

### **The Gospel of Luke (28): The Parable of the Soils**

The parable of Luke 8 that we are about to consider is within a section of Luke's Gospel which has a special emphasis: It is the responsibility of the one who *hears* the word of God *to heed* what he hears. In other words, great stress is given on *obedience* to the word of God. Not only should one hear and believe the word of God, but it is equally important to *obey what he believes*. Now we know and confess that a person does not obtain or keep his salvation because of his obedience, but no one will be saved without obedience.

There is progression of thought in Luke's story which has led to this point; I have mentioned it in the past, but it would be good to draw our attention to it again. The first portion of our Lord's ministry, as recorded by Luke, was a demonstration of His *authority*--He had been given authority to heal, deliver people from evil forces, authority over nature and even had authority to forgive sins. His authority having been established, the emphasis changed, stress was given to *the responsibility of all to hear Him*, for Jesus spoke the word of God with authority. Then thirdly, and we are now in the midst of this emphasis, Luke records incidents in the life of our Lord which stresses *obedience to His word*. Jesus Christ has been given authority by His Father to bring salvation to His people. This places responsibility on all to hear Him intently, but further, it compels all to obey Him completely. We are both to hear and heed His word. And in this section, the responsibility of obedience is stressed.

Last Lord's Day we considered that Luke had introduced this account with a few words about our Lord's ministry (8:1-3). Jesus and the 12 were travelling about preaching the good news of the kingdom of God as they were accompanied with "many" women who traveled with them and supported them in their ministry.

As we consider the contents of Luke 8 and through the next chapter, we should understand that our Lord's public ministry in Galilee was flourishing, with great crowds gathering to Him. The long-awaited time of God's promised blessing had arrived. There was now available through Jesus Christ deliverance from the bondage of sin; salvation was now available in Jesus Christ. Verse 4 tells us that a "great multitude" gathered, and there, perhaps next to a farmer's field, perhaps where a farmer was sowing His seed, Jesus spoke to them this parable. It was during this period of His ministry that

He commenced to teach more exclusively by means of parables. One of the most important and probably the first of the series of parables of that time, is the one that is produced by all three synoptic Gospels, the parable of the sower.<sup>1</sup>

Here is **Luke 8:4-15**.

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: <sup>5</sup>"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

<sup>9</sup>Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

<sup>10</sup>And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that

'Seeing they may not see,  
And hearing they may not understand.'

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<sup>1</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, **Commentary on the Gospel of Luke** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 242.

<sup>11</sup>“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup>Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. <sup>15</sup>But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

## I. The telling of the parable (8:5-8)

This is a parable that is familiar to most of us. It is commonly known as the parable of the sower, for that is the content of the first few words of verse 5. But actually, it might be better called, the parable of the soils, for it is the types of soil that are emphasized. **William Arnot** (1808-1875), who wrote a classic book, *The Parables of our Lord*, gave this word of introduction to this first and foremost parable, the parable of the sower:

The parable is, in our language at least, so uniformly associated with this name, that it would not readily be recognized under any other designation; but “The Four Kinds of Ground”, the title which seems to be in ordinary use among the Germans, is logically more correct, inasmuch as it points directly to the central idea, and expresses the distinctive characteristic.<sup>2</sup>

Let us read the details of the parable again. Jesus taught the people,

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Jesus tells of a farmer scattering his seed in his field with the intention of bringing forth a mature crop at harvest time. The manner of farming in that part of the world was for the farmer to first sow his seed in the field, then afterward he would plow or upturn the field in order to cover the sown seed with soil. But obviously, not all of the scattered seed would be plowed under and therefore not all of the seed would result in growth and later harvest. Some seed would fall on the hardened path that would remain untilled. One would not expect this seed even to sprout. The birds quickly take the seed away. And then there is that seed which falls on soil barely covering rock. This seed may grow briefly, but because there is no root system, it cannot be expected to yield a crop. Of course, some seed will fall among weeds, it too, will not bring a yield to the farmer. Only that which falls on good soil, that soil prepared by the farmer, could be expected to produce the results desired by the farmer; in fact, he could be assured that fruitfulness would result. The concluding remark of verse 8 is most important: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” It is as though the Lord were saying to the multitudes, “Be careful how you hear, do not be mere nominal or superficial followers of me.” So through this parable Jesus summons people to do more than just hear His words. They must apply them in life as well. Something must happen in one’s life as result of hearing His word. The word of God must bring forth fruit in the harvest.

