

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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MATTHEW XIII. 1–23.

<p>1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.</p> <p>2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.</p> <p>3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;</p> <p>4 And when he sowed, some <i>seeds</i> fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:</p> <p>5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:</p> <p>6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.</p> <p>7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:</p> <p>8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.</p> <p>9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.</p> <p>10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?</p> <p>11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.</p> <p>12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.</p> <p>13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.</p> <p>14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall</p>	<p>hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:</p> <p>15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and <i>their</i> ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with <i>their</i> eyes, and hear with <i>their</i> ears, and should understand with <i>their</i> heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.</p> <p>16 But blessed <i>are</i> your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.</p> <p>17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous <i>men</i> have desired to see <i>those things</i> which ye see, and have not seen <i>them</i>; and to hear <i>those things</i> which ye hear, and have not heard <i>them</i>.</p> <p>18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.</p> <p>19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth <i>it</i> not, then cometh the wicked <i>one</i>, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which receiveth seed by the way side.</p> <p>20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;</p> <p>21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.</p> <p>22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.</p> <p>23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth <i>it</i>; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.</p>
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THE chapter which these verses begin is remarkable for the number of parables which it contains. Seven striking illustrations of spiritual truth are here drawn by the great Head of the Church from the book of nature. By so doing He shows us that religious teaching may draw helps from everything in creation. Those that would “find out acceptable words,” should not forget this. (Eccles. xii. 10.)

The parable of the sower, which begins this chapter, is one of those parables which admit of a very wide application. It is being continually verified under our own eyes. Wherever the Word of God is preached or expounded, and people are assembled to hear it, the sayings of our Lord in this parable

are found to be true. It describes what goes on, as a general rule, in all congregations.

Let us learn, in the first place, from this parable, that *the work of the preacher resembles that of the sower*.

Like the sower, the preacher must sow good seed, if he wants to see fruit. He must sow the pure Word of God, and not the traditions of the Church, or the doctrines of men. Without this, his labour will be vain. He may go to and fro, and seem to say much, and to work much in his weekly round of ministerial duty; but there will be no harvest of souls for heaven, no living results, and no conversions.

Like the sower, the preacher must be diligent. He must spare no pains; he must use every possible means to make his work prosper; he must patiently “sow beside all waters,” and “sow in hope;” he must be “instant in season and out of season;” he must not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements: “he that observeth the wind shall not sow.” No doubt his success does not entirely depend upon his labour and diligence, but without labour and diligence success will not be obtained. (Isa. xxxii. 20; 2 Tim. iv. 2; Eccles. xi. 4.)

Like the sower, the preacher cannot give life. He can scatter the seed committed to his charge, but he cannot command it to grow. He may offer the word of truth to a people, but he cannot make them receive it and bear fruit. To give life is God’s solemn prerogative: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” God alone can “give the increase.” (John vi. 63; 1 Cor. iii. 7.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. It is no light thing to be a real minister of God’s Word. To be an idle, formal workman in the Church is an easy business: to be a faithful sower is very hard. Preachers ought to be specially remembered in our prayers.

In the next place, let us learn from this passage that *there are various ways of hearing the Word of God without benefit*.

We may listen to a sermon with a heart like the hard “way side:” careless, thoughtless, and unconcerned. Christ crucified may be affectionately set before us, and we may hear of His sufferings with utter indifference, as a subject in which we have no interest. Fast as the words fall on our ears, the devil may pluck them away, and we may go home as if we have not heard a sermon at all. Alas, there are many such hearers! It is as true of them as of the idols of old, “eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not.” (Psa. cxxxv. 16, 17.) Truth seems to have no more effect on their hearts than water on a stone.

We may listen to a sermon with pleasure, while the impression produced on us is only temporary and shortlived. Our hearts, like the “stony ground,” may yield a plentiful crop of warm feelings and good resolutions, but all this time there may be no deeply-rooted work in our souls, and the first cold

blast of opposition or temptation may cause our seeming religion to wither away. Alas, there are many such hearers! The mere love of sermons is no sign of grace. Thousands of baptized people are like the Jews of Ezekiel's day: "Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." (Ezek. xxxiii. 32.)

We may listen to a sermon, and approve of every word it contains, and yet get no good from it, in consequence of the absorbing influence of this world. Our hearts, like the "thorny ground," may be choked with a rank crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans. We may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet insensibly give it no chance of bearing fruit, by allowing other things to fill a place in our affections, until they occupy our whole hearts. Alas, there are many such hearers! They know the truth well. They hope one day to be decided Christians, but they never come to the point of giving up all for Christ's sake. They never make up their minds to "seek first the kingdom of God,"—and so die in their sins.

