

The parable of the Sower

Matthew 13 vv.3-9.

Mark 4 vv.1-9.

Luke 8 vv.4-8.

In your living room there is a lamp, isn't there? ... A lamp with a big shade round it. Why is that shade there? ... Just suppose that there were no shade over the lamp, what then? Well, then it would be equally light in every part of the room. The light would shine with equal strength in the corners, against the ceiling, throughout the whole room.

But when, as now, a shade is hung over the lamp, it becomes darker in the corners of the room, but over the table it is lighter. Whoever takes the trouble to come and sit by the table under the lamp will get more light, simply because of that lampshade. You can understand that now can't you?

Well now, that is just an example. I have written this purposely so as to make something clearer to you. Just listen carefully.

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The Lord Jesus had preached a great deal. The people were fond of hearing Him. Why? ... Well, He spoke so simply, was so easy to be understood and He brought the Gospel to the poor. By that I do not mean the people who are poor in the sense that they lack money, but I mean people who mourn over their sins. Each one who truly had sorrow for sin was invited by Jesus to come unto Him. Just listen to what He said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Many came to Him for help. They sought healing for their bodily ailments. Diseased, cripples, blind, lame, lepers, all were healed. In that way the Lord Jesus showed that He was the ALMIGHTY, that He was the Son of God. He healed them of their diseases that they might believe that He was also mighty to heal their soul-sickness. Just as He saved and relieved them from the consequences of sin, so He was able also to deliver them from sin itself.

And what answer did the Lord Jesus get to all His labours?

In the last chapter we told you that the Pharisees had the audacity to make fun of the work of God. They dared to call it the work of the devil.

From that moment the Lord Jesus would preach in a different way. Henceforth He would preach by means of parables.

Parables were usually simple stories taken from everyday life. But these stories had a deeper meaning. Through these parables the Lord Jesus had

something to say.

Not everyone could understand at once what ~~the~~ Jesus meant thereby. But whoever wanted to know could go to Jesus and ask Him. Just as the lampshade takes the light away from the corners of the room, so Jesus covered the meaning of His words through parables.

Now, why did He do that? ... Just read what God's Word says: "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand." That means "You will indeed hear the words, but the meaning of them will no longer be clear." Thus the mockers could no longer make such a cruel mockery of those words.

But those who did not want to join in such mockery, those who were anxious to know what Jesus meant by these parables - well, they could come and ask. For such people the meaning would become much clearer because of the parables. Yes, for that very reason they would be better able to remember the Saviour's lessons. These parables served just the same purpose as a lampshade. It became darker for the mockers and unbelievers; that is to say, it was no longer so easy for them to understand, and for those who believed in Him, things appeared much brighter and clearer.

The Lord Jesus spake many parables. We will tell you some of them, and may the Lord grant a blessing.

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On the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret thousands and thousands of people are jostling each other. Why? ... What is to be seen? ... Oh, nothing out of the ordinary.

The Lord Jesus has left Capernaum and has gone to the lake. The multitudes have followed Him. They want to stay by Him, they want to hear Him preach. It has become known throughout the whole city what had happened there that morning, how that the man possessed of a devil, who was moreover blind and dumb had been healed. The Pharisees may slander Him, but they want to hear Him.

The Numerous Jews press forward, anxious to hear something. In order to be able to speak to them more easily, Jesus steps on board a ship which lies close inshore and there He sits down. His many hearers remain standing upon the shore. The murmur of voices slowly subsides. It becomes breathlessly quiet.

Let us listen too.

The voice of the Lord Jesus is clear and lucid: "A sower went forth to sow." He is speaking in a parable.

A sower! Quite an ordinary example from everyday life. Lots of you have also seen that at some time. Certainly nowadays farmers use machinery for sowing, but not so in former times. Then everything was done by hand. It was thus then that this sower went forth to sow.

