

Expository Tracts, No. 5.

THE SOWER AND THE GROUND.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON MATT. XIII. 1-12 and 18-23.

BY THE

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THE SOWER AND THE GROUND.

MATTHEW XIII. 1-12 AND 18-23.

- 1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.
- 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.
- 3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;
- 4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:
- 5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:
- 6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away.
- 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:
- 8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.
- 9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.
- 10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?
- 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.
- 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.—
- 18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.
- 19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.
- 20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
- 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.
- 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.
- 23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

READER,

The verses before you contain the well-known parable of the Sower. Of all the parables which the Lord Jesus spoke, none is more heart-searching, none more practical than this.

The parable of the Sower is being continually fulfilled under your own eyes. Wherever the Word of God is preached or expounded, 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.

1. Learn, in the first place, from this parable, that *the work of the preacher is like that of the sower.*

Like the sower, the preacher must sow good seed, if he wishes to see fruit: he must sow the pure Word of God, and not the doctrines of men. Without this his labour will be vain. Unless good seed is sown, there will be no harvest of souls for heaven, 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 be “instant in season and out of season.” He must not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements. No doubt his success does not entirely depend upon his labour and diligence; but without labour and diligence success will seldom be obtained.

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 peculiar prerogative. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth:” God alone can “give the increase.”

Reader, let these things sink down into your heart. 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. Pray much for all preachers of the Gospel: preachers ought to be specially remembered in your prayers.

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

You may listen to a sermon with a heart like the hard “*way side*,” careless, thoughtless, and unconcerned. Christ crucified may be set before you, and you may hear of His sufferings with indifference: fast as the words fall on your ears, the devil may pluck them away, and you may go home as if you had not heard a sermon at all.—Alas, there are many such hearers! “They have ears, but they hear not.” Truth seems to have no more effect on their hearts than water on a stone.

You may listen to a sermon with pleasure, while the impression produced on you is only temporary and short-lived. Your heart, 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 your soul; and the first cold blast of opposition or temptation may cause your seeming religion to wither away.—Alas, there are many such hearers! The mere love of sermons is no sign of grace.

You 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. Your heart, like the “*thorny ground*,” may be choked with a rank crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans; you may really like the Gospel,

and wish to obey it, and yet allow other things to occupy your affections, and to fill up your mind.—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 “seek first the kingdom of God,”—and so they die in their sins.

Reader, these are points which you ought to weigh well. There are three ways of hearing the Word without profit.—It is not enough that you come to hear: you may come and be careless. It is not enough that you are not a careless hearer; your impressions may be only temporary, and ready to perish.

It is not enough that your impressions are not merely temporary: but they may yield no result, in consequence of your obstinate cleaving to the world. —Truly, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jerem. xvii. 9.)

3. In the last place, 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 your soul. Without such proofs your religion is vain.

Reader, there is no part of the whole parable more important than this. You must never be content with a barren orthodoxy, and a cold maintenance of correct theological views. You must not be satisfied with clear knowledge, warm feelings, and a decent profession of religion. You must see to it that the Gospel you profess to love produces positive “fruit” in your heart and life. This is real Christianity. Those words of St. James should often ring in your ears: “Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” (James i. 22.)

Reader, how do you hear? You live in a Christian country; you go to a place of worship Sunday after Sunday and hear sermons: in what spirit do you hear them? What effect have they upon your character? Can you point to anything that deserves the name of “fruit”?

I entreat you to remember that to reach heaven at last, it needs something more than to go to Church regularly on Sundays, and listen to preachers. Sin must be given up; Christ must be received as your Saviour, and must dwell in your heart by faith; you must know what it is to be converted, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The Word of God must be received into your heart: the Word must produce impressions on your inward man, which shall appear in your outward behaviour. Reader, if the Word does not do this, it will only add to your condemnation in the day of judgment.