These are points that we ought to weigh well. We should never forget that there are more ways than one of hearing the Word without profit. It is not enough that we come to hear. We may come, and be careless. It is not enough that we are not careless hearers: our impressions may be only temporary, and ready to perish. It is not enough that our impressions are not merely temporary: but they may be continually yielding no result, in consequence of our obstinate cleaving to the world. —Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah xvii. 9.)

In the last place, let us learn from this parable that *there is only one evidence of hearing the Word rightly*. That evidence is to bear "fruit."

The fruit here spoken of is the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance towards God, faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and character, prayerfulness, humility, charity, spiritual mindedness,—these are the only satisfactory proofs that the seed of God's Word is doing its proper work in our souls. Without such proofs our religion is vain, however high our profession. It is no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Christ has said, "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth *fruit*." (John xv. 16.)

There is no part of the whole parable more important than this. We must never be content with a barren orthodoxy, and a cold maintenance of correct theological views; we must not be satisfied with clear knowledge, warm feelings, and a decent profession. We must see to it that the Gospel we profess to love, produces positive "fruit" in our hearts and lives. This is real Christianity. These words of St. James should often ring in our ears: "Be ye

doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”
(James i. 22.)

Let us not leave these verses without putting to ourselves the important question, “How do we hear?” We live in a Christian country; we probably go to a place of worship Sunday after Sunday, and hear sermons: in what spirit do we hear them? What effect have they upon our characters? Can we point to anything that deserves the name of “fruit”?

We may rest assured, that to reach heaven at last it needs something more than to go to church regularly on Sundays and listen to preachers. The Word of God must be received into our hearts, and become the mainspring of our conduct. It must produce practical impressions on our inward man, that shall appear in our outward behaviour. If it does not do this, it will only add to our condemnation in the day of judgment.

MATTHEW XIII. 24–43.

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven,

which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*.

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

THE parable of the wheat and tares, which occupies the chief part of these verses, is one of peculiar importance in the present day.¹ It is eminently calculated to correct the extravagant expectations in which many Christians indulge, as to the effect of missions abroad, and of preaching the Gospel at home. May we give it the attention which it deserves!

In the first place, this parable teaches us *that good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church, until the end of the world.*

The visible Church is set before us as a mixed body. It is a vast “field” in which “wheat and tares” grow side by side. We must expect to find believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, “the children of the king-

¹ The consideration of the parables of the “mustard seed” and the “leaven” is purposely deferred to a future part of the “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels.”

dom and the children of the wicked one,” all mingled together in every congregation of baptized people.

The purest preaching of the Gospel will not prevent this. In every age of the Church, the same state of things has existed. It was the experience of the early Fathers, it was the experience of the Reformers, it is the experience of the best ministers at the present hour. There has never been a visible Church or a religious assembly of which the members have been all “wheat.” The devil, that great enemy of souls, has always taken care to sow “tares.”

The most strict and prudent discipline will not prevent this. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, all alike find it to be so. Do what we will to purify a Church, we shall never succeed in obtaining a perfectly pure communion: tares will be found among the wheat; hypocrites and deceivers will creep in; and, worst of all, if we are extreme in our efforts to obtain purity, we do more harm than good. We run the risk of encouraging many a Judas Iscariot, and breaking many a bruised reed. In our zeal to “gather up the tares,” we are in danger of “rooting up the wheat with them:” such zeal is not according to knowledge, and has often done much harm. Those who care not what happens to the wheat, provided they can root up the tares, show little of the mind of Christ: and after all, there is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine, “Those who are tares today, may be wheat tomorrow.”

Are we inclined to look for the conversion of the whole world by the labours of missionaries and ministers? Let us place this parable before us, and beware of such an idea. We shall never see all the inhabitants of earth “the wheat” of God, in the present order of things. The tares and wheat will “grow together till the harvest.” The kingdoms of this world will never become the kingdom of Christ, and the millennium will never begin, until the King Himself returns.

Are we ever tried by the scoffing argument of the infidel, that Christianity cannot be a true religion, because there are so many false Christians? Let us call to mind this parable, and remain unmoved. Let us tell the infidel that the state of things he scoffs at does not surprise us at all. Our Master prepared us for it eighteen hundred years ago. He foresaw and foretold that His Church would be a field, containing not only “wheat,” but “tares.”

