

THE SEED BY THE WAYSIDE

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“As he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down,
and the fowls of the air devoured it.”*
Luke 8:5

THIS parable is recorded by Matthew, and Mark, and Luke. It is a very important one, and therefore, it is very carefully preserved for us. Matthew puts it, “When he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came, and devoured them up.”

Notice that the sower is always spoken of as a solitary man. In the harvest field, there is a great company, and they sing and shout together in harmony, but the sower goes forth alone. Our Savior was the great Sower, “THE SOWER went forth to sow,” unaccompanied. He pursued His solitary way, and all day long He continued His personal task. For that reason, I feel that when we come together in large numbers—the majority of us, I hope, being earnest sowers of the good seed of the kingdom, we help to cheer each other up, for to a large extent, we have to work alone.

I have, thank God, many helpers, but there are certain parts of this work in which I feel an almost unbearable solitude. I suppose that you, who are engaged in your own spheres of service, often derive much comfort from Christian communion, but there must be some parts of your work in which you have to act by yourselves, to labor alone, and to wait upon God alone.

I think that this experience is good for us. I do not believe that it is good for us to be continually leaning upon one another, like those houses of which so many are being run up nowadays. If you took the end one away, they would all fall down. We want to be self-contained, not merely semi-detached, but altogether detached, so as to be able to stand by ourselves upon our own foundation. God sometimes takes away a helper from us in order that we may learn to lean upon Him only, and to go about our service in entire dependence upon the Master who is to derive glory not only from the result of the service, but from the service itself.

It may do us good to talk a little while about our failures. I suppose that we have all had a good many. When some of you began your work for God, you thought that you were going to push the world before you, and to drag the church behind you, but you have not done it yet. You fancied that you were going to convert everybody by your preaching, but like Melancthon, you have had to say, “Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon,” and you have been driven closer to God by the very failures which you have experienced.

If the Holy Spirit shall graciously help us, we may both glorify God and comfort one another while we meditate upon one set of failures with which we are constantly meeting, that is, those that are set forth in these words, “As he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

So, first, we learn that *we shall have some unprofitable labors*. Secondly, *we shall find that some soils will remain unsuitable for the good seed*. And thirdly, *we shall have to watch that seed*, that we may learn something from what happens to it.

I. First then, WE SHALL MOST CERTAINLY HAVE SOME UNPROFITABLE LABORS—something to sigh over, something that will drive us to cry, with Isaiah, “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

We may expect this, first, *because it is so in everything else*. There is not a tradesman here who makes a profit on everything. There never was a merchant who was successful in every transaction. There are losses in the most gainful trade. Look at the fisherman, does he catch fish every time he casts his net? I have stood many times, on the sea shore at Mentone, and seen from a dozen to twenty men pull in a net which had encompassed many acres of sea, and when they had pulled it in, I could hold in my hand all that they had caught.

Yet I have seen them go out again almost directly after, and come in again with as little as before, but they still kept on their task even though, often and often, the tiniest plate would hold all that they took. Fishermen do not give up their work because they have some failures in their fishing, and if we take the figure which our Lord used, that of the husbandman, we find that all crops do not succeed.

The husbandman, after some years of experience, at any rate, does not expect that every seed will come up, and that every crop will be alike bountiful. If he did, he would be sorely disappointed. He learns at last to set the gain over against the loss—to set the success over against the failure, and so he perseveres, and has patience, expecting and believing that in the long run, he will be a gainer.

So, dear Christian friend, whatever is your sphere of service, I would lead you to expect that there will be some unprofitable parts of the field because it is so in everything else, and the analogies of nature generally hold good in the sphere of grace.

Do you not think, in the next place, that *our disappointments, our unprofitable labors, teach us our dependence upon God*? Perhaps we are not able yet to bear a very large measure of success. If the Lord blesses some brethren a little, and they see a few souls brought to Christ, they are not only very grateful and very happy, which is quite right, but they are very great in their own esteem, which is quite wrong. You should hear them at night after a successful meeting, you would hardly know them. God has given them a puff of wind in their sail, and they are almost blown over, for they have so little ballast.

