

"THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD."

– MARK 4:1-20. – APRIL 29. –

OUR LORD had returned to the Sea of Galilee, where some of his earliest teachings had been given. Great multitudes were attracted to him by reason of the miracles he performed. Entering a boat he sat in the prow of it and taught the people on the shelving beach by various parables, similes, illustrations, the thing said never being the thing meant. One of these parables, constituting the basis of our lesson, is known as the parable of the Sower, though more accurately perhaps it might be described as the parable of the four kinds of soil, representing the four kinds of human hearts. The parable is introduced by the word.

"HEARKEN" – TAKE HEED

This is an implication that an important lesson is contained in the parable. Nevertheless the world gives little heed to this or other of our Lord's teachings, and even his professed followers rarely give the Master's words that deeper, attentive thought necessary to their appreciation, and only he that seeketh findeth the true meaning, the true lessons.

The parable itself is a very simple statement of a matter familiar to his hearers: A farmer sowed good seed, a portion of which fell on the pathway leading through the farm, where it was readily seen and quickly devoured by the birds. Some fell on stony ground, the soil of which was good enough but shallow, with the result that it sprang up quickly, made a good show at first, but soon withered under the heat of the sun. Other seed fell upon ground infested with the seed of thorns, and the two growing together the thorns so choked the good seed that it became unfruitful. But some of the seed fulfilled the farmer's intention and

brought forth much fruit, some thirty, sixty and a hundred-fold, because the soil was more favorable: it had been prepared by the plowing processes to receive the seed, it was deep enough to properly care for and root the seed, and it was not thorn-infested.

This picture, familiar to all farmers, was especially clear and forcible to the minds of those who heard Jesus, for several reasons: (1) The fields of that land are not fenced and the paths of travel frequently cross them. (2) The birds of Syria, including Palestine, seem to be much more numerous than elsewhere, probably on account of the climate; they are said to be one of the special pests of the farmer of that region. (3) Thorns abound there. A writer says, "There are no less than fifty genera and two hundred species of plants in Syria and Palestine furnished with thorns and prickles. There is probably no country on earth of the same extent which has so many...Thistles grow to a height of ten to fifteen feet." As for the stony ground: Palestine abounds with limestone, which renders the soil very rich, but when shallow very hot. As for the hundred-fold crop we are assured that this is not an exaggerated statement. One writer remarks [R3763 : page 124] that at Geneva in 1855 he got from the field a single ear of barley containing two hundred and seventy-six grains.

WHY TEACH IN PARABLES?

Our Lord concluded his parable with the words, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The majority of the multitude heard, wondered at his gracious words, thought of him as a wonderful teacher sent of God, but took no deeper interest. They had not the ears to hear, they were not hungry for the truth, their hearts were not prepared. There remained with the Lord not only the twelve apostles but a considerable number of disciples or followers. These now crowded about the Master to ask the interpretation of the parable. They had ears not only for the story but for the meaning, for the lesson: they desired to know the will of God that

they might do it – they were consecrated to know and to do the Father's will.

The Prophet had foretold that our Lord would open his mouth in "parables" and in "dark sayings" (Psa. 78:2), and the evangelists record that thus he did, and now to those who inquired the meaning our Lord answered, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without [outsiders – not disciples – not consecrated] all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted [turned to a proper course] and their sins should be forgiven them. – Mark 4:11,12.

WHY THE MYSTERY – SECRECY?

From the standpoint of ordinary Christian thought the Master's words here are utterly unintelligible. The ordinary thought is that all not converted, all left in their sins, are destined to an eternity of torture. But if that were true how could our Savior have used the words just quoted? His words are intelligible only from the standpoint of the Plan of the Ages, which alone makes clear the divine Word as a whole or in part. When we see our Lord's mission amongst men in its true light it has two divisions: (1) Through his own faithfulness to the Father's plan and as our Redeemer he needed to pay our ransom price by tasting death for every man, suffering the Just for the unjust that we might be reconciled to God. (2) While thus laying the foundation for the blessing of the whole world, with the opportunity to escape from sin and death, our Lord began a second feature of the divine plan, namely, the selection of a Kingdom class, a Church class, which would be associated with himself in the sufferings of this present time and in the glorious work of the future – the blessing of all the families of the earth under the favorable Millennial conditions.

