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THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM

– JULY 14. – MARK 4:1-20. –

Text: – Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." – James 1:21.

THE SALVATION open at the present time has been obtainable only through faith, and faith is dependent upon a measure of knowledge, or revelation, and this knowledge, or revelation, came to us from God, for said St. Peter, "Holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." God in this Age is calling a class possessed of ears of appreciation for His Message. These are mainly the weary and heavy laden and sin-sick, chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith.

It is not enough that they hear the Message, not enough that additionally they accept it, turn from sin and consecrate their lives to God and His service and be accepted of Him, through the merit of Jesus, and be begotten of the Holy Spirit. From that moment they may be said to be saved and to have everlasting life, *if* they [R5039 : page 182] follow a certain course. That course includes a continual study of the Divine instructions and promises and the exercise of faith and prayer, and obedience and trust, even unto the end.

The point of this lesson is to show the importance of having the right kind of spiritual food, and of using it and not allowing the new nature to become choked by earthly hopes, aims or ambitions. Such as thus overcome will be inheritors with Jesus of His glorious Messianic Kingdom of a thousand years, which is to bless Israel and, through Israel, all the families of the earth.

Jesus gave the parable of the Sower of the "good seed," some of which fell by the wayside, and was devoured by the fowls; some fell on rocky ground where it had no depth of earth, and brought forth no

fruitage; some amongst thorns, which choked it; some into the good ground, which yielded thirty fold, sixty fold and one hundred fold. The disciples were perplexed and unable to understand it and inquired of the Great Teacher its meaning.

His answer was that He was quite willing that they should understand the parable, and that it related to the Kingdom of God, but it was not to be understood by outsiders. He explained that it was for this reason that He always spoke in parables, so that the general public might see and hear and not understand, because the masses even of the Jews were not in a heart condition to understand and be profited by these lessons respecting the Kingdom. Only such persons as desired to become members of the Kingdom class and were also willing to undertake the stringent conditions of the "narrow way" – only such were to fully and clearly understand the parables of the Kingdom. This is in harmony with all of God's dealings in the present time. We read again, "None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise (toward God) shall understand." And again we read, "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence Him, and He will show them His Covenant."

In Verse 13 the Master indicates that this parable would serve as a general key to His followers for their interpretation of all His parables. "Seed" does not mean literal seed, "birds" do not mean birds, "thorns" do not mean thorns, etc. Proceeding, the Great Teacher expounded the parable as follows: (1) The seed that was sown represents the Word of God. More than this, it represents that particular element or feature of God's Word which relates to the Kingdom.

This is shown by St. Matthew's account of the same parable (Matt. 13:19): "When anyone heareth the Word (Message of the Kingdom), and understandeth it not, then cometh the Wicked One and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he that receiveth the seed by the wayside." Our lesson says that the Wicked One meant is Satan. Satan and his evil agents are therefore represented

in the parable by "birds," and the lesson is that however much of the Gospel of the Kingdom we may read or hear preached, we lose the benefit of that which we do not understand.

Evidently, then, much of the Bible study and much of the religious reading is lost, because not understood. The secondary lesson is that one reason why the "good seed" does not enter into the understanding is that the heart is not in a receptive attitude. Like the wayside path, it is hard. Such hard hearts, selfish hearts, proud hearts, are of the kind which the Savior does not wish to have understand His parables nor understand the glorious Kingdom Plan which they expound.

(2) The seed sown in the stony place represents those who, when they hear the Message of the Kingdom, are delighted. They say, How good that sounds! What a grand time there will be when Messiah rules in righteousness to bless the world and lift up the poor, degraded members of Adam's family! And how great is the privilege of becoming members of the Bride of Christ, to be associated with Him in His glorious Kingdom work! But the class represented by the stony ground have little depth of character; they are merely emotional.

The "Seed," or Message of the Kingdom, which these heard with such delight at first, never matures in their hearts, because they are too shallow, too superficial in **[R5039 : page 183]** their love of righteousness. Below the surface those are hard hearts and selfish, and so, when they find that the good Seed of the Kingdom is unpopular and that it will bring them a certain amount of reproach and contempt and perhaps persecution – then all their ardor oozes out, their zeal is at an end. The Kingdom Message fails to produce in them the fruitage desired. The trouble was not with the Seed nor with the Sower, nor with the sun of persecution necessary for the ripening – the fault lay in the fact that their hearts were not right; they were hard, stony.

(3) The seed sown in the thorny ground represents those who have good hearts and have heard the Message of the Kingdom and

appreciate it and rejoice in it, but their hearts are divided. They allow the cares of this life and the love of riches to have such a share of their heart's affections that the Kingdom Message does not have the opportunity to bring forth such fruitage as will be pleasing to the Lord.

Let us note carefully that these thorns do not, as some suggest, represent gambling devices, card parties, saloons and other places of ill-repute, nor secret sins and vices. None of those things should appeal to Christians at all. The Master distinctly tells us that the thorns represent "the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches." Thus every Christian man or woman who has received the Message of the Kingdom and has allowed the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches to choke and frustrate his prospects as respects the Kingdom is represented in this parable. Very nice people, hospitable, educated, etc., belong to this class of the parable represented by the thorny ground.

(4) According to the parable there will be three classes of believers who will attain the Kingdom – or we may say, they will all be one class in the sense that they will bring forth the one kind of fruitage and be acceptable to the Lord as joint-heirs in His Kingdom, but the differences between them will be in the amount of fruitage such yield – some thirty fold, some sixty fold and some a hundred fold.

The Lord does not explain the differences between these fruitages, but we may well understand that the amount of fruitage will be measured by the amount of love and zeal in the heart. The fully appreciative and the fully loving will be the most energetic to know and to do the Master's will, and they will bring forth the largest fruitage – a hundred fold – and they, too, will have the chief places in the Kingdom.

St. Paul declares that as star differs from star in glory, so it will be with those who attain unto the First Resurrection – all will come forth glorious, but some will blaze with a more resplendent brilliancy, because of their great zeal, and therefore their great likeness to their

Redeemer and Lord. Jesus likewise mentions the distinctions amongst those who will sit with Him in His Throne. He assured James and John that, if they were willing to drink of His cup and be baptized into His death, they should surely sit with Him in His Throne; but as to whether or not they would have the chief places of honor and distinction was not for Him to say. Those places will be given according to the Father's determination; that is to say, according to principles of justice, of merit.

Those will have the places of honor next to the Redeemer, who, in this life, will manifest to God the greatest harmony with His character, in their zeal, their love for God, the Truth and the brethren.

We are not to understand that those people represented by the thorny ground and the wayside will suffer eternal torments because of their unfaithfulness in respect to the Kingdom, nor are we to understand that others, who do not hear about the Kingdom in the present life at all, will on this account suffer eternal torment. They will all, however, lose the grand privilege and glorious blessing of participating in the Kingdom, whatever they may obtain under the restitution blessings which that Kingdom will inaugurate for the blessing of mankind in general.

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