## II. The reason for Jesus teaching in parables (8:9, 10)

We again read verses 9 and 10.

<sup>9</sup>Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?”

<sup>10</sup>And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that

‘Seeing they may not see,  
And hearing they may not understand.’

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<sup>2</sup> William Arnot, *The Parables of Our Lord* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1893), 43.

Before our Lord explained the meaning of the parable to His disciples, He spoke of their blessed privilege to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” He spoke of their rather rare blessing, especially when they are compared with the numbers of hearers who never grasp the truthfulness and the importance of the kingdom of God.

In Matthew’s account of Jesus giving this parable, the disciples asked why it was that Jesus taught in parables (cf. Matt. 13:10). But here in Luke’s Gospel we simply have the disciples asking Jesus to give them the meaning of the parable they had just heard from Him.

Here in Luke’s account, just before Jesus gave the interpretation of the parable, He first gave two reasons why He taught the crowds using parables. **First**, Jesus taught in parables in order to better teach and illustrate truth to His disciples. Jesus took incidents from life’s experiences to explain spiritual truths. Parables involve taking a situation of life with details which people are familiar, and use it to explain spiritual truths with which they are unfamiliar. The reason He spoke parables was to explain the workings of God to His disciples.

But the Lord’s use of parables served another function. **Second**, Jesus taught in parables in order to conceal truth from non-disciples. In verse 10 we read,

<sup>10</sup>And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that

‘Seeing they may not see,  
And hearing they may not understand.’

One cannot expect to know the ways of God unless he has resolved to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. There can be no true understanding unless there is first the willingness to obey His Words. Jesus declared, “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God” (John 17:7). God’s word is not a collection of suggestions to take or leave them, to follow those which seem to be suitable and to disregard the rest. The Lord hides Himself and even clouds the understanding of His word from all those who have no intention to obey Him. The Lord is desirous to reveal Himself to every sincere seeker, every willing hearer, but He purposes to leave the rest to their just due. Some words in the last verses of the Bible speak this sentiment:

“Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. (Rev. 22:11)

Our Lord quotes an Old Testament verse--Isaiah 6:9--to show that His method of teaching parables in order to hide truth from the disobedient is consistent with Scripture. This verse is from the passage in which God called and commissioned Isaiah to be His prophet to Israel. Here are the words of Isaiah when he had been transported to the throne room of heaven before the presence of the Holy God. Here is Isaiah 6:5ff.

<sup>5</sup>So I (Isaiah) said:

“Woe is me, for I am undone!  
Because I am a man of unclean lips,  
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;  
For my eyes have seen the King,  
The LORD of hosts.”

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>And he touched my mouth with it, and said:

“Behold, this has touched your lips;  
Your iniquity is taken away,  
And your sin purged.”

<sup>8</sup>Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

“Whom shall I send,  
And who will go for Us?”

Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

<sup>9</sup>And He said, “Go, and tell this people:

***‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’***

<sup>10</sup>“Make the heart of this people dull,  
And their ears heavy,  
And shut their eyes;  
Lest they see with their eyes,  
And hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart,  
And return and be healed.”

<sup>11</sup>Then I said, “Lord, how long?”  
And He answered:

“Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,  
The houses are without a man,  
The land is utterly desolate,

<sup>12</sup>The LORD has removed men far away,  
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

<sup>13</sup>But yet a tenth will be in it,  
And will return and be for consuming,  
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,  
Whose stump remains when it is cut down.  
So the holy seed shall be its stump.”

The Lord’s emphasis is this: if you do not intend and purpose to obey His word, then,

“You may look and look again, but you will never see,  
You may listen and listen, but you will never hear.”

If you want to know the Bible, the word of God, and to know the God of this book, you must resolve that you will believe whatever claims it makes, and obey whatever commands it gives. God opens His book to all of such mind and heart.