In harmony with this thought our Lord at the time of this parable was not only in process of laying down his life, dying daily, hourly, but also engaged in attracting to himself an elect class who would be suitable for his Bride, his Kingdom, his Church.

It was some of this Kingdom class, this elect class, that had come around him and asked the interpretation of the parable. He declared that it was his wish, his desire, to make the matter clear, very plain, to these; that it really belonged to them to know, because they were in the condition of heart that would be profited by the knowledge – because the knowledge thus imparted would be essential to their development, to their strengthening, to their guidance, to their preparation for the Kingdom – "To you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom." Nearly all of our Lord's parables related to the Kingdom, and all of them therefore are to be understood by the Kingdom class, the elect, the consecrated. All of this class should be earnestly desirous of an understanding of "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Their earnestness in desiring will be part of the evidence that they belong to this class, that it is proper for them to know. It is to their advantage that it should be hidden, so that they may seek and find, and that in seeking and finding they may have a greater blessing than if the entire matter were strewn upon the surface.

Our faith in the Lord and in his wonderful plan is strengthened when we find how simple his plan is, how grand, how beautiful, and yet how hidden from the world – from all except those who have the guidance of the holy Spirit and to whom it is given to know the "mystery." Some of these mysteries pertain to the present and some to the future, and the more clearly we seek the more we may find, and the more clearly we discern the stronger will be our faith and loyalty and the better will be our prospects therefore of making our calling and election sure by obedience.

"LEST THEY SHOULD BE CONVERTED"

But, says one, how would it have injured the multitude to have heard and understood a good parable, even if they were not prepared of heart to receive and act upon its message heartily? Would they not have received some blessing through a partial understanding of the divine plan? Not being perfect in knowledge or wisdom it is becoming in us to trust the Lord's love, knowledge and wisdom on this subject, and to conclude that the multitudes were really better off left in ignorance for the time. Perhaps we can see to some extent how and why this was so. (1) Even worldly wisdom has decided that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." (2) Had the multitudes been drawn to the Lord to accept him fully as a teacher and to believe his doctrines, while their hearts were still in an unconsecrated attitude, they would not have been of the Kingdom class which the Lord is now seeking, but might have hindered certain features of the divine plan connected with our Lord's sacrifice by so protesting against his death as to have endangered an insurrection, which would have forced Pilate to defend him against the malice of the rulers.

All this is reasonable and intelligible when viewed from the standpoint of the Plan of the Ages – when we see that the election of the Church does not signify the damnation of the remainder of the world, but, on the contrary, that the elect are to be God's agents by and by for the blessing of the non-elect, and bringing all to a clear knowledge of the Lord and to opportunities for everlasting life, which would be more favorable to the temperament, disposition, etc., of the masses. Nothing is more evident than that only a very few have ears to hear and hearts to appreciate the invitation of the present time – to suffer with Christ in the narrow way in hope of the glory, honor and immortality of the future. **[R3764 : page 125]**

HOW UNDERSTAND ALL PARABLES?

Our Lord's words, "Know ye not this parable? How, then, will ye know all parables?" may be understood to signify, It is proper for you to understand this parable, as it will prove a key valuable in the interpretation of all parables. Our Lord then proceeded to give a very particular interpretation of the parable.

(1) The "seed is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11). The different kinds of soil represent different kinds of hearts coming in contact with that Word. By the Word of God we are to understand the entire revelation which God has made to us – the Bible. This includes, as the Apostle points out, "the word spoken by angels" – God's direct messages in the past to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc., including the giving of the Law. These angels represented God as his mouthpieces. It includes also the messages sent through the prophets, "when holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the holy Spirit." (2 Pet. 1:21.) And it includes the teachings of our Lord Jesus and his apostles, whom he authorized to speak in his name, as it is written, "God hath in these last times spoken unto us by his Son," and the Son declared respecting the apostles that those who heard them heard him, those who received them received him, as those who heard and received him heard and received the Father. – Heb. 1:2; Matt. 10:40.

