

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

NO. 308

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, APRIL 15, 1860,
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spoke by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that has ears to hear, let him hear.”
Luke 8:4-8.

IN our country when a sower goes forth with his seed, he enters into an enclosed field, and begins at once with due order and precision to scatter the seed from his basket along every ridge and furrow, but in the East, the corn-growing country, hard by a small town, is one vast unenclosed plain. True, it is divided into different properties, but there are no hedges, no divisions, except the ancient landmark, or perhaps on rare occasions, a simple ridge of stones to divide one man's field from another. Through these wide open common lands there are footpaths, the most frequented being called the highways. You must not imagine these highways to be in the slightest degree like our macadamized roads, but simply frequented paths, which are trodden tolerably hard.

Here and there, there are byways, along which travelers who wish to avoid the public road may journey with a little more safety when the main road is infested with robbers, and the hasty pedestrian can strike out a short cut for himself across the plain, and so open a fresh road for others, who are journeying in the same direction.

When the sower goes out in the morning to sow his seed, he finds, perhaps, a little spot of ground scratched over with the primitive Eastern plow. He begins to scatter his seed there of course most plentifully, but there runs a path right through the very center of the field, and unless he is willing to leave a broad headland, he must throw a handful on the pathway. And yonder, there is a rock cropping out just in the midst of the plowed land, and the seed falls on that, and there too, fostered by the negligent husbandry of the East, there is a corner full of the roots of nettles and thistles, and the sower sows his seed there too. The corn and the nettles come up together, and as we know by the parable, the thorns being the strongest spring up and choke the seed, so that it brings forth no fruit unto perfection. The recollection that the Bible was written in the East, and that its metaphors and allusions are fully to be explained to us only by Eastern travelers, would very often help us to understand a passage far better than the common English reader possibly can do.

Now the preacher of the Gospel is like the sower. He does not make his seed; the seed is given him by his Master. It would not be possible for a man to make the smallest seed that ever germinated upon the earth, much less that celestial seed of eternal life. The minister goes to his Master in secret, and asks Him to teach him His truth, and thus he fills his basket with the good seed of the kingdom. What the minister has to do is go forth in his Master's name and scatter precious truth. If he knew where the best soil was to be found, perhaps he might limit himself to that which had been prepared by the plow of conviction. But not knowing men's hearts, it is his business to preach the Gospel to every creature—to throw a handful on the hardened heart yonder, and another handful on that overgrown heart, which is

full of cares and riches and pleasures of the world. He has to leave the fate of the seed in the care of the Master who gave it to him, for well he understands that he is not responsible for the harvest, he is only responsible for the care, the fidelity, and the industry with which he scatters the seed, right and left with both his hands.

What, if not a single ear should ever make glad the sheaves, if never should there be seen a single green blade starting up among the furrows, the man would be accepted and rewarded by His Master, if he had but sown the right seed, and sown it with careful hand. Alas! Alas!—if it were not for this fact—that we are not responsible for our success—with what despairing agony must we remember, that too often we labor in vain, and spend our strength for nought. The cry of Isaiah of old must be our cry still, “Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?”

But one seed in four finds hopeful soil. The three portions out of the four scattered on evil places, produce no good effect, but they are lost, and shall ne’er be seen again, except when they shall rise up in judgment against our ungracious hearers to condemn them. Here let me remark, that the measure of our duty is not limited by the character of our hearers, but by the command of God. We are bound to preach the Gospel, whether men will hear, or whether they forbear. Let men’s hearts be what they may, I am not loosed from my obligation to sow the seed on the rock as well as in the furrow, on the highway as well as in the plowed field.

My plan this morning will be very simply to address myself to the four classes of hearers that are to be found in my congregation. We have, first of all, those who are represented by the *wayside*, the mere hearers, then those represented by the *stony ground hearers*, those in whom there is a transient impression produced, so transient, however, that it never comes to any lasting good. Then, those on whom *a large and good impression is produced*, but the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this world choke the seed, and lastly, that small class—God be pleased to multiply it exceedingly—that small class of *good-ground hearers*, in whom the Word brings forth fruit, in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold.