Now aside from our Lord stating the two reasons he taught in parables, we might ask what were the purposes of our Lord teaching this particular parable of the sower. I was reading the classic book by the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Reformed Baptist, **Benjamin Keach** (1640-1704), entitled, ***Expositions in the Parables of the Bible***, in which he proposed six purposes that this parable served. They include the following:

First, one great design of this parable (as I conceive), is to show the excellent nature of the word of God, in that it is the seed of all grace in the hand of the Spirit; or as it is by the influences of the Spirit, received into a heart prepared by the convictions of the Holy Ghost.

Secondly (Considering the great multitudes that were gathered together to hear the word of God at that time, as the second verse shows), it is evident, that one reason or main design of Christ’s speaking this parable, was to convince them, that it is not enough or sufficient to hear the word of God preached, but that many may hear it, who are never effectually wrought upon by it, but shall eternally perish.

Thirdly, it might be the design of our Saviour, also hereby to show, that but few comparatively, prove right hearers of the word. Three sorts of ground proving bad, and only but one in four good ground; intimating, but very few hearers have their hearts broken up, or prepared by the convictions of the Holy Spirit, to receive Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, another main design of this parable, might be to show that grace is not of ourselves, or from nature; but that is a supernatural work or blessing flowing from the Lord Jesus Christ. The heart

must be first dug up, or be ploughed up by the Holy Ghost, that it may become like good tillage. Before the seed of the word will take root and bring forth fruit unto perfection, which three sorts of hearers never experience.

Fifthly, also it might be to discover the case of men's damnation, or of their final apostasy, viz. (namely), because their hearts were never right with God.

Sixthly, also to discover that some men who never were sincere or upright Christians, might nevertheless go very far in a profession of the gospel, as is signified by the stony and thorny ground. So that most evident it is, that this blessed parable gives us to understand the different effect, or success the preaching of the gospel hath upon those that hear it. So much is the design and scope of the parable.<sup>3</sup>

### III. The meaning of the parable (8:11-15)

Beginning with verse 8, Jesus gave the meaning of the parable to His disciples. Again, we read our Lord's words,

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup>Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. <sup>15</sup>But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

#### A. The seed is the word of God (8:11)

In Luke 8:11 "The seed is the word of God." If we were to read Matthew's account, there it records Jesus saying that the seed is "the word of the kingdom." Matthew 13:19 reads,

When anyone hears *the word of the kingdom*, and does not understand it, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

It is clear from the larger context of Luke 8 that the seed as "the word of God" is also referring to the teaching of "the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (v. 10), but it is not as directly stated by Luke as it is in Matthew's account. The sower of the word of God is proclaiming the nature of the kingdom of God and the way to enter into it in order to experience salvation.

Here we see our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to scatter the seed of the word of God everywhere possible, in as much quantity as possible. This is *the supreme standard* to which we may make judgments about churches and ministries. In all their doing, in all their activity, is it their chief concern and effort to disseminate the word of God and are they faithful in doing so? And this is the ultimate question we should ask of our own church and ministry. Have we been and do we remain faithful proclaiming both publicly and privately, the word of God? In many things we falter and fail, but we must be right and faithful in this matter.

The Bible is the word of God, which is the means that God has ordained to accomplish His work. Sometimes a harvest is the result, but sometimes there must first be much sowing and further watering before a harvest is realized. The seed is the word of God, either read or heard. Only through the instrument of the word of God will the work of God be accomplished. But sometimes the faithful proclamation of the word of God is an instrument of God's judgment rather than salvation. It was so through the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, and it was also true of much of the ministry of our Lord Jesus. Jesus Himself declared, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind" (John 9:39). In our Lord teaching through parables, He was accomplishing both purposes for which His Father had sent Him. As the aged Simeon once declared concerning Jesus, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34).

#### B. The various types of soil are different kinds of hearers of the word of God (8:12-16)

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Keach, *Expositions of the Parables in the Bible* (Kregel Publications, 1974), 119f.

Four different kinds of soil are four different kinds of hearers. All four hear the word of God, only one of these hearers, however, the last one, obtains salvation. Only the fourth type produces the yield for which the seed was designed to bring forth—"fruit."