There are some of us workers for God whom He cannot trust with success, that is one reason for our failures, for our Master means to make more use of us by and by. It does not yet appear what we shall be, and He is humbling us that we may be fitted to bear the exceeding weight of happiness which He means to lay upon us when, in after years, He makes us bring forth abundantly to His praise and glory.

O workers, mind that you are fit to be blessed by God! Do pray that you may be in such a state of spiritual health that it may be safe for your heavenly Father to indulge you with very much success! I do think that whenever we have been trying hard for the conversion of any person, and we have not succeeded in it, it drives us to our knees.

You must have met with some who have greatly disappointed you. You thought that you had that fish, but it has slipped away from you, and gone back into the river or sea again. You supposed that that woman was really converted. What a sincere penitent she seemed to be! But she has gone back to her old sins, and is as evil as ever.

You thought that that man was really a most striking instance of divine grace, but you are ashamed of him now, for he is doing harm to others, who think that there is nothing in religion when they see what a false profession he has made.

Ah, some of you do not know the heartbreak which we, who have to deal with many souls, have to endure, but in your smaller sphere, you must often have had to go to God with tears bedewing your cheeks because, after all, you have not won that boy for Christ, or you cannot induce that giddy girl to seek the Savior. You have wept and you have prayed, and yet, for all that, there is some of the way side still in front of you, and it seems as if it never can and never will yield any harvest to your sowing.

We do not like wasting our breath, we do not like, above all, seeming to waste our breath in prayer, and I do not believe that we really do so. I believe that it all turns in some way to God's glory, but yet it does so happen that by our failures, we are driven to feel our entire dependence upon our God. We are emptied of our self-sufficiency, and made to know that we can no more convert a soul than we can make a world. Any man, who thinks that he can create a new heart in any other person, had better begin by creating a fly. When he has done that, then let him think that he can make a sinful man to be a new

creature in Christ Jesus. Go and raise the dead, if you can. Speak to those that lie in our cemeteries, and cause them to live again, and then imagine that you have within you the power to call a dead soul to spiritual life. This is the work of God alone, God's arm must be made bare ere this miracle can be wrought, and our failures teach us our absolute dependence upon Him.

This process is needful, also, in order *to get at the good soil*. We must sometimes have to deal with persons who derive no benefit from us, for the sake of others connected with them. The sower does not want to cast his seed upon the path that runs through the middle of the field. It is so hard that he knows that whatever falls upon it will be lost. But then, he does want to sow right up to the edge of it, he does not want to leave a long strip on each side of the path, without any corn.

His endeavor is, while he does not waste more than he can help upon the path, yet to sow right along by the edge of it that he may have a harvest close up to the barren pathway. It cannot be helped, in the nature of things, that some grains of wheat must fall upon the trodden path.

So, if you want to be the means of blessing to a man's wife, it may be that you will have to try to win her husband also, although he never will be won to Christ. If it be your anxious desire that all the children in a certain house should be converted to God, and if all the family should come to hear the Word, it may be that one member of the family will never receive the blessing.

Do not begin asking any questions about that matter, your business is to preach to them all—to "preach the Gospel to every creature," and if there should be some who prove to be like the trodden pathway to the good seed, effectually resisting the Gospel, it is necessary that they should be in the audience, for if they did not come, it is probable that somebody else, whom God means to bless, would not be there.

Further, consider that *this scattering of the seed on the trodden road is necessary to the testing of the soil*. I believe that we should do a deal of mischief by keeping on sorting out certain characters in preaching the Gospel, for it would drive people to think of themselves rather than of the Gospel. If I were to come here and say, "Now if you are so-and-so, and so-and-so, then you may come to Christ, and be saved," the first thought in each of my hearer's minds would be, "Am I this, or am I that?"