I. First of all, then, I am to address myself to those hearts which are like the *WAYSIDE*—“Some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

There are many of you who did not come here this morning to get a blessing. You did not intend to worship God, or to be affected by anything that you might hear. You are like the highway which was never intended to be a cornfield. If a single grain of truth should fall into your heart and grow it would be a miracle, as great a wonder as for the corn to grow upon the hardly-trodden wayside. You are the wayside hearer. If the corn, however, shall be dexterously scattered, some of it will fall upon you, and rest for a while upon your thoughts. ’Tis true you will not understand it, but nevertheless, if it be placed before you in an interesting style, it will lodge for a little season. Until some more congenial entertainment shall attract you, you will talk of the words which you heard from the minister of truth.

But even this slender benefit is brief, for in a little season you will forget what manner of man you are. Would to God I could hope that my words would tarry with you, but we cannot hope it, for the soil of your heart is so beaten by continual traffic that there is no hope of the seed finding a lasting and living root-hold down its roots. There is too much traffic in your soul to let the good seed remain uncrushed. The foot of Satan is always passing over your heart, with his herd of blasphemies, lusts, lies, and vanities. Then the chariots of pride roll along it, and the feet of greedy mammon tread it till it is hard as adamant.

Alas! for the good seed, it finds not a moment’s respite, crowds pass and repass, in fact, your soul is an Exchange, across which continually pass the busy feet of the merchants, that make merchandise with the souls of men. You are buying and selling, but you little think that you are selling the truth, and that you are buying your soul’s destruction. You are busy here and there about this body, the husk of your manhood, but you are negligent of that internal, precious thing, your soul. You have no time, you say, to think of religion. No, the road of your heart is such a crowded thoroughfare that there is no room for this wheat to spring up. If it did begin to germinate, some rough foot would crush the green blade ere it could

come to anything like perfection. There have been times with you when the seed has lain long enough to begin to germinate, but just then there was some place of amusement open, and you entered there, and as with an iron heel, the spark of life that was in the seed was crushed out, it had fallen in the wrong place, there was too much traffic there for it possibly to grow.

During the plague of London, when men were carried to their long home by multitudes, the grass grew in the streets, but corn could not grow in Cornhill, however excellent might be the seed which you should sow there. Ransack the world, and you cannot purchase a wheat that would flourish where such traffic continually rolls along. Your heart is just like that crowded thoroughfare, for there are so many thoughts, and cares, and sins, so many proud, vain, evil, rebellious thoughts against God, continually tracking through it, that the truth is like seed cast on the highway, it cannot grow, it is crushed down, and if it does remain a moment, the birds of the air come and steal it away. Ay, but it is a very sad thought, that if you should scatter seed on the highway, it is not only the foot of a bad man that would prevent its growing, but the foot even of a saint would help to destroy its life. Alas! men's hearts may be hardened, not merely by sin, but by the very preaching of the Gospel.

There is such a thing as being Gospel-hardened, it is possible to sit under sermons till your heart becomes dead, and callous, and careless. Like the blacksmith's dog, that lies and sleeps while the sparks are flying about his nostrils, so you will lie and sleep under the hammer of the law, while the sparks of damnation are flying about you, never startled, never astonished. You have heard all that before, we tell you but a thrice-told tale when we warn you of the wrath to come.

The men that work in the huge boilers of Southwark factories, when they are first put inside to hold the hammer, their ears are stunned, they cannot hear a sound, but by degrees, I am told, they are so used to that hideous noise that they could sleep in the midst of the engine while men were battering and beating it, although the reverberations are like the loudest thunder. So has it become with you, minister after minister has trodden along the highway of your soul, till it has become so hard, that unless God Himself shall be pleased to crack it in sunder with an earthquake, or with a heart-quake, there will never be room for the seed of heaven to lodge there. Your soul has become like a hard, well-beaten path that has much traffic on it.