There lies the field, all carefully prepared. First the plough had loosened the hard packed soil. The sower begins. Each time he grasps a handful of seed and scatters it with one movement of his hand. He sows as he walks on. Of course he scatters some seed near the borders of the field. Some grains fall on the road which runs alongside the field, and there they lie on the hard surface. With flapping wings some birds come down and gratefully peck up those grains. That seed is lost and cannot bring forth any fruit.

At last the sower finishes and then he leaves. Will all that seed grow up and produce fruit? ... Alas, no. Why not? ...

Some of the seed fell on stony places. The sower could not see that. The stony places were hidden from his eyes, for the layer of stone was covered with a thin layer of dark fruitful soil. Yet what happens? The seeds which have fallen into that thin layer of earth germinate after a few days. Little roots bore downwards. Soon however they come to the hard impenetrable layer of stone and can make no further progress. It gets warm. The sun shines down with a burning heat on the stony places. All the moisture soon dries up. The roots can suck up no more water and ... the young tender plants wither.

That seed too is lost, and brings forth no fruit.

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In another corner of the field thorns and thistles have been growing. They have indeed been cut down and burnt and there is nothing to be seen of them now. The field ~~appears~~<sup>Seems</sup> to be good at that spot too. But do you know what the sower cannot see? ... that the roots of those thorns and thistles had remained in the ground. Those roots are not dead, they are still alive. The sower however did not know that, and so he cast his seed there also. This seed also comes up after a few days. The fine roots of the germinating seed bore downwards and meet no obstruction from a layer of hard stone. But ... the roots of the thorns and thistles also start to sprout forth through the influence of rain and warmth. There stands the grain, in amongst the thorns.

The thorns however grow much faster than the corn, and it is not long before the thorns and thistles are towering above it. And the grain which is underneath becomes choked! No, not immediately, but still little by little. It goes yellow and then dies. Why? ... Well, those little plants are not getting any light. The warmth of the sunbeams is completely captured by the great thorn bushes, and the little plants languish and finally die.

So then, the seed which fell among thorns is also lost, for the farmer will harvest no grain from that either.

Is it all lost then? The seed that fell by the wayside was pecked by birds. The seed which fell on stony places sprung up, but withered. The grain which fell among thorns was choked. Is it all lost then? ...

No, fortunately not! Some seed also fell on good ground. This seed sprung up, grew and brought forth fruit. The rain moistened it, the sun warmed it, and ... it developed and grew! At last ears appeared. In those ears grew grains of corn. In one ear there were thirty grains, in another, sixty, yes, there were even ears which contained a hundred grains!

No, not all the seed was lost.

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Matthew 13 vv.18-23.

Mark 4 vv.10-20.

Luke 8 vv.9-15.

So you see children, this was the parable which the Lord Jesus told to that great multitude. As you can see, it is quite an ordinary story. In the land of Canaan especially that was a daily sight in the autumn.

Yes, but what does it all mean? ... Why does the Lord Jesus relate it? "Lord", His disciples ask Him, "why speakest thou unto them in parables?" ... They are afraid that all His hearers will not be able to understand.

And then the Lord Jesus replies in words like these. "It is not given to all to understand these things. The mockers would laugh and speak disdainfully about them, but that will no longer be so."

Then the Lord Jesus explains to His disciples the meaning of the parable. You would also like to know the meaning, wouldn't you?

Just listen then.

Let us imagine that we step into a schoolroom where a number of children are sitting. The master is going to tell a Bible story. All the children are

sitting still and listening. In this parable these children might be likened to the field. The Word of God is the seed and the master who is going to tell the story, is the sower.

The master begins. All the children sit still and listen attentively. That is what the teacher thinks and so it seems, but it is not in fact so because ...