Are we ever tempted to leave one Protestant Church for another, because we see many of its members unconverted? Let us remember this parable, and take heed what we do. We shall never find a perfect Church. We may spend our lives in migrating from communion to communion, and pass our days in perpetual disappointment: go where we will, and worship where we may, we shall always find “tares.”

In the second place, the parable teaches us *that there is to be a day of separation between the godly and the ungodly members of the visible Church, at the end of the world.*

The present mixed state of things is not to be for ever: the wheat and the tares are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus shall “send forth His angels” in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake. They shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory, honour, and eternal life: the worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted shall be “cast into a furnace of fire.”

There is something peculiarly solemn in this part of the parable. The meaning of it admits of no mistake. Our Lord Himself explains it in words of singular clearness, as if He would impress it deeply on our minds. Well may He say at the conclusion, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable. Let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom, unless he repents and is converted. Let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God. Let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the “bundles of tares,” and be burned. Surely such a prospect ought to make a man think! As Baxter truly says, “We must not misinterpret God’s patience with the ungodly.”

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable. Let him see that there is happiness and safety prepared for him in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will proclaim no terror for him. They will summon him to join what he has long desired to see,—a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear when the tares are at length taken away! How brightly will grace shine when no longer dimmed by incessant contact with the worldly and unconverted! The righteous are little known in the present day. The world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master. “The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.” (1 John iii. 1.) But the righteous shall one day “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” To use the words of Matthew Henry, “their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification will be published.” “When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” (Coloss. iii. 4.)

MATTHEW XIII. 44–50.

44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found; he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

THE parables of the “treasure hid in a field,” and the “merchant man seeking goodly pearls,” appear intended to convey one and the same lesson. They vary, no doubt, in one striking particular: the “treasure” was found of one who does not seem to have sought it; the “pearl” was found of one who was actually seeking pearls. But the conduct of the finders, in both cases, was precisely alike: both “sold all” to make the thing found their own property, and it is exactly at this point that the instruction of both parables agrees.

These two parables are meant to teach us *that men really convinced of the importance of salvation will give up everything to win Christ and eternal life.*

What was the conduct of the two men our Lord describes? The one was persuaded that there was a “treasure hid in a field,” which would amply repay him, if he bought the field, however great the price that he might give.—The other was persuaded that the “pearl” he had found was so immensely valuable, that it would answer to him to purchase it at any cost.—Both were convinced that they had found a thing of great value. Both were satisfied that it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this thing their own. Others might wonder at them; others might think them foolish for paying such a sum of money for the “field” and “pearl,” but they knew what they were about. They were sure that they were making a good bargain.

We see, in this simple picture, the conduct of a true Christian explained. He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because he is *thoroughly persuaded* that it is worthwhile. He comes out from the world. He puts off the old man. He forsakes the vain companion of his past life. Like Matthew, he gives up everything, and, like Paul, he “counts all things loss” for Christ’s sake. And why? Because he is convinced that Christ will make amends to him for all he gives up. He sees in Christ an endless “treasure;” he sees in Christ a precious “pearl:” to win Christ he will make any sacrifice. This is true faith: this is the stamp of a genuine work of the Holy Ghost.

We see in these two parables the real clue to the conduct of many unconverted people. They are what they are in religion, because they are *not fully persuaded* that it is worthwhile to be different. They flinch from decision; they shrink from taking up the cross; they halt between two opinions; they will not commit themselves: they will not come forward boldly on the Lord's side.—And why? Because they are not convinced that it will answer. They have not faith. They are not sure that “the treasure” is before them. They are not satisfied that “the pearl” is worth so great a price. They cannot yet make up their minds to “sell all,” that they may win Christ. And so too often they perish everlastingly! When a man will venture nothing for Christ's sake, we must draw the sorrowful conclusion that he has not got the grace of God.

The parable of the net let down into the sea, has some points in common with that of the wheat and the tares. It is intended to instruct us on a most important subject: *the true nature of the visible Church of Christ*.

The preaching of the Gospel was the letting down of a large net into the midst of the sea of this world. The professing Church which it was to gather together, was to be a mixed body. Within the folds of the net there were to be fish of every kind, both good and bad. Within the pale of the Church there were to be Christians of various sorts, unconverted as well as converted, false as well as true. The separation of good and bad was sure to come at last, but not before the end of the world. Such was the account which the great Master gave to His disciples of the Churches which they were to found.

It is of the utmost importance to have the lessons of this parable deeply graven on our minds. There is hardly any point in Christianity on which greater mistakes exist, than *the nature of the visible Church*. There is none, perhaps, on which mistakes are so perilous to the soul.