We have marked this hard roadside; let us now describe what becomes of the good Word, when it falls upon his heart. It does not grow, it would have grown if it had fallen on right soil, but it is in the wrong place, and it remains as dry as when it fell from the sower's hand. Its life lies asleep, the life-germ in the Gospel hides itself, and it lies upon the surface of the heart, but never enters into it. Like the snow, which sometimes falls upon our streets and does not lie there for an instant, but drops upon the wet pavement and is dissolved and gone, so is it with this man. The Word has not time to quicken in the souls of such casual hearers of it. It lies there an instant, but it never begins to strike its root, or to take the slightest effect.

But we say, why do men come to hear if the Word is never made useful to them, and never enters the heart? That has often puzzled me, there are some of our hearers who would not be absent on the Sunday for all the world, and who seem to be quite delighted to come up with us to worship, but yet the tear never trickles down their cheek, their soul never seems mounting up to heaven on the wings of praise, nor do they truly join in our confessions of sin.

When do they ever think about the wrath to come, or of the future state of their souls? Their heart is as iron, the minister might as well preach to a heap of stones as preach to them. What brings these senseless sinners here? Shall we talk to brows of brass and hearts of steel? Surely we are as hopeful of converting lions and leopards as these untamed, unmoved hearts. Oh, feeling! you are fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason. I suppose these men often come because it is respectable, and again, because it even helps to make them hard, if they stopped away, conscience would prick them, there would be a little life in them, but they go that they may be able to flatter themselves with the notion that they are doing right after all.

Oh, my hearers, your case is one that might make an angel weep, to have the sun of the Gospel shining on your faces, and yet to have blind eyes that never see the light. The music of heaven sounds sweetly, but your ears are deaf, and the faintest accent never reaches your poor spirit, the minister is to you as one who plays upon a goodly instrument, but he plays before a statue that has no ears to hear. You can catch the turn of a phrase, you can find out the meaning of a metaphor, but the hidden meaning, the divine life, is all lost upon you. You are sitting at the marriage feast, but you eat not of the dainties, you drink not of those wines, you hear the bells of heaven sounding joy over ransomed spirits, but you yourself live unransomed, without God, and without Christ.

You are standing at the gate of the narrow way, at the very gate, but yet you do not enter it, you are close to the house of mercy, and the door is ajar, you stand, and sometimes look within, but never take the final and decisive step. Let us do what we may to urge you, let us plead with you and pray for you, and weep over you, you still remain just as hardened, as careless, and as thoughtless as ever you were. Oh! may God have mercy on you, and bring you out of this evil state, that you may yet be saved. O Holy Spirit, break up this hard highway, and cause it yet to bring forth abundantly.

We have not, however, completed the picture. The passage tells us that the fowls of the air devoured it. Is there a man here, this morning, who is one of these wayside hearers? Perhaps he did not mean to come in, but he saw a great crowd standing in the Strand, and he thought he would even turn in and spend the hour, and he will hear something, perhaps, which he will not readily forget, but when he shall get outside and go home, some old companion will propose to him that they should go on some excursion this afternoon. He agrees, and that poor seed which fell on such an unpropitious spot, will be devoured by the fowls of the air.

There are plenty of evil ones ready always to eat up this good seed. There is the devil himself, that prince of the air, ready at any time to snatch away a good thought, or quench a holy resolution. And then, the devil is not alone—he has legions of helpers. He may set a man's own wife, a man's own children, he may set that shop of yours upon you, and it may eat up the good seed. There may be a customer waiting at the door, and though you have no wish to serve him today, yet you may be afraid of losing him, and you may do it, and then the good seed is gone, and all its good effect is carried away. Oh, sorrow upon sorrow that heavenly seed should become devil's meat, that God's corn should feed the devil's birds.