There sits a boy, who is indeed looking at the master, but he is not listening. In his thoughts he is busy with his marbles, or with a lovely <sup>kite</sup> ~~airplane~~ which he has been busy making at home. Yes, he may be sitting still, but he hears nothing of what the master is saying. Over there sits a girl. She is thinking about the pretty dress which she was given on her birthday for her big doll. That girl also has no idea what story is being told. They both sit there motionless, but their eyes stare absently in front of them. When the master stops at last they do not even notice it. They know nothing, can repeat nothing of what has been said. Yes, they have no idea what he has been talking about.

That seed has fallen by the wayside and the fowls of the air have devoured it. The fowls of the air? ... Yes, certainly, because that is like saying that other things have so occupied the mind of that boy or girl that every word their master has spoken has passed them by. They have heard a voice. Nothing more. Their thoughts were occupied elsewhere.

Now, I ask: "Will there be any profit to them from what has been related? ... There cannot possibly be. That Bible story is lost to them.

There are other children in that class however. They do listen - very carefully. And when the master tells them about Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, then they are envious and think: "Now, that is what I would like too." Or, when the story of Saul is told, how he made an end of his life in his despair, yes, then they are worried and anxious. And when the teacher points out to them the way of salvation they are impressed. Tears come to their eyes. Oh, they make a resolve to pray earnestly that very evening for a renewed heart. Yes, they are going to keep praying for conversion until God hears them. That is their plan, and at that moment they mean it too. Quite definitely.

But ... the lesson is over. Now it is arithmetic. They begin to

concentrate on their sums. The deep impression becomes weaker. These sums are hard, and they don't want to stay behind. Furthermore, the devil does not want that impression to last. He will try to take it away. Something happens in the class. A boy misbehaves or something else may happen. At playtime that is what is talked about. And in the evening, when they go to bed then they do not give a thought to the serious story of the morning. They rattle off their prayers and creep into bed. What has come of those fine plans? ... Nothing! ... absolutely nothing! They have been forgotten!

That is the seed which fell on stony places. It springs up, it looks for a moment so fine, but it withers. That is to say, nothing comes of it. For those children too the Bible story was unprofitable.

Yet there are in that class still more children, a third group. They too listen, they too are impressed. They too feel that unless they are converted, they will be for ever lost. With them these thoughts do not disappear so quickly. No, in the evening they pray earnestly. They lie awake, cannot get to sleep because they are thinking over what was said in the morning. Yes, even the next day they've not forgotten. But ... gradually it disappears. Happy things may take their attention, or sad happenings may fill their thoughts. Mother is sick, father must go to hospital perhaps, and so on. True, those thoughts come back once or twice in the next few days, but much weaker - much weaker. At last this third group too has forgotten it all. The good seed of God's word becomes gradually pushed to one side by the thorns, by the many things of this world and ... it is choked.

It brings forth no fruit. Lost!

Is everything lost then? ... Oh, the master doesn't know the answer to that, God only knows that. That teacher has sown, and now he must wait and see whether the seed will bear fruit. He can sow, but he cannot make the seed grow. The making to grow is GOD'S work. And when God makes it grow, then ... yes, only then will it bring forth ~~fruit~~ fruit.

So you see, boys and girls, that is what the Lord Jesus meant with the parable of the sower.

Do you know who are also sowers? The ministers when they proclaim God's Word in church or chapel, or in the Sunday School. Yes, wherever God's Word is read or preached from faithfully, that is sowing.

Much, yes very much seed is lost. But that is not the fault of the seed, that is because of the hardness of the ground, it is because of the hardness of our hearts. Most people bring forth not good fruit, but bad. Oh, nowadays, so few are turned to God.

With most it is a matter of indifference, they are much too busy with other things. They have no time to think about matters of eternity. No, not yet, they will do that later perhaps, when they are older. They put it off, they keep putting it off. For years and years! And then? ... Then ... suddenly ... unexpectedly ... death comes and takes them away, <sup>relentlessly</sup> ~~irresistably~~ ... and then ... it is for ever, for ever too late! Irrevocably: "Too late!"

How terrible that will be!