It is well that we lay full emphasis upon this only proper seed, because much confusion has resulted from a mistake on this point, the using of improper seed, as we shall see in our next lesson. We are not limiting the seed to any particular translation of the Word of God, nor do we urge that religious writings which contain this Word are invaluable and good seed. We do urge, however, most emphatically that they are good seed only in proportion as they are thoroughly loyal to the divine Word. To whatever extent they present human philosophies instead of the divine plan and philosophy, to whatever extent they mix the human with the

divine, to that extent they are not the good seed. How careful, then, the Lord's people should be respecting the seed which they receive into their own hearts from day to day, and respecting the seed of truth which they in turn seek to scatter in the good ground of other hearts.

Alas that we must confess it, but nearly all of the theology and theological works outside the Bible are so mixed as to be untrue, misleading: hence they do not bring forth the intended harvest in the heart, in the life of the individual. This is the great trouble with nominal Christendom, Churchianity, today. Traditions of men have taken the place of the Word of God; the good seed, the Gospel of the Kingdom, is a scarce article outside the Bible, and even in the Bible presentation of God's Word there are difficulties and hindrances in the shape of mistranslations and interpolations which hinder its results. In MILLENNIAL DAWN and WATCH TOWER publications we endeavor to set forth the Word of God simply and without human traditions in any measure or degree. We repeatedly, continually, persistently scatter that Word by liberal quotations and expositions of it – presenting it cleared of many misrepresentations and falsifications thereof. By the Lord's grace we trust that only the pure, unadulterated seed will ever be scattered by us in the Master's name.

THE WAYSIDE HEARTS

Our Lord elsewhere declares that the field is the world, but not all of the field or world is being planted at the present time. Vast areas of the world of mankind are already sown thickly with various human doctrines and are growing great crops after their kind. The field that the Lord is sowing first is a Jewish field, already prepared by divine instructions and disciplines. And although the middle wall of partition has since been broken down, so that there is no longer a distinction made as between Jews and Gentiles, nevertheless the portion of the Gentile field that is being

sown is but a limited one, namely, the comparatively few amongst whom the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Word of God, has been declared.

So, then, we may say that Christendom is the wheat-field in which the Lord has sown his Word. In Christendom, therefore, and not in heathendom, where the Word has never gone, we are to look for the four kinds of results brought to our attention in the parable. In Christendom some are like the wayside, or paths hard trodden by life's experiences; sometimes, by too great prosperity and unprepared to receive God's message, unappreciative of it. If such hear the message it enters not into the heart: it is to them merely a mental hearing, they take little interest in it. At first indeed they may appreciate the harmony and certain beauties and consistencies of the Truth, but it never becomes theirs, it never enters in, they are not open to its reception. Ere long the enemy comes; Satan the adversary steals away from them every element of Truth they once had seen or appreciated. The Truth is not for such, even though, being in the way, some grains fell on them.

This class of people may be found in every community, in almost every home. They are not specially to be blamed, though we may sympathize with them, regretting their inability to receive the comfort and grace of the Word of God. These hearts are not fit for the Kingdom under present conditions. What the Lord may do for them in the future – either through trials and sufferings and disappointments in the present life, that will plow them up and make them ready for the reception of the Truth – or what he may do for them in the disciplines of the Millennial age to fit and prepare them for the Truth, are different questions. All the parable says is that while in this condition they are not acceptable, not wanted amongst the Lord's people.

THE STONY-GROUND HEARERS

We have all come across this class of hearers in Christendom; they not only see something of the beauty of God's plan but they receive it with joy, they give every evidence of bringing forth much fruit. We say to ourselves, I believe that person is a true Christian and will be one of the overcomers. But we cannot see as God sees, we know not the heart, the shallowness of the nature is not disclosed until, opposition being aroused, the sun of persecution blights and withers the results. We are inclined to feel discouraged, especially if we helped to plant the seed and had expected great results. The Lord in this parable cautions us against discouragement by assuring us that he knows in advance that considerable of the seed will fall upon stony-ground hearts, where, having little nourishment backed by **[R3764 : page 126]** little character, it will soon wither and bring no fruitage to maturity.