Let me turn personally to you again, this morning. O my hearers, if you have heard the Gospel from your youth, what wagon loads of sermons have been wasted on you! In your younger days, you heard old Dr. So-and-so, and the dear old man was accustomed to pray for his hearers till his eyes were red with tears! Do you recollect those many Sundays when you said to yourself, "Let me go to my chamber and fall on my knees and pray"? But you did not, the fowls of the air ate up the seed, and you went on to sin as you had sinned. Since then, by some strange impulse, you are very rarely absent from God's house, but now the sparks of the Gospel fall into your soul as if they dropped into an ocean, in which they are quenched forever.

The law may be thundered at you, you do not sneer at it, but it never affects you. Jesus Christ may be lifted up, His dear wounds may be exhibited, His streaming blood may flow before your very eyes, and you may be bidden with all earnestness to look to Him and live, but it is has now become a matter of perfect indifference to you. You have not said so much in words, "If I am to be lost, I shall be lost, and if I am to be saved, I shall be saved," you have not *said* so much, but you have come to *think* so, and now we may do what we will with you, and what we will for you, your flinty spirits we cannot penetrate, and into your hard heart we cannot thrust a holy thought.

What shall I do for you? Shall I stand here, and rain tears upon this hard highway? Alas! My tears will not break it; it is far too hard for that. Shall I bring the Gospel-plow upon it? Alas! It will break the steel, but the share will not enter. What shall we do? O God, You know how to dash the flint in pieces. You can melt the stony long-travelled heart with the precious blood of Jesus. Do it now, we beseech You, to the praise and glory of Your grace, that the good seed may yet live, and yet produce that

heavenly harvest, after which the soul of Your servant yearns, without which he cannot live, but with which he can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

II. I shall now turn to the second class of hearers. “And some fell upon a ROCK, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”

You can easily picture to yourselves that piece of rock cropping out in the midst of the field. By some disruption of nature, it has been heaped upwards into the midst of the plain, and of course the seed falls there as it does everywhere else. We have hearers who cause us more pleasure and yet more subsequent pain than many of you would believe. None but those who love the souls of men can tell what hopes, what joy, and what bitter dashings of our expectations to the ground these stony places have caused us.

We have a class of hearers whose hearts inwardly are very hard, but outwardly they are apparently the softest and most impressible of men. While other men see nothing in the sermon, these men weep. It is but an ordinary discourse to the most of our hearers, but these men are affected to tears. Whether you preach the terrors of the law or the love of Calvary, they are alike stirred in their souls, and the liveliest impressions are apparently produced.

I have some here this morning. They have resolved, re-resolved, and yet they have procrastinated. They are not the sturdy enemies of God who clothe themselves in steel, but they seem to bare their breasts, and lay them open, and say to the minister, “Cut here, here is a naked breast for you. Here aim your arrows. They shall find a ready lodging place.” Rejoiced in heart, we shoot our arrows there, and they appear to penetrate, but, alas, there is a secret armor worn underneath the flesh which blunts every dart, and though it abides awhile, it falls away, and no work is done.

We read of this character under this language—“Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth.” Or as another passage explains it, “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.”

Oh! have we not tens of thousands of hearers who receive the Word of God with joy? They have no deep convictions, it is true, no terrible alarms, but they leap into Christ on a sudden, and profess an instantaneous faith in Him, and that faith too has all the appearance of being genuine. When we look at it, the seed has really sprouted. There is a kind of life in it, there is the real green blade. We thank God, and bow our knees, and clap our hands—there a sinner is brought back we say, there is a soul born to God, there is an heir of heaven.

But our joy is premature—they sprang up on a sudden, and received the Word with joy because they had no depth of earth, and from that very cause, which hastened their reception of the seed, they also by and by when the sun is risen with his fervent heat, withered away.

These men we see every day in the week. They often come to join the church, they tell us a story of how they heard us preach on such-and-such an occasion, and oh the Word was so blessed to them, they never felt so happy in their lives! “Oh sir, I thought I must leap from my seat when I heard about a precious Christ, and I believed on Him there and then, I am sure I did.” We ask them whether they ever felt their need of a savior. They say “Yes,” but they mean “No.” We question them as to whether they were ever convinced of sin. Well they think they were, but they don’t know, but one thing they know, they feel a great pleasure in religion.