I do not want you to think in any such fashion as that, the main thing is to take you off from all thought of self, that you may think only of Christ and His all-sufficiency. Are you a creature? We are bidden to preach the Gospel to every creature. Are you a sinner? Then, "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

So, if we are to preach in this wholesale style, we must throw some handfuls of seed where they will never spring up, and our great Lord has so much good corn, He is so rich a Husbandman, that He will not miss those handfuls that seem to be lost, and we have a far easier task to bear our failures, and mourn over them, than if we had to be weighted with the responsibility of picking out our hearers and saying, "This one may have the Gospel, and that other one may not." That would be, indeed, a heavier burden than we could bear.

I remember Rowland Hill's reply, when somebody said that he ought to preach only to the elect. "Very well," he said, "next Sunday morning, chalk them all on the back, and when you have done that, I will preach to them." But the chalking of them on the back is the difficulty, we cannot do that, and as we cannot do that, the best way is for us to leave our God to carry out the purposes of His distinguishing grace in His own effectual way, and not attempt to do what we certainly can never accomplish. There, scatter a handful of seed "by the way side." Even if the birds of the air devour it, there is plenty more where that came from, and it would be a pity for us to leave any portion unsown because we were miserly and parsimonious with our Master's seed.

Once more, I am sure that when we do meet with failures, as we all do, *this makes us the more grateful when we see the seed spring up anywhere*. I could not help blessing God, in the prayer meeting before this service, for any soul that had ever found the Savior under my ministry. It always seems to stagger me how God can bless one who is so feeble, and I think that it must often surprise you, my dear friends, when you find that God has really brought a sinner to Jesus' feet through your instrumentality.

When we remember the feebleness of our testimony, and our frequent want of faith in God—when we recollect how often we go home groaning because we cannot preach as we would like to preach—and I suppose I may say of you teachers, because you cannot teach as you would like to teach—then we can say, “Blessed be God, ten thousand times, if but one poor servant girl has found the way to heaven through me.” If one poor Arab of the street should find Christ at the ragged school, if there were only one as the result of a life of service, it would well repay you.

Do not feel that because you seem to have no influence upon some people, the edge of the chisel is taken off, the material upon which you are working is so hard that you cannot make any impression upon it. When the Lord gives you another piece of wood that He has softened, you may work away at that, and then you will be able to say, “Blessed be His name, I do not have all the difficult side of the work, but I do have to sow in some honest and good soil, which brings forth its hundredfold as my reward.”

II. But secondly, it is certainly true that we shall find SOME SOILS WHICH, for the present, at any rate, SEEM UNSUITED TO THE GOSPEL.

This trodden track, through the field, was not a fit place for the seed to fall with any hope of a harvest following. Roadways, which have been long used, become very bad for sowing. I remember paying a visit to the old city of Silchester, which still remains in England, few ever seem to see it, but it is well worth seeing, though nothing remains but the walls.

I went down to examine it, and standing on the wall, I could distinctly trace the streets of that old city, yet the whole of it was covered with corn, but the corn would not come to perfection, or grow to any great length of straw, where the old Roman roads had been. Near Croydon, I have frequently traced the old Roman road, through a field of grass or of corn, by the fact that it was so well made that after the English ploughing of centuries, it still seems difficult to raise good crops upon the ground, and those Oriental paths, though not made with all the skill of the Roman road makers, became very hard through being traversed by multitudes of feet.

In a similar manner, there are many persons into whom we cannot get the Gospel because *they are too much occupied*. There is too much traffic over them. They are not occupied with deep thought, but with multitudes of frivolous thoughts, which are well imaged by travelers who just pass continually along a road. Have we not many in our congregations who are always occupied with worldly thoughts? From the moment they are up till they go to bed, it is just one continuous tramp of the world. They are trodden with the multitudinous feet of worldly business.