This should not signify to us that the case is a hopeless one as respects the future. Under new conditions character will be deepened and good results will be proportionately obtained, or else, if the heart will not come under the influence of the Lord's dealings in the future, it will be utterly discarded as useless ground. If any of the Lord's people who have received the Truth find in themselves this shallowness of nature, this superficiality represented in the parable, he or she should at once appeal to the Lord for such a deepening of the soil of their hearts as would enable them to bring forth fruitage to his praise.

THE THORNY-GROUND HEARERS

The soil that brings forth great thorns is rich, and if devoted wholly to the production of wheat would bring forth large crops. So it is, our Lord explains, with some who hear the message of God respecting the Kingdom – they are good, strong, deep characters, they would make noble Christians and bring forth much fruitage to the Master's praise and to their own honor if they

were fully devoted to the Lord. But alas! their talents, influence, means, time – the strength of their hearts, the strength of the soil, is absorbed in another direction – in the bringing forth of earthly projects and ambitions whose interests conflict with the interests of the Kingdom. The parable shows that where the thorns are permitted to remain the Kingdom interests will suffer. This is another way of saying that those who have heard of the Lord and love him are mistaken when they suppose they can love both the Lord and the world; it is another way of telling us that we cannot serve God and Mammon, that we cannot bring forth both thorns and wheat. Our hearts must be single, wholly given to the Lord; we must love him with all our heart, soul, strength, mind, else we cannot bring forth the fruitage which he requires of disciples.

Alas! of all the disappointing ones who hear the Gospel of the Kingdom during this age, the thorny-ground hearers have the most conspicuous place. Not much could be expected from the wayside heart, not much could be expected of the shallow hearted, but great possibilities are lost in those in whom the seed of Truth is choked by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches – the thorns. All of the Lord's people who find these thorns mingling with the Truth in their hearts should learn from this parable the impossibility of bringing forth two crops – of being prosperous, successful and prominent and honored according to the course of this world, and also growing prosperous in the spiritual interests and in association with their Lord in the Kingdom. We cannot serve God and Mammon. The Lord seeketh not such as are double-hearted to be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom. We must love him with all our hearts in order to bring forth the proper fruitage, and eventually to hear his, "Well done, good and faithful."

THE GOOD-GROUND HEARERS

Thank God that in his providence and grace some of our hearts have been plowed deeply by the plowshare of experience, trouble, disappointment in respect to earthly affairs and conditions. Thanks

be to him, too, if the soil of our hearts is deep and able to receive and appreciate the Truth, the Word of the Kingdom. We praise him if we have learned the necessity for the establishment of his [R3765 : page 126] Kingdom and have heard the invitation and received the seed of Truth which invites us to become heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, and which makes known to us the terms and conditions of fellowship in his sufferings if we would have fellowship also in his glory to follow. Thanks be to him also if our hearts have been in the attitude to respond to these things and not infested with the double mind of business care, household work, etc.

Doubtless in the very best fields seeds of thorns and thistles may be found. O, that we may receive the good seed in such abundant measure as to choke out the thorns, as to separate us fully from the world, its spirit, its ambitions, its aims, and to sanctify us wholly to the love and service of him who hath called us from darkness into his marvellous light.

Let us, dear brethren, not only be sure that our hearts are of the good-ground sort, and be sure that we have received and are developing the good seed, the Word of the Kingdom, but let us seek also to bring forth much fruit. Seeing that some of these may bring forth thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold to the Master's praise, let us determine that by the grace of God, which we know is ours and will assist us, we will be of those who bring forth fruitage an hundred-fold – to our largest possible capacity and measure of service to our King. How may we increase our faithfulness? We answer, by increasing honesty of heart, which prepares us for increased measure of the seed and which enables us to bring this forward to perfection. The harvest is nigh: let us give diligence, therefore, while still there is opportunity, that the Master may find us fruit-bearing to the very largest degree of our possibilities of nature, surroundings and opportunities.
