

Sowing the Seeds of Truth

***“In the morning
sow thy seed, and
in the evening
withhold not thine
hand: for thou
knowest not
whether shall
prosper, either this
or that, or whether
they both shall be
alike good.”***

—Ecclesiastes 11:6

AS ANOTHER YEAR DRAWS

to a close, we are very thankful for the privilege the Lord has afforded The Dawn to continue to give forth the message of Truth throughout the earth. Indeed, in these troubling times, we believe it is more important than ever before to bring a message of comfort and hope to this groaning creation. It is our desire that the words of this lesson will stir up the minds of our readers to likewise be engaged in spreading the seeds of Truth and proclaiming the wonderful “gospel of the kingdom” to all with a hearing ear.—Rom. 8:22; Matt. 24:14

In the literal sowing of seed, we have a very fitting illustration of the consecrated believer’s privilege of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and the good news of his kingdom. It is an illustration which properly applies to any and all efforts we may make

to tell the glad tidings to others. Our text indicates that it is proper to do this sowing at all times—"in the morning" and "in the evening."

We could consider this as meaning the literal days which make up our lives. Surely, throughout each day we should always be on the alert to use every possible opportunity to bear witness to the Truth. In a more general way, we could think of this as a reference to the entire Gospel Age—its morning time, or beginning, and its evening, or close. Which-ever application we make, the lesson is that we should constantly be on the alert to sow the seeds of Truth whenever and wherever we can.

From a dispensational standpoint, the Scriptures give us a progressive picture of the Gospel Age, in which there is a sowing in the beginning and a reaping at the end. "The harvest is the end of the age," the Master declared. (Matt. 13:39, *New American Standard Bible*) However, in the outworking of God's plan, even the harvest work at the end of the age is accomplished in great measure by sowing the seeds of Truth. We are to thrust in the sickle and reap, but this is done by making known the Gospel message far and wide, so that those who have a hearing ear may understand and be blessed.—Rev. 14:14-16; Matt. 13:16

Thus we see that the general illustration of sowing is applicable at all times, and there is no reason why the Truth should ever be withheld when an opportunity presents itself to proclaim it. Some, however, may find reasons not to sow. The Lord foresaw this and called attention to it in the chapter from which our opening text is taken. Verse 4 reads, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he

that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." In ancient times sowing was done by hand, and apparently when the wind blew, much of the seed would be lost, and carried to places where it was not intended to go. Because of this, one who was expecting to sow would most likely hold back from doing it if the wind were blowing.

Whether this was a wise procedure on the part of the sower need not concern us, but the prophet indicates that it is not the right course for those who would sow seeds of Truth. It suggests the finding of excuses not to sow. Many excuses can be made to withhold the Truth from others if we yield to the preferences of the flesh to find them. The apostle speaks of "every wind of doctrine," or teaching. (Eph. 4:14) For the most part it is this sort of "wind" that may influence us not to sow the seeds of Truth.

EXCUSES IMPROPER

These winds of false teachings are many and varied. Some may conclude that the time is past for sowing, and we should now be reaping, forgetting that the reaping work is accomplished by the dissemination of the Gospel message. Others, perhaps, believe that the door to the High Calling is closed, so we should no longer preach the Truth. These overlook the fact that they have no definite knowledge concerning the door being closed, and that even if it were closed we should continue bearing witness to the Truth. Still others might say that this is not the time to convert the world, hence we should confine our activities among ourselves, working out our own salvation. These disregard the fact that no

truth-enlightened Christian has ever supposed that the world would be converted in this age, and that the very best way to be prepared for the kingdom is to actively engage in making known the glad tidings to others.

The prophet also says that those who “regardeth the clouds” will not reap. This also may describe the viewpoints and experiences of some as applied to the reaping work in this harvest time at the end of the age. Clouds are a symbol of the great time of trouble with which the Gospel Age comes to an end. We might be tempted to decide that since these clouds are hanging ominously over the world today, we should not endeavor to do any more work in the Lord’s vineyard. Here again, however, we do not believe this should be the attitude of the consecrated believer.