Then, along a public road, you not only have business men, but you have persons bent on pleasure. How many young people there are whose hearts are just a road along which thoughts of levity and desires for amusement are continually going! How many precious hours are wasted over the novels of the day! I do think that one of the worst enemies of the Gospel of Christ, at the present time, is to be found in the fiction of the day.

People get these worthless books, and sit, and sit, forgetful of the duties of this world, and of all that relates to the world to come, just losing themselves in the story of the hero or heroine. I have seen them shedding tears over things that never happened, as if there were not enough real sorrows in the world for us to grieve over. So these feet of fictitious personages, these feet of foolish frivolities, these feet of mere nonsense, or worse, keep traversing the hearts of men, and making them hard, so that the Gospel cannot enter.

I believe too, that some are made hard even by hearing the Gospel. You can hear too much if you do not hear aright. One nail can drive another out. If one sermon were put into practice, it would be better than fifty that went in at one ear, and out the other. Some are always greedy to hear the last new orator who has been discovered. They will go all over London to listen to him. That is only another kind of traffic constantly going over the road, and making it as hard as if it were traversed for unholy purposes.

Again, this was bad and unsuitable soil because *it was hardened by the constant traffic*. Sin hardens the heart. Every sin makes room for another sin, and it is always easier to sin again after you have sinned

once. Nay, more, I might even say that it becomes almost inevitable that you will sin again after you have sinned once. Sin hardens the mind so that it does not receive the Gospel.

And the world has a hardening effect too. Association with its society, yielding to its customs, being engrossed in its business—all this makes a man's heart exceedingly hard. I have already reminded you that, alas! even the Gospel itself may harden sinners in their sin. After long hearing it, neglecting it, rejecting it, it seems to operate upon them in a very terrible way, so that it becomes a savor of death unto death to them. Sad to relate, they are not alarmed by the fatal lethargy which has crept over them even while hearing the Word, and if they hear error, it has the same effect in a more dreadful way.

Much of the preaching of the present day tends to harden the hearts of men against the Gospel. They are excused in their sins, taught to question the inspiration of the Scriptures, led to doubt whether, after all, sin will bring the eternal punishment which our Lord Jesus plainly revealed. Oh, it is a sad, sad thing when all this traffic of things good, bad, and indifferent has gone over a man's soul till it becomes harder than the nether millstone!

One other reason why this soil was so uncongenial was that *it was totally unprepared for the seed*. There had been no ploughing before the seed was sown, and no harrowing afterwards. He that sows without a plough may reap without a sickle. He who preaches the Gospel without preaching the law may hold all the results of it in his hand, and there will be little for him to hold.

Robbie Flockhart, when he preached in the streets of Edinburgh, used to say, "You must preach the law, for the Gospel is a silken thread, and you cannot get it into the hearts of men unless you have made a way for it with a sharp needle, the sharp needle of the law will pull the silken thread of the Gospel after it." There must be ploughing before there is sowing if there is to be reaping after the sowing.

And in this case there was no harrowing after sowing, and that is a very important part of the work—to go over the ground again to get the seed well into the soil. I like those prayer meetings that harrow in the seed, and that private prayer, that secret study of the Word, that private crying unto God, after the seed has been sown, that He would be pleased to cover it up, and keep it in the soil, and make it grow ready for the harvest, but with no ploughing before the sowing, and no harrowing afterwards, what result can you expect?

We do meet with hearers who are just like that trodden path. I wonder how many of that sort are here now. As a rule, we have a choice congregation on a Thursday evening, because it is not every hypocrite who comes out to a week night service. I do not say that every hypocrite comes out on Sunday, but we have a hope that persons have some love for the things of God when they come out on a week night to hear the Gospel. Yet I should not wonder if some of you are no better than you ought to be, as hearers of the Word, I mean.