What is "fruit" in this context? The metaphor of fruit in the Christian life is a pervasive theme of Scripture. John the Baptist had declared of the necessity of good "fruit" born of every "tree", that is, of every individual. He said, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). Of course Paul wrote of the "fruit of the Spirit" that the Lord produces in the life of every Christian: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22f). But perhaps the broader idea of "fruit" should be understood here—"fruit" is practical righteousness that is born in one's life. Fruit is a life of obedience to the Lord Jesus within the kingdom of God over which Jesus Christ is Lord. Paul wrote about the Christian "being filled with *the fruits of righteousness* which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). And the writer of Hebrews wrote of the product of the Lord's chastening in the lives of His children: "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable *fruit of righteousness* to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). The fruit of righteousness is shown in the ordering of our lives according to the will of God set forth in the word of God. Living according to God's moral law through Jesus Christ is what the Bible defines as righteousness.

Let us consider each one of these types of ground upon which the seed of the word of God, the word of the kingdom, is cast.

### **1. The seed along the path: hearers who are unaffected by the word. (8:12)**

We read in **verse 12**, "*Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*"

We all know persons of this type. They hear the word of God, but they may as well have not heard. They are unaffected and uninfluenced by the word that they hear. No change occurred in their lives. They remain unaffected and unimpacted by the truth of the word of God. This is a typical example of an unbeliever.

That this hearer does not receive the seed and bring forth fruit is not the fault of the seed. The seed is good. It will bring forth fruit! The problem lies with the hearer. No amount of coercion, no amount of pleading will make a difference. The ground, that is, the heart of this person, is not prepared, not willing to receive the word of God.

But we also read that this unbeliever has the devil working upon him to keep him in his unbelief. "*Then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts.*"

This is one of those expressions which bring out strongly the existence, personality, and agency of the devil. There is an active, living agent, distinct from man, operating powerfully in man's heart, and to man's injury.<sup>4</sup>

Now there are ways which we could get this kind of person to attend church, in fact, many of this type attend church regularly. And we could use other means, offer other things rather than the word of God, to bring them in. We could fill our church with these kinds of hearers. Modern church growth theorists can tell us how to do it! With the right kind of "message" and the right kind of music, they will come, and in large numbers. But what do you do after you gather such a group? If you preach and teach the word of God in truth there will be little or no interest, no concern, no change, no transformation. Spurgeon used to speak of the bane of the church in amusing goats rather than feeding sheep. He proclaimed a sermon, "*Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats*," in which he taught these words:

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most shortsighted can hardly fail to notice it during the past few years. It has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them.

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on the Gospels; Luke, vol. 1** (Banner of Truth Trust, 1986, first pub. 1858), 255.

From speaking out as the Puritans did, the church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

No, our responsibility is to proclaim the word of God. But it will not be received by all, in fact it will not be received by most. In the work of the kingdom most seed falls on the hearers with hardened hearts. These hearers are indifferent to the gospel. Their interests lie elsewhere. They really care little of Jesus Christ nor do they regard the claims of God as binding on their lives. This kind of hearer does not want Jesus as Lord over his life, for he himself is his own lord, and there is room for only one master in the soul of man. This person will most certainly be banished eternally from the presence of Christ at His coming.

## 2. The seed in rocky soil: hearers who believe for a while (8:13)

We read in **verse 13**, “*But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*” This hearer of the word of God had been affected by the word of God proclaimed to him. He advanced farther than the first, but he, too, failed to bring forth fruit, that is, a life of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ the Lord. Everyone was hopeful for this person! He became a “believer”, a very joyous, enthusiastic believer. He seemed to grow more rapidly than all about him. But the problem is that he only believed “for a while.” The effects of the word were only temporary. And there is no salvation for a temporary believer. This is an example of an *apostate*, a temporary believer.

**Richard Trench** described this kind of hearer:

So far from the heart of this class of hearers appearing irreceptive of the truth, the good news of the kingdom is received at once, and with gladness. The joy itself is most appropriate. How should not he be glad, whom the glad tidings have reached? (Acts 8:8; 16:24; Gal. 5:22; 1 Pet. 1:6). But alas! In this case the joy thus suddenly conceived is not, as the sequel too surely proves, a joy springing up from the contemplation of the greatness of the benefit, even after counting the costs, and hazards, and sacrifices, have been taken in to account, but a joy which springs from an overlooking and leaving out of calculation those costs and hazards.

Later in Luke’s Gospel we will read of our Lord pressing upon His disciples to consider carefully the cost that they would incur if they were to follow Him. Yes, the end of the life of faith born out in life is eternal life, but the course that would lead them to that destination will be beset with great difficulty and opposition. But this kind of “believer” will not stand in the day of trial.