We put it to them, “Do you think you will hold on?” Oh, they are confident that they shall. They could not go back to their old acquaintances, they are quite sure of it. They hate the things they once loved, they are sure they do. Everything has become new to them. And all this is on a sudden. We inquire when the good work began. We find it began when it ended, that is to say, there was no previous work, no plowing of the soil, but on a sudden they sprang from death to life and out of condemnation into grace, as a man standing on the edge of a river might leap into the flood. Still we are very thankful

for these men. We cannot deny that there seems to be every appearance of grace. Perhaps we receive them into the church, but in a week or two they are not so regular as they used to be at a place of worship. We gently reprove them, and they say, well, they meet with such opposition in religion, that they are content to yield a little. Another week and we lose them altogether.

The reason is that they have been laughed at, exposed to a little opposition, and they have gone back. They are the Mr. Pliables, they will go to heaven with Christian, for heaven is a brave country. So they walk arm in arm, chatting so sweetly together about the world to come. But by and by, there is a bog—the Slough of Despond—and in goes poor Christian, and Mr. Pliable falls in too. “Oh!” says he, “I did not bargain for this, I did not bargain to have my mouth filled with dirt, if I can once get out, and get back, you may have the brave country all to yourself for me.” So the poor man flounders out as best he can, and lands on the same side as his own house, and back he goes, so glad to think he has escaped from the melancholy necessity of being a Christian.

And what think you are the feelings of the minister? He feels that he had reckoned too early upon his success. He is like the husbandman, who sees his field all green and flourishing, and at night a frost nips every shoot, and the poor farmer mourns because his hoped-for gains are gone. So does the minister, he goes to his chamber, and casts himself on his face before God and cries, “Oh, I have been deceived, this man has returned like a dog to his vomit, like the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

You will remember that ancient picture of Orpheus, who had such skill on the lyre that the ancients said he made the very oaks and stones to dance around him. It is a poetical fiction, and yet has it sometimes happened to the minister, that not only have the godly rejoiced, but the very oaks and stones have danced from their places, but alas! they have been oaks and stones still. Hushed is the lyre, and the oak returns to its rooting place, and the stone casts itself once more heavily to the earth. The sinner, who, like Saul, was among the prophets, goes back to plan mischief against the Lord Most High.

He who sung yesterday, and prayed the day before in the public assembly, goes to the tavern to curse, he rolls through the streets on the Sabbath night which follows his reception into the church visible on earth.

I had one man who caused me many bitter tears. In a certain village he was the ringleader of all that was bad, he was a tall, fine, big fellow, and a man that could drink more largely than, perhaps, any man for miles around him. He was the terror of the neighborhood—a man who would curse and swear, and never knew a thought of fear.

He stepped in one day to hear the Word of God, and he wept. All the parish was astonished. There was old So-and-so weeping, and it was rumored about that Tom felt impressed. He began regularly to attend the chapel, and was manifestly an altered man. The public house lost an excellent customer, he was not seen in the skittle alley, nor was he detected in the drunken rows that were so common in the neighborhood. At last he ventured to come forward at the prayer meeting, he talked about what he had experienced, what he had felt and known. I heard him pray, it was rough, rugged language, but there was such impassioned earnestness. I set him down as being a bright jewel in the Redeemer’s crown.

He held out six, nay, nine months he persevered in our midst. If there was rough work to be done, he would do it, if there was a Sunday school to be maintained six or seven miles away, he would walk there. At any risk, he would be out to help in the Lord’s work, if he could but be of service to the lowest member of the church of Christ, he rejoiced greatly. So he went on, but at last, the laughter to which he was exposed, the jeers and scoffs of his old companions—though at first he bore them like a man—became too much for him.

