are glad, however, that the thousands and millions who have been deceived by these false systems will have a glorious opportunity during the Millennial age to come to a knowledge of the Truth and a right understanding of the character of God as revealed in the fulfilment of his gracious plan. Thus many who miss the great prize may still

have a glorious opportunity for the lesser prize or favor of God in restitution, etc.

"DEPART FROM ME, YE THAT WORK INIQUITY"

We believe that there are active workers in the sectarian systems called "Babylon" who will yet be reached by the knowledge of the Truth and delivered. Our Lord intimates this, saying, "Come out of her, my people." Some of his people evidently are in Babylon, and it is our present [R3748 : page 95] mission in the name of the Lord to call these out – through the presentation of the Present Truth, which will show to all who are truly the Lord's where they stand, and their duty. Others of the active workers in the iniquitous systems, which are counterfeits of the true, misrepresenters of God's message and binders and enslavers of the Lord's people, because not at heart loyal to him, will not come out of Babylon, and therefore will share in the condemnation coming upon her. They will go into the great time of trouble, and for a season at least be cut off from all fellowship with the Lord. These workers of iniquity will have their hands full of the trouble which they have helped to bring upon the world of mankind by their misrepresentations of the divine character and plan. It will be a terrible chastisement, and our hope for them is that "when the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth all the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." – Isa. 26:9.

ON THE ROCK OR ON THE SAND

This picture or parable of one house built upon the rock and the other house built upon the sand refers not to the Church and the world, but to two parties in the Church. None are in the parable except "those who hear these sayings of mine." The world hears not our Lord's message at all. As the Apostle declares, the world is both deaf and blind to spiritual things. Those who hearken to and appreciate the Lord's sayings represent at least a nominal Church, and amongst those of the nominal Church are some who are

obedient to the Lord's Word while others are disobedient. The obedient are built upon the rock, the disobedient upon the sand.

Those who build upon the rock our Lord explains to be such as not only hear his message but are obedient thereto to the extent of their ability. Let us remember the words to which he refers – they are the words or message of the Sermon on the Mount, which show the things which are blessed of God in contradistinction to the things which would not have his approval. Those who do, who strive for, who to the best of their ability obey these divine teachings, the message from heaven, are laying the foundations which will be permanent, which will guarantee them against all the storms, difficulties and trials of the present life.

Those who hear the Master's words and say, "Yea, Lord," but who do not put the Master's teachings into practice, are not built properly upon the rock of Truth, upon Christ. They are building their hope, their faith, their trust upon a foundation which will not stand. When the adversities of life come upon such their hopes will be undermined, their faith will collapse. Thus does the Lord teach us that it is not merely to know his will, to be doctrinally informed, but that he is looking for such character development in us as will bring us into full harmony with his teachings, into heart harmony, and, to the extent that we are able, to obedience in all the affairs of life. The other, whose faith is built upon knowledge without obedience, without growth in grace, will not be accepted to the Kingdom, will not be members of the Bride class, will not be joint-heirs with God's dear Son.

"THE FIRE OF THAT DAY"

In this lesson our Lord describes not only the trials and tests which come upon all Christians throughout this Gospel age, but especially the great test in the close of this age – in the "harvest" time. Here his figure is that of rain, floods, and winds beating upon the faith structure of his professed followers, overthrowing the

faith of those not properly constructed in accordance with his teachings, but unable to harm those founded on the rock of Truth. A mighty downpour of Truth throughout Christendom is in progress. The great storm is already raging. The various denominations are trembling under the shock. Their foundations on human tradition, creeds, theories, ignorance, superstition of the "dark ages," are realized to be unsatisfactory. Ere long the storms of Truth will move the quicksand foundation upon which nominal Christendom is built, and her wreck will follow. Only the true people of God will be able to stand the great storm of "that day" – already beginning.

This is the same storm and flood mentioned by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah – "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding places...when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be overthrown by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you; for morning by morning shall it pass through, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report [the message, the Truth]." – Isa. 28:17-19.

The same day of trial is pictured under another figure by the Apostle Paul when he says, "The fire of that day shall try every man's work of what sort it is." He pictures true believers built upon the rock, the true foundation, but points out to us the necessity of having a proper house, or faith, as well as a proper foundation. He pictures one faith structure built of wood, hay, stubble, combustible materials, which will shortly be destroyed in this day when the fire of divine judgment shall test every doctrine and destroy every error. He pictures also the proper building constructed of gold, silver and precious stones, the divine promises, and how these will stand every test.

The lesson as a whole is, first, that we must be on the rock foundation to have either part or lot in the matter – to be able to

stand any test; second, that of those upon the rock, trusting in Christ, loyal to him and his atonement work, there will be two classes – the "little flock," faithful to the Word and upheld by it and protected, and the "great company," not sufficiently diligent and careful respecting the divine promises, and who will have a faith structure largely composed of error, which will be consumed. Respecting this latter class the Apostle declares, "the same shall be saved, yet so as by fire." This fitly describes the deliverance of the great company, who will "come up through great tribulation and wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb." – 1 Cor. 3:12,15; Rev. 7:14. [R3749 : page 95]

"DOERS OF THE WORD"

Our golden text is well chosen – "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." To be honored with a knowledge of the divine will and plan is a great boon, a great blessing; but it brings a great responsibility: "to whom much is given of him shall much be required." We who have heard the voice of him that speaketh from heaven, speaking peace through Jesus Christ; we who, on the strength of this message of forgiveness of sins, have been accepted in consecration as members of the body of Christ, we have greater responsibility than have others. To attain the glorious things to which we have been invited we must not merely have this honor but must make use of the privilege and show our appreciation by obedience to the terms of the Covenant – presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to the divine service, in faithful obedience to righteousness, and in endeavoring to assist others in the same course.