It is easy for our fallen flesh to decide what the Lord can and cannot do, or what he ought to be doing. We should be thankful that he has revealed to us many of the details of his plan. Nevertheless, let us not attempt to fill in matters which are not revealed in the Bible, and decide that the Lord’s work should be confined to the pattern we have set. Let us remember that we know not the way of the Spirit, and it is, therefore, not for us to determine what might be accomplished by the work God has given us to do.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

God does not daily reveal to us what may be accomplished by our self-sacrificing efforts to make known the glad tidings of his kingdom. In the parable of the sower, however, Jesus has given us

a broad outline of what to expect. In this parable, recorded in Matthew 13:3-8, we learn that the seed which was sown fell on various types of ground. Some fell by the wayside, some on stony ground or among thorns, and other seed fell on good ground. This indicates that much of the effort we put forth in sowing the message of Truth brings little or no tangible results at the present time. Only that seed which falls on good ground produces plants which bring forth fruit.

In Jesus' explanation of this parable, found in verses 18-23, he brings to light the reasons why so few are prepared at the present time to receive the Gospel message. First, there is the seed which falls "by the way side." (vs. 19) This class of hearers, Jesus says, receive the Truth into their hearts temporarily, but do not understand it. Not understanding it, they have no real desire to hold it, and thus the Adversary is able to snatch it away before it has a chance to take root. How much in keeping this is with what often occurs when the Truth is proclaimed.

Many may initially give some attention. They may pick up a tract and read part of it, and believe that its message is quite reasonable. Perhaps they send for the booklet which it offers, but before it arrives forget they sent for it. They might hear the message over radio, television, or electronic media and be sufficiently impressed to send for literature, but lose interest even before it arrives. It might be one of our neighbors to whom we try to explain the Truth. He listens attentively, and we rejoice, thinking we have found a hearing ear, but later when we again meet, there is no interest and he indicates that he would rather talk about something else.

The importance of this lesson is that it should prevent us from becoming discouraged when seemingly so few take a deep interest in the Gospel of the kingdom. It is very easy to conclude that because the results of our efforts are so meager we should cease sowing. This is the wrong viewpoint, for the results have always been small. Most of the seeds of Truth which have been sown throughout the entire age doubtless have fallen by the wayside, yet the Lord wants his people to keep sowing, regardless of visible results, for we know not what will prosper, "this or that."

ON STONY GROUND

Jesus next speaks of those who receive seed into "stony places." (Matt. 13:20,21) These hearers of the message, he says, are those who at first greatly rejoice in it, even accepting it as the Truth. They acknowledge that it is the most wonderful thing they have ever heard. In our initial opportunities for fellowship with them, it is all they want to talk about. Perhaps they attend several meetings and give every evidence of fully embracing the message. They may even get a supply of literature to give to others, for they have found that which satisfies their longings as nothing else could do, and they want to share it with others.

Then we notice that they only come to the meetings sporadically, and finally, not at all. Wondering what has happened, a brother or sister contacts them, only to find that their interest has cooled off. In such a case, Jesus points out in the parable that some form of tribulation or persecution has perhaps arisen, and they did not have sufficient depth of soil in their

hearts to stand up under the opposition. Like the tender plant rooted only in the shallow earth between the stones, which withers under the heat of the sun, so these wilt under the sun of persecution.

When they first hear the Truth and become interested in it, many do not realize that the vast majority of their friends will treat them coolly as a result. It does not occur to them that a friend or family member might even say they are “going crazy on religion.” They perhaps do not expect that their pastor might be opposed and would warn them against heresy and the danger of being condemned as a result of their new-found beliefs. When some or all of these situations develop this group is unprepared for them. Wilting under the heat of trial, they choose to give up the Truth rather than their friends. Here again, let us not be discouraged if we find that some whom we believed to be coming fully into the Truth turn out to be those who receive it into “stony ground.” Jesus gave us the parable of the sower in order that we might be prepared for experiences of this kind.

AMONG THORNS

“Some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them,” Jesus said when giving the parable. (Matt. 13:7) His explanation, found in verse 22, is that this is a group which permits the “care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches,” to choke the growing plant and prevent it from becoming fruitful. Here also is an illustration which fits many who for a time have rejoiced in the Truth and enjoyed the fellowship of the Lord’s people. Most of us have doubtless observed cases of this kind, in which some have manifested great enthusiasm for

a time. They were not affected by persecution, and even the enmity of the world did not wither them at the start. The roots became reasonably well embedded in a sincere and honest condition of heart, but the time came when they lost interest. What has happened in such cases?

Jesus explains that worldly cares and delusions which result from earthly wealth choke the Word's intended purpose, hindering continued growth in grace. Here are influences which, if permitted, can destroy the life of the New Creature at almost any stage of its development. These thorns can grow even after one has been in the Truth for many years. For this reason, we should all be on guard against such a dangerous course. It is neither a case of suddenly turning to worldly things, nor abruptly laying up treasures on earth rather than in heaven. It is more subtle than that. Thorns do not grow up overnight, but are of gradual development.