Some people come to see what kind of a place the Tabernacle is, or what kind of a person the preacher is. I hope that all of you are perfectly satisfied now on both those points, and that you will forget all about the place and the preacher, and will just think about yourselves, and about that divine truth which will not be blessed to your salvation unless it is honestly and genuinely received into your heart. If you receive Christ, He will bring forth fruit in you, but if you remain like the trodden pathway, and do not receive Him, what can be the result but your greater condemnation?

III. The third thing that I learn from this part of the parable is that **WE MUST WATCH THE SEED**. Ministers have to do this, all Christian workers have to do this, we will try to do it now for a few minutes.

First, it is clear that *when this seed was sown, it touched the heart*. In the twelfth verse, we read, "Those by the way side are they that hear, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the Word out of their hearts." Then it must have reached their hearts, and that is the sad part about it. These hearers were not, after all, merely hearers, for they were, to some extent, affected by the Word. They had some serious thoughts for the time being.

The seed did not get into their hearts, but it did touch them. It fell on the soil, and remained on the soil for a while, though it could not get its rootlets down into it, and could not really be absorbed into the

ground, and oh, my dear hearers, it may be that when you hear the Word of God, it does affect you! You have not yet reached that stage in which you can hear it without any feeling whatever. You do feel it, and you sometimes weep when you hear it, yet how often we are disappointed, for you seem desperately resolved not to be saved.

In this case, *the good seed did not really reach the understanding*. Those who heard the Word did not understand it. We are told now that if you touch the heart, that is everything, but it is not. To touch the heart is something, but you must touch the understanding also if you are to effect any permanent good. I mean, that you may gather people together and get up excitement, and work them up in any way you please, for some people are easily moved, but they must understand what it all means if they are to derive real benefit.

It is not enough to say, "Believe! Believe! Believe!" Teach them what they have to believe, or else what good have you done? Shouting, stamping, bawling, crying does not amount to much. People need to be taught to understand the truth, to get a grip of it, to really know the meaning of what they hear. They must know that they are lost. They must know that Christ is the great Substitute for sinners, they must know what the new birth means. Otherwise, if the truth is not received into the understanding, the mere receiving of it into the emotions will be of very little use whatever. These hearers understood not the Word, so Satan stole it away from them.

Notice that, all the while, this good seed, as it did not get into the understanding, *was really outside the man*. There it lay upon the surface. That which fell on the good ground had disappeared. You could not find it, for it had sunk into the earth. But here you can see every single grain that has been dropped, here it lies, outside the soil.

O my dear hearer, as long as the Gospel is outside you, it cannot do you any good! So, let it in. Oh, that your broken heart might receive it! Oh, that your ploughed-up conscience might accept it, and bury the truth of God within your innermost self, that there it might grow!

The next thing that happened to it was that, as it lay there, somebody came along and trod on it. "*It was trodden down.*" It was crushed and smashed. The hearer, who does not receive the truth into his heart, goes outside and meets an old companion who speedily treads on it. Or he gets home to his wife, who does not fear the Lord, and she treads on it. Or tomorrow, he goes into the workshop, and somebody there ridicules him and so treads on the good seed.

Yet, even then, *it retained so much of life as to arouse the opposition of Satan*. Notice how zealous the devil is. We may be careless about souls, but he never is. Although the seed lay there on the surface, and had never penetrated the soil, and although that grain had been trodden on, Satan was not satisfied. He said, "There may be life in it, and if there is, it is dangerous to have it lying there, for it may grow." So he comes and takes it away altogether. Some bird of the air devours it.

I believe that Satan does not like you to come to a place where the Gospel is preached, he knows that if you stand where the shots are flying, you may get one of them into your heart, so he would rather that you would not come at all. But if you do hear the Gospel, even though it does not penetrate into your heart, yet still he does not like it to be there. So he comes and takes it away, makes you forget it, brings something fresh before you, so that you may fail to remember the good Word of God.