He began to think he had been a little too fanatical, a little too earnest. He slunk up to the place of worship instead of coming boldly in, he gradually forsook week night service, and forsook the Sabbath day at last, and though often warned, and often rebuked, he returned to his old habits, and though never again such a monster in sin as he had been before, yet any thoughts of God or godliness that he had ever known, seemed to die away. He could again take the blasphemer’s oath, once more could he act wickedly with the profane, and he—of whom we had often boasted, and said in our meetings together,

“Oh! how much is God to be glorified by this! what cannot grace do?”—to the confusion of us all, was to be seen sometimes drunk in our streets, and then it was thrown in our teeth, “This is one of your Christians, is it?—one of your converts gone back again, and become as bad as he was before?”

If it is bad to be a wayside hearer, I cannot think it is much better to be like the rock. And yet this second class of hearers certainly gives us more joy than the first. There is a sort of people who always comes round a new minister, and I have often thought it is an act of God’s kindness in Providence that He always sends some of these people to gather at the first, while the minister is young, and has but few to stand by him—a class of people who are easily moved, and if he preaches earnestly they feel it, and they love him, and they gather round him.

But time, that proves all things, proves them. They seemed to be made of good and true metal, but they are put in the fire, they are tested, they are proved, they are consumed in the furnace. I see as I look here some one or two of that kind. I do not know the most of you, but I do see some of whom I must say, “You are the very persons here described.” I have looked at you when I have been preaching, and often have I thought, “There, that man one of these days will come out from the world, I am sure he will.” I have thanked God for him.

Ah! but these seven years have we preached to you and you are the same as you were. Well, there may be seven years more, who can tell? and are those to be seven years of wasted efforts? are those to be seven years of warnings rejected and of invitations refused? Can it be so, and must you be carried to your tomb at last, and shall I stand over the mouth of that open sepulcher, and think, “Here lies a blasted hope, a flower that withered in its bud, a man in whom grace seemed to struggle, but in whom it never reigned, who gave some hopeful spasms of life, and then they all subsided into the coldness and languor of eternal death?” God save you! Oh! may He deal with you effectually, and may you, even you, yet be brought in, that Jesus may have all the glory.

III. I shall have very briefly to treat of the third class, and may the Spirit of God assist me to deal faithfully with you. “And some fell among THORNS, and the thorns sprung up and choked it.”

Now this was good soil. The two first characters were bad, the wayside was not the proper place, the rock was not a congenial situation for the growth of any plant, but this is good soil, for it grows thorns. A soil that will grow thistles will surely grow wheat. Wherever the thistle will spring up and flourish, there would wheat flourish too.

This was right rich, fat, fertile soil, it was no marvel therefore that the husbandman dealt largely there, and threw handful after handful upon that corner of the field. See how happy he is when in a month or two’s time he visits the spot. The seed has sprung up. True, there’s a suspicious little plant down there of about the same size as the wheat. “Oh!” he thinks, “that’s not much, the corn will outgrow that, when it comes up it will choke these few thistles that have unfortunately mixed with it.” Ay, Mr. Husbandman, you do not understand the force of evil, or you would not thus dream!

He comes again, and the seed has grown, there is even the corn in the ear, but the thistles, the thorns, and the briars have become intertwined with one another, and the poor wheat can hardly get a ray of sunshine. It is so festooned with brambles every way, that what with the drippings from the brambles and the absence of sunlight, it looks of a yellow and sallow hue. Still it lives, it perseveres in growing, and it does seem as if it would bring forth a little fruit, but it never comes to anything. With it the reaper never fills his arm. There is the sign of fruit, but there is no reality in it, it brings forth no fruit unto perfection.

Now we have this class very largely among us. We have the gentlemen and the ladies who come up to hear the Word, and they understand what they hear too. They are not ignorant and unenlightened men and women, who cast away what they have heard. We are not throwing pearls before swine when we preach to them, but they recollect and treasure up the words of truth, they take them home, they think them over, they come, they come, they come again. They even go the length of making a profession of religion. The wheat seems to bud, and bloom and blossom, it will soon come to perfection. Be in no hurry, these men and women have a great deal to see after, they have the cares of a large concern, their

establishment employs so many hundred hands, do not be deceived about their godliness—they have no time for it. They will tell you that they must live, that they cannot neglect this world, that they must anyhow look out for the present, and as for the future, they think they will be able to take care of that by and by. They continue to attend, and that poor little dwindled blade keeps on growing, and now they have got rich, they can come up to the place of worship in their carriage, they have all that heart can wish now.