Let us learn, from this parable, that all congregations of professed Christians ought to be regarded as *mixed bodies*. They are all assemblies containing “good fish and bad,” converted and unconverted, children of God and children of the world, and ought to be described and addressed as such. To tell all baptized people that they are born again, and have the Spirit, and are members of Christ, and are holy, in the face of such a parable as this, is utterly unwarrantable. Such a mode of address may flatter and please: it is not likely to profit or save. It is painfully calculated to promote self-righteousness, and lull sinners to sleep. It overthrows the plain teaching of Christ, and is ruinous to souls. Do we ever hear such doctrine? If we do, let us remember “the net.”

Finally, let it be a settled principle with us never to be satisfied with mere *outward church-membership*. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed

in the water of life; the bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's table, who never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the "good fish"? This is the grand question! It is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be "drawn to shore;" the true character of every man's religion will at length be exposed. There will be an eternal separation between the good fish and the bad. There will be a "furnace of fire" for the wicked. Surely, as Baxter says, "these plain words more need belief and consideration than exposition."

MATTHEW XIII. 51–58.

<p>51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.</p> <p>52 Then he said unto them, Therefore every Scribe <i>which is</i> instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man <i>that is</i> an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure <i>things</i> new and old.</p> <p>53 And it came to pass, <i>that</i> when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.</p> <p>54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and</p>	<p>said, Whence hath this <i>man</i> this wisdom, and <i>these</i> mighty works?</p> <p>55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?</p> <p>56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this <i>man</i> all these things?</p> <p>57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.</p> <p>58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.</p>
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THE first thing which we ought to notice in these verses is *the striking question* with which our Lord winds up the seven wonderful parables of this chapter. He said, "Have ye understood all these things?"

Personal application has been called the "soul" of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without a direction. It may be well written, rightly dated, and duly signed, but it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application: "Have ye understood?"

The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means. He might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. He might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed: ideas must be received into his mind and he must carry off the seeds of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain.

It is of great importance to see this point clearly. There is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship, and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them, when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year, as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen.

Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to church, not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, —"What have I got from this sermon? what have I learned? what truths have been impressed on my mind?"—Intellect, no doubt, is not everything in religion, but it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. —The heart is unquestionably the main point, but we must never forget that the Holy Ghost generally reaches the heart through the mind. Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers are never likely to be converted.

The second thing which we ought to notice in these verses is *the strange treatment which our Lord received in His own country.*

He came to the town of Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and “taught in their synagogues.” His teaching, no doubt, was the same as it always was: “Never man spake like this man.” But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were “astonished,” but their hearts were unmoved. They said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary?” They despised Him, because they were so familiar with Him. “They were offended in Him.” And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, “A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

Let us see, in this history, a melancholy page of human nature unfolded to our view. We are all apt to despise mercies, if we are accustomed to them, and have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books, which are so plentiful in England, the means of grace, of which we have so abundant a supply, the preaching of the Gospel, which we hear every week,—all, all are liable to be undervalued. It is mournfully true, that in religion, more than anything else, “familiarity breeds contempt.” Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound,—and despise it because it is old. Alas, by so doing, they provoke God to take it away!

Do we wonder that the relatives, servants, and neighbours of godly people are not always converted? Do we wonder that the parishioners of eminent ministers of the Gospel are often their hardest and most impenitent hearers? Let us wonder no more. Let us mark the experience of our Lord at Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

Do we ever fancy that if we had only seen and heard Jesus Christ we should have been His faithful disciples? Do we think that if we had only lived near Him, and been eye-witnesses of His ways, we should not have been undecided, wavering, and half-hearted about religion? If we do, let us think so no longer. Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

The last thing which we ought to notice in these verses is *the ruinous nature of unbelief.* The chapter ends with the fearful words, “He did not many works there, because of their unbelief.”

We see in this single word the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls! They perish forever, because they *will not* believe. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation: their sins, however many, might all be forgiven; the Father’s love is ready to receive them; the blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them; the power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a great barrier interposes. They will not believe. “Ye will not come to Me,” says Jesus, “that ye might have life.” (John v. 40.)

May we all be on our guard against this accursed sin! It is the old root-sin which caused the fall of man. Cut down in the true child of God by the power of the Spirit, it is ever ready to bud and sprout again. There are three great enemies against which God's children should daily pray: pride, worldliness, and unbelief. Of these three none is greater than unbelief.