Perhaps he suggests a new line of business to you, or there is a new play at the theater, or something fresh to attract your attention, because he is afraid of losing you. He does not like losing his servants, and from long experience, he knows that every now and then one of them runs away at night, and never comes back. So he is always on the watch for would be runaways. He does not want you to be gone, so he calls his birds of the air and says to them, "Take away that seed. The man has not received it into his heart, but I do not even like it to be near him."

I wish I could clap my hands, and so drive those foul birds away, but I ask God's people to lift their hands in prayer that these sermon thieves may be driven off, and that what has been said may abide in your memory.

My dear hearers, are any of you content to be like this trodden way side? Will you continue hearing the Gospel, and yet never receive it into your souls? Are you going to be trodden on, and trodden on, and trodden on, till you are simply a way for other people to use? Some of you work hard for your living and get nothing out of it. Somebody else is getting the whole of your life. You are simply a rut in which other people go to get riches for themselves. Are you content to let it be so with you in a spiritual sense? Do you mean to be nothing else but just a place for other people to walk over, and to use your life for their own ends and purposes?

Oh, that the Holy Spirit would drive the great steam-plough through you, and break you in pieces! It would be the happiest thing that could happen to you, though your misery might be deep and your anguish terrible. And then may He sow you with His own good seed, that you may bring forth fruit to life eternal, having in this life joy, peace, restfulness, usefulness, and in the world to come life everlasting! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." There is a handful of corn for you. Believe now, and you shall live. Look, look, look and live.

Look even now, at this very moment, for you live the moment that you do look. God save you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 8:1-21

Verse 1. *And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him.*

Our Lord's display of forgiving grace to the woman who was a sinner seemed to whet His appetite for soul-saving, so that, "He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." Dear friends, whenever we win a soul for God, let it spur us on to a greater diligence in His service, let it make us insatiable for more of this best wine of the kingdom of heaven.

It was so with our Divine Master. He went about preaching, and as He preached, He was training others also to preach, "the twelve were with him." I think that whenever there is a successful ministry, there should be those round about who are being trained to continue it. Among the Waldensians, the pastors were always accompanied by young men who learned to preach from their example, and who shared their toils when they went from valley to valley proclaiming the Gospel.

2-3. *And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.*

If they could not be apostles, they could, at any rate, being women of property, contribute both to the sustenance of Christ and of the apostles who were with Him. There is a place for everyone who is willing to be used by the great Master-builder, who leaves no stone out of the wall if it is fit to be built into it. There is something for the twelve to do, and there is something for the holy women to do, and we cannot do without either of them, and in that last great day when the rewards are distributed, there will be as much for Joanna as for John, and as much for Mary Magdalene as for Simon Peter. Did they not each, according to their utility, serve the Lord Jesus Christ?

4-6. *And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: a sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; 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.*

Or as Mark records it, "because it had no depth of earth." There was just a little coating of earth, sufficient for the fructification and the early sprouting of the seed, it came up all the more quickly because it was so near the surface, and because the heat could get at it so easily, the hard pan of the rock

speedily sending up the heat to it. But for that very reason, “as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”

7-8. *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 hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

There are many, who have ears, who do not hear to any real purpose. There is the physical act of hearing, but they do not hear in the heart and the mind. It is a very different thing to have an impression on the drum of the ear and to have an impression on the tablet of the heart. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

9-10. *And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

It was a time of judicial visitations. These people had for centuries refused to hear the voice of God, and now they were to pay the penalty for that refusal. The reward of virtue is capacity for higher virtue, just as the effect of vice is a tendency to yet greater vice. When men will not hear the voice of God, it is a just judgment upon them that they cannot hear, their impotence being the result of their impudence. Since they would not hear, they shall not, who shall say that this is not a very just and natural way of allowing sin to punish itself?

So these people heard the words of our Savior’s parable. It was like a cloak, a covering to the truth, but to them, it hid the truth, they did not see it. To the disciples of Christ, it set forth truth in all its beauty, but to the unbelieving people, it hid the truth, so that they did not discern it.