Ah! now the seed will grow, will it not? No, no. They have no cares now, the shop is given up, they live in the country, they have not to ask, “Where shall the money come from to meet the next bill,” or “How they shall be able to provide for an increasing family.” No, now they have too much instead of too little, for they have their *riches*. “Well but,” says one, “they might spend their riches for God,” they might be talents that they could put out at interest.” Oh! no, it is not that, their riches are deceitful. Now they have to entertain much company, now they must think about becoming members of parliament, now they must have all the deceitfulness which riches can possibly confer.

Yes, but they begin to spend their riches, so they have surely got over that difficulty. They give largely to the cause of Christ, they are munificent in the cause of charity, and the like, now that little blade will grow, will it not? No, for now behold the thorns of pleasure. Their liberality to others involves liberality to themselves, they take pleasure in what they have, and quite right they should too, but at the same time these pleasures become so tall and so big that they choke the wheat, and the good grains of Gospel truth cannot grow because they have this pleasure, that musical party, that ball and that soiree, so they cannot attend to the things of God, because the pleasures of this world choke the seed.

I know several fearful specimens of this class. It were not fair to tell the story if it should be known again, but I might tell of scores. I know one who stands high in court circles, who has often confessed to me that he wished he were poor, for he thinks that then he might enter the kingdom of heaven. He holds a high position, but he has said it—and it too with marks upon his countenance which showed that he meant what he said—“Ah! sir, these politics, these politics, I wish I were rid of them, they are eating the life out of my heart, I cannot serve God as I would. I only wish I could retire to some sequestered place to seek my savior.” I know of one, too, overloaded perhaps with riches, always kind and noble with them too, that man has said to me—when we have walked together and I have read his very thoughts—“Ah! sir, it is an awful thing to be rich, for one cannot find it easy to keep to the savior with all this earth about me.”

Ah! my dear hearers, I will not ask for you that God may lay you on a bed of sickness; that He may strip you of all your wealth, that He may bring you to beggary, that He may take away your comforts, I will not ask that, but oh, if He were to do it, and you were to save your soul, it would be the greatest bargain you could ever make. If the king could doff his diadem to be saved, if those mightiest among the mighty who now make this complaint, that the thorns choke the seed, could give up all their riches and be banished from all their pleasures, if all their luxury should be turned into poverty, and if they that fare sumptuously every day could take the place of Lazarus on the dunghill, and have dogs to lick their sores, it were a happy change for them if their souls might be but saved.

Mind you, I do not believe but what a man may be honorable and rich, and have much pleasure in the mercies of God, and then go to heaven hereafter, but it will be hard work with him, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Some of those camels do go through the needle’s eye, God does make some rich men enter the kingdom of heaven, but hard is their struggle, and desperate is the strife they always have against their proud flesh, to keep it under and subdue it.

Steady, young man, steady! Hurry not to get up there. It is a place where your head will turn. Do not ask God to make you popular, they that have popularity hate it, and would be rid of it. Do not ask that He would make you famous and rich, they that are famous and rich often look within, and wish that they could go back to the quietude they once enjoyed. Cry with Agur—“Give me neither poverty nor riches.”

God give me to tread the golden mean, and may I ever have in my heart that good seed, which shall bring forth fruit a hundredfold to His own glory.

IV. I now close with the last character, namely the GOOD GROUND.

Of the good soil as you will, mark, we have but one in four. Ah! would to God there were one in four of us here, with well-prepared hearts to receive the Word. The ground was good, not that it was good by nature, but it had been made good by grace. God had plowed it, He had stirred it up with the plow of conviction, and there it lay in ridge and furrow as it should be. And when the Gospel was preached, the heart received it, for the man said, "That's just the Christ I want. Mercy!" said he, "it's just what a needy sinner requires. A refuge! God help me to fly to it, for a refuge I sorely want." So that the preaching of the Gospel was THE thing to give comfort to this disturbed and plowed soil.