This “believer” seemed so enthusiastic, so responsive. He seemed to be set on fire for the cause of Christ. He had aspects about his faith that we should desire for ourselves! We might initially think, “Surely, a true work of salvation had been done in this man’s heart!” But not so fast. A time of testing and trial comes. Perhaps in the form of *temptation to sin*. Or maybe he was *deceived by false teachers*. Or maybe it was *pressure* from friends, family, or *persecution* from others about him. Or perhaps the testing was in the form of very *difficult circumstances* encountered in life. He endures as a believer for a while, but trials and troubles lead him to give up. He abandons His faith in Christ and he repudiates the word of God as binding on His life. He ceases to do the word of God that he has heard.

It is not that this person was saved and then lost his salvation; rather, his testing only revealed what was not there from the beginning. There was no real substance to the matter in him. He had some understanding. His emotions had been stirred. He was enthusiastic. But in reality it was but shallow and superficial from the beginning, and the time of testing only revealed what was already there, or not there.

**John Bunyan** (1628-1688) set forth a character in the *Pilgrim’s Progress* that reflects this kind of temporary hearer. As Christian was fleeing his home town, the city of Destruction, he met two men, Obstinate and Pliable. Obstinate would have nothing to do with Christian and his intention to travel to the Celestial City. We might say he was like the seed sown on the hardened path. But Pliable had decided that he would go along with Christian, but only for a while.

‘Well, neighbor Obstinate,’ said Pliable, ‘I begin to come to a point; I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in lot with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?’

CHRISTIAN. I am directed by a man, whose name is Evangelist, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

PLIABLE. Come, then, good neighbor, let us be going. Then they went both together...

Now, I saw in my dream, that when Obstinate was gone back, Christian and Pliable went talking over the plain; and thus they began their discourse.

CHRISTIAN. Come, neighbor Pliable, how do you do? I am glad you are persuaded to go along with me. Had even Obstinate himself but felt what I have felt of the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen, he would not thus lightly have given us the back.

PLIABLE. Come, neighbor Christian, since there are none but us two here, tell me now further what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going.

CHRISTIAN. I can better conceive of them with my mind, than speak of them with my tongue: but yet, since you are desirous to know, I will read of them in my book.

PLIABLE. And do you think that the words of your book are certainly true?

CHRISTIAN. Yes, verily; for it was made by Him that cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

PLIABLE. Well said; what things are they?

CHRISTIAN. There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom for ever (Isa. 65:17; John 10:27-29).

PLIABLE. Well said; and what else?

CHRISTIAN. There are crowns and glory to be given us, and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:5; Matt. 13:43).

PLIABLE. This is very pleasant; and what else?

CHRISTIAN. There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow: for He that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 7:16, 17; 21:4).

PLIABLE. And what company shall we have there?

CHRISTIAN. There we shall be with seraphims and cherubims (Isa. 6:2; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 5:11); creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There also you shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place; none of them are hurtful, but loving and holy; every one walking in the sight of God, and standing in His presence with acceptance for ever. In a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns (Rev. 4:4); there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps (Rev. 14:1-5); there we shall see men that by the world were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love that they bear to the Lord of the place (John 12:25), all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment (2 Cor. 5:2).

PLIABLE. The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart. But are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers thereof?

CHRISTIAN. The Lord, the Governor of the country, hath recorded that in this book (Isa. 55:1, 2; John 6:37; 7:37; Rev. 21:6; 22:17); the substance of which is, If we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely.

PLIABLE. Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things: come on, let us mend our pace.

CHRISTIAN. I cannot go so fast as I would, by reason of this burden that is on my back.

Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk they drew near to a very miry slough, that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond. Here, therefore, they wallowed for a being grievously bedaubed with the dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.

Then said Pliable; ‘Ah! neighbor Christian, where are you now?’

‘Truly,’ said Christian, ‘I do not know.’

At this Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, ‘Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect between this and our journey’s end? May I get out again with my life you shall possess the brave country alone for me.’ And, with that, he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and Christian saw him no more.