Brethren and sisters, if you and I understand heavenly mysteries, let us not be proud that it is so, but let us hear our Savior saying to us, “Unto you it is *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” This is the gift of the free grace of God. Be very thankful for it, but give God all the glory of it. For if you begin to say to yourself, “I am a man of great understanding,” and if you shall take to yourself a high place, God may leave you to your natural blindness, and then, where will you be?

11. *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.*

Not the word of man. Have we a Word of God at all? Brethren, that is a question which we have to answer nowadays. Our fathers never questioned it, they believed in the infallibility of the Bible, as we do. But now, all our wise men do not think so. They set to work to mend the Scriptures, to pick out of the Bible that which they imagine to be inspired. Let us not do so, my brethren.

12. *Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

He does not mind their merely hearing. What he is afraid of is their believing, for he knows that in believing lies the secret of their salvation.

13. *They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy;*

They are very hasty converts, like men who hurriedly take a bath. They are no sooner in than they are out, it is so speedy that there is more haste than real speed with some of them.

13. *And these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

“These have no root,” and they never had any root. If you give your child a little garden for himself, perhaps he will go and pluck the heads off some of your flowers, and put them in the ground, and say, “There, Father, see what a nice garden of flowers I have got?” But they have no root, and so they very soon wither away. These are like men’s converts, of whom we read that so many scores came forward, the whole of the people in the parish were said to be converted, but in six weeks you cannot find one of them. How often is this the case! We begin to be afraid of those statistics, because there is so little truth in them, and yet, if there were but one saved out of a hundred, how grateful we should be!

14. *And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

How many we have of that sort! They continue somewhat longer than the others, yet they get choked after all.

15. *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

Or “with perseverance, with continuance.” “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” He is not converted at all who is not converted eternally. The work of man is temporary, the work of God is everlasting.

16. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.*

A candlestick, or lamp stand. True religion and true doctrine are not intended to be concealed, they are meant to be seen, and if any of you are hiding these blessed things away, I pray you to do so no longer. Bring out your candle, and put it on the candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

17. *For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.*

You cannot conceal anything from the eye of God, so do not try to do so. You are like bees in a glass hive, watched while you are working, and your every movement observed. God can read the secret emotions of our hidden nature. “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

18. *Take heed therefore how ye hear:*

You think, and think very properly, that we ought to take heed how we preach. Yes, that is true, but you must take heed how you hear. There are a great many criticisms upon preaching, will you kindly make a few criticisms upon your own hearing? I like what a woman said to me some time ago, about a certain preacher. She said, “I heard him well last Sunday.” Ay, that is the thing, she did not tell me how he preached, she told me how she heard, and that is the main point. Good hearers will make good preachers, in due time, I do not doubt. God grant that we may be all good hearers! “Take heed therefore how ye hear:”

18. *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

Preaching will enrich you or impoverish you according to how you hear. There are some hearers, who have nothing, and the preacher gives them nothing. Hens like to lay where there is a nest-egg, and preachers of the Gospel like to preach to hearers who have received some truth and want more. Where there is some love to God, and love to souls, there more will come. May all of you be among those who have, to whom more shall be given!

But the Gospel is also “a savor of death unto death” to some who hear it. It takes away from some men what they never had. You call that a paradox, so it is, but it is true. They think they have it, but the Gospel reveals to them their mistake, and so it takes from them that which they seem to have.

19. *Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press.*

I think that His mother and His brethren were under the delusion that He was mad, and they came to seize Him, to restrain Him, so little did even they understand Him

20-21. *And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.*

The spiritual relationship overtops the natural. But what a sweet and condescending word this is. Dear brothers and sisters, do you hear the Word of God, and do it? If so, Christ is at home with you. Christ calls you, “Mother.” He knows that you will take care of His cause. He calls you, “Brother.” He has deep sympathy with you. O blessed One, You who calls us mother and brother, how we welcome those loving and familiar titles!

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