Down fell the seed, it sprung up. In some cases it produced fervency of love, a largeness of heart, a devotedness of purpose, like seed which produces a hundredfold. The man became a mighty servant for God, he spent himself and was spent. He took his place in the vanguard of Christ's army, stood in the hottest of the battle, and did deeds of daring which few could accomplish—the seed produced a hundredfold. It fell into another heart of like character—the man could not do the most, still he did much. He gave himself, just as he was, up to God, and in his business he had a word to say for the business of the world to come. In his daily walk, he quietly adorned the doctrine of God his Savior—he brought forth sixty-fold. Then, it fell on another, whose abilities and talents were but small, he could not be a star, but he would be a glowworm, he could not do as the greatest, but he was content to do something, even though it were the least. The seed had brought forth in him ten-fold, perhaps twenty-fold. How many have I of such in this vast congregation today?

I came here with my soul all on fire to preach to you, but a sudden darkness and heaviness of soul has possessed me, and while I have been addressing you, I have preached in my won spirit against wind and tide. But may I hope that notwithstanding the awkwardness with which I throw the seed it may light on some good spot, some happy soil? Is there one who prays within himself, "O Lord save me, God be merciful to me a sinner"? The seed has fallen in the right spot. Soul, your prayer shall be heard, God never sets a man longing for mercy without intending to give it.

And does another whisper, "Oh! that I might be saved"? Soul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you, even you, shall be saved! Have you been the chief of sinners? Trust Christ, and your enormous sins shall vanish as the millstone sinks beneath the flood. Is there no man here that will now trust the Savior? Can it be possible that the Spirit is entirely absent? that He is not moving in one soul? not begetting life in one spirit? We will pray that now He may descend, that scattered badly as the seed may be, the protecting God may watch over it, and foster and nourish it, till it shall come to an eternal harvest.

What a solemn thought it is—to think of these great Sunday gatherings these many years, coming and going, coming and going, and so many yet unsaved! I suppose it is my lot to address more than one or two millions every year of precious immortal spirits, and how many out of these millions hear with deaf ears, are not moved in their souls, but continue as they were, dead in trespasses and in sins!

The thought sometimes staggers me—shall these congregations pass before my eyes in eternity, and if I have been unfaithful, shall I be spit upon by every mouth of every man whom I have deceived? Shall every eye of the millions I have addressed flash fiery damnations on me throughout eternity? They must, *they must*, if I have not sought your welfare, and if I have not preached to you the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I implore you, I beseech of you, if your blood must fall somewhere, at least take heed to what I say now, or permit me to hope that you will accept me as having tried to be faithful to you, lest your blood be found on my skirts.

But why should that blood be scattered anywhere? Is there not hope? Is there not salvation? Is there not, while life lasts, still an open door of escape? Flee, flee, my hearer, flee! I beseech you flee, I implore you by the living God, by time, by eternity, by heaven, by hell, flee, flee to Jesus, ere Death o'ertakes you, for he is after you—that skeleton rider on his pale horse, and ere damnation reaches you flee, flee to him whose opened arms are ready to receive you now. Trust Jesus and you are saved, "He

that believeth on the Lord Jesus, and is baptized, shall be saved, he that believeth not must be damned.” Am I fanatical or enthusiastic in begging, in beseeching you to think of these things? “Fanatic,” at the day of judgment, will only mean a man who was in earnest. An “Enthusiast,” will only mean one who meant what he said. Oh, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, lest now, even while you are here, God’s wrath should burn, and his swift justice overtake you—

*“Come, guilty souls, and flee away,
To Christ, and heal your wounds;
This is the welcome Gospel-day,
Wherein free grace abounds.”*

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.