It is regrettable that anyone who once rejoiced in the Gospel message and its service should permit worldly cares and ambitions to choke his interest. However, Jesus has foretold that this would be the case. In such cases, it is not something for which the sowers are to be blamed, nor is it an indication that nothing is to be gained from sowing, simply because some who accept the Truth do not remain faithful to it.

In ancient times the sower of literal seed was doubtless confronted with all the difficulties mentioned in the parable, yet he sowed his seed faithfully just the same. He knew that some of it would fall on good ground, where it would grow and bring forth the proper fruitage. Similarly, our responsibility is

to keep on sowing the seeds of Truth, knowing that in the Lord's providence a grain, here and there, will find its way to "good ground," and from this there will be abundant fruitage.

THE GOOD GROUND

The good ground, or proper heart condition, to receive the Truth means, as Jesus explains, that it is not only heard, but understood. (Matt. 13:23) It is clear from this that a knowledge of the fundamentals of the Gospel is essential in order that the Christian may maintain his standing before the Lord, and be one who bears "fruit unto . . . everlasting life." (Rom. 6:22) Accepting the Truth and devoting oneself to God is much more than an emotional feeling, for it must be based on an understanding of his Word. We are to "know whom [we] have believed," and why. (II Tim. 1:12) Like Paul, we must be persuaded, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. 8:38,39

Only those who are deeply rooted and grounded in the Truth and in whose hearts the love of God has fully permeated, are able to withstand the heat of persecution and the allurements of the world. Only such will give evidence that the Holy Spirit, operating through God's Word, is transforming their lives and making them daily more like the Master. The apostle speaks of the "fruit of the Spirit," and it is this fruit that manifests itself in the lives of "good ground" followers of Christ. These character qualities—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,

goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”—are all elements of Christlike fruitage.—Gal. 5:22,23

It has been said that love is the sum of all the Christian graces. If one is bearing the fruit of love, he is fulfilling the mission for which he was called. The Scriptures tell us that “God is love,” and as we grow to maturity in Christ, the fruit of love will become more manifest in our daily lives. (I John 4:8; 3:16) We will thus become more like our Heavenly Father, and as we do, our zeal for the things of God will increase. His viewpoint will become our viewpoint. As he is continually seeking the good of his creatures, we will be watching for opportunities to bless our fellow men. Not only will the fruit of the Spirit develop into a luscious ripeness in our own lives, but as it does, it will bring joy to the lives of others.

Peter admonishes us to add certain graces of character to our faith—the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Then he declares that if these things are in us, and abound, they will prevent us from being barren or unfruitful “in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:5-8

As Peter shows, if love and the other elements of Christian character are in us and abound, they will not permit us to be idle in the Lord’s service. Like faith, which without works is dead, where spiritual fruitage abounds, there is sure to be a reaching out for the blessing of others. Thus the seed of Truth that reaches the good ground multiplies itself, in that the fruit-bearing plant which it produces, in turn becomes a sower of the seed of the glorious Gospel of Christ.

Even among those of the good ground, because they have all been affected in different ways by the

fall, the Holy Spirit controls their lives in varying degrees. Yet, in each case, their hearts are right and pure, and the seed finds a ready reception and sufficient depth of soil to grow and bear fruit—"some an hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." The Lord knows about our handicaps, and when we do the best we can to crucify the flesh, that the Spirit may have free course in our lives, his blessing is upon us and we can continue to rejoice. All such hearers bear sufficient fruitage to obtain an "entrance . . . abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:11

Let us endeavor, however, never to permit the flesh and its interests to quench the Spirit and thus stunt the growth of fruit which otherwise would manifest itself in our lives. If we are bearing the fruit of love, we will want to be sowing the seeds of Truth, that others might be reached and comforted by a knowledge of God and of his beloved Son. (II Cor. 4:5; II Tim. 4:2) We will want to sow in the morning and in the evening, and we will be faithful in sharing the joys of the glorious Gospel message, irrespective of any visible results.

Indeed, we are happy in the love of God which he has revealed to us, and glad that he has commissioned us to tell the glorious message to others. If faithful unto death, when we get beyond the veil, we will probably discover that in the great economy of God not a single sincere effort that was made by his people to tell forth the glad tidings of the kingdom was in vain. We will then know that in his wise and loving providence, both the morning and evening sowing were "alike good." ■