Wherefore Christian was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone: but still he endeavoured to struggle to that side of the slough that was still further from his own house, and next to the wicket-gate; the which he did, but could not get out, because of the burden that was upon his back: but I beheld in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help, and asked him, What he did there?...

*Two points* may be concluded because of this kind of hearer:

**a. Don’t be too quick to lead people to make “decisions” for Christ, and if they do, do not be too quick to label professors of Christ as numbered among the people of God.**

Here are some wise words of Charles Spurgeon in his book, *The Soul Winner*:

“Do not, therefore, consider that soul-winning is or can be secured by the multitude of baptisms, and the swelling of the size of your church. What means these dispatches from the battlefield? “Last night, 14 souls were under conviction, 15 were justified, and 8 received full sanctification.” I am weary of this public bragging, this counting of unhatched chickens, this exhibition of doubtful spoils. Lay aside such numberings of the people, such idle pretense of certifying in a half a minute that which will need the testing of a lifetime. Hope for the best, but in your highest excitements be reasonable.”

And so, yes, be encouraged would you witness someone showing forth faith in Jesus Christ, but watch for their souls in prayer and encourage them in the faith. Continue to sow the good seed of the word of God.

**b. How do you know that you are not one of these kinds of hearers?**

The answer is that you really don’t know, until the testing of the life bears the true nature of your faith.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance <sup>1</sup>incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

<sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup>whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

**3. The seed among thorns: hearers who “believe” but who cease to obey (8:14)**

Jesus said, “*Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity*” (8:14).

This person also responded to the word. He, too, became a “believer.” This hearer responds to the word, a real change occurs in life. Perhaps this continues for some time. What is the problem with this hearer? Doing the will of God, obeying the word of God, is not the most important concern for this person! This is an example of a *hypocrite*. And God promises salvation to no one who is a hypocrite. He is a hearer, not a doer, he is but deceiving himself that he has salvation (James 1:22). The hypocrite will find himself consigned to the same place as the unbeliever on judgment day (cf. Luke 12:46). This person allowed his heart to grow cold and indifferent to the word of God. He allowed other matters to take precedence in his heart and life. Gradually, his life became so consumed with the affairs of this life the word of God no longer governed his life. Other issues were more important to him.

Our Lord spoke of the kinds of worldly matters that divert this one from living for Christ.

**a. Concerns of this life.** He decides, “My health, family, my job, the things I want in life, these will be the desires of my heart and the aim of my life.”

**b. Riches of this life.** He either gives himself over primarily to either accumulating wealth or longing for wealth. You need not have any money to fall into this error. There are some Christians who are non-covetous persons, but who were quite rich. But there are many poorer people who are consumed by covetousness.

**c. Pleasures of this life.** He thinks to himself, “My time, my hobbies, my activities become my principal pursuits.”

Now there is nothing wrong with cares of this life, riches of this world, or the godly pleasures of this life. The problem is when they take priority over obeying the word of God, more important than doing the will of God! God and His word are eternal. The things of this life are but temporal. Do not allow the things of this world to dominate your thoughts. Do not allow other things to become more precious to you than the cause of Christ and God’s word.

#### **4. The seed in good soil: hearers who continue believing and continue bringing forth fruit (8:15)**

Jesus declared, “*But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience*” (8:15). This is an example of a *true disciple of Jesus, one who has salvation*. He hears just like all the rest, but in contrast to all the rest, this hearer “retains” the word -- He perseveres in faith. This hearer “bears fruit” due to the word. The seed accomplishes its design, bringing forth a life which bears the fruit of righteousness before God. His faith governs his existence.

It was not because this hearer was more intelligent, more deserving than the others. Rather, this difference lies in the fact that this hearer had been the object of a deep and thorough work of God’s grace. His heart had been prepared to receive the word. The hard, fallow heart had been plowed thoroughly, the rocks removed, the weeds uprooted. The ground was prepared by God to receive the good word of God.

We will close with these words of **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714).

Note, those who would receive instruction from Christ must know and consider what a privilege it is to be instructed by Him, what a distinguishing privilege to be led into the light, such a light, when others are left in darkness, such a darkness. Happy are we, and for ever indebted to free grace, if the same thing that is a *parable* to others, with which they are only *amused*, is a *plain truth* to us, by which we are *enlightened* and *governed*, and into the mould of which we are *delivered*.

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