

Parables and Dark Sayings

“Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old.”

—*Psalms 78:1,2*

THE HEAVENLY FATHER’S

divine program was designed to keep the Truth hidden from the worldly-wise and those whose hearts were not in tune to the principles of truth and righteousness. However, they would be revealed to the Lord’s people who accept the wonderful teachings, and respond by making a full consecration to God during the present Gospel Age. “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”—vss. 3,4

TAUGHT IN PARABLES

Our Lord Jesus used parables and dark sayings to teach valuable lessons to his followers and those who are seeking the heavenly calling. In Luke’s gospel, it is recorded, “He [Jesus] said, Unto you it

is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” (Luke 8:10) All others of the sin-sick world will receive their opportunity toward reconciliation with God during the future kingdom of life and truth that will be made available to them under the establishment of Christ’s future kingdom, that we believe is soon to come.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

One of the important and valuable lessons which Jesus taught was the parable of the sower, and Luke recounts the lesson in his gospel. The Lord said, “A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred-fold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—vss. 5-8

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, some of his faithful followers evidently surmised that his mission was the conversion of the world, even at that early time of the church’s history. They therefore asked him, “Why speakest thou unto them [the multitude] in parables?” (Matt. 13:10) The Lord answered them, saying, “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. Therefore speak I to them

in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”—vss. 12,13

Continuing, the Lord explains the inability of the multitude to understand his words, saying, “This people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—vss. 15-17

THE PARABLE’S MEANING

The Lord plainly states to his disciples the important point of his parable. He told them, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”—Luke 8:11-15

SEED SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE

In this parable, the ‘seed’ that is sown is the Word of God. The sowing of the seed began with our Lord Jesus and was continued by the apostles after Pentecost and the remainder of the present Gospel Age church. We observe, in this parable, that some of the seed falls by the wayside where it is trodden down and the fowls of the air devour it. The Lord explains that those by the wayside are they who hear the message of Truth, but have the Word taken out of their hearts by Satan, lest they should believe and be saved. The seed which falls by the wayside to some extent enters the hearts of those who demonstrate some interest and appreciation for the Truth. As we know, Satan is a deceiver. (Rev. 12:9) He employs an array of means by which he endeavors to take away the precious Word of God from those who may have received it with lukewarm zeal or a passing interest. One of his most potent means, and most often employed, is by false teachers who often instill error, fear, and confusion where there would otherwise be confidence, peace, and understanding.

SEED LANDING ON STONY GROUND

Some of the seed fell upon ground that had little of the necessary nutrients to sustain it, or the right amount of moisture to nurture the new life that springs forth from the seed of Truth. The Lord explains that this part of the lesson portrays those Christian people who are joyful upon hearing the Word of God and believe it. However, having no substantial root they fall away in an hour of temptation. He said, “He that received the seed into

stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but [en]dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.” (Matt. 13:20,21) The trials may come because of the Truth, and those who uphold the Word of God will inevitably be tested by a world full of unbelief.

The Apostle Paul made clear, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:1-4

As they begin their Christian walk, these Christians fall prey to one of Satan’s most insidious lies. It is the lie that says that it is reasonable to expect that the disciple of Christ will be protected from trials. The mature believer never forgets that the path to glory is only through much tribulation. We are reminded of this reality in the account of Paul and Barnabas when they passed through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They strengthened the brethren, “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) In his second

epistle to Timothy, Paul states, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” (II Tim. 2:12) In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle explains, “Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.”—Rom. 5:3,4

Only those who are willing to suffer and die with the Master may expect to attain a place in Christ’s future kingdom. The consecrated child of God must continue to allow the sanctifying effect of the Word of God to take ever deeper root in their heart, or a falling away will surely follow. Those who would patiently endure the test are those who have sufficient good ground for the seed of Truth to have become deeply rooted.

SOWN AMONG THORNS

Jesus also pointed to other of the sown seed that fell among thorns, which sprang up and choked it. He explained that this portrays those who have heard the Word of God, and may go forth with zeal and commitment in an effort to fulfill the Christian life they desire to follow. However, these soon allow themselves to become entangled in the riches, pleasures, and cares of this world. In due course, the sense in which they began their new Christian journey gradually becomes choked and dies, having fallen prey to another of Satan’s insidious devices. As recorded by Matthew, we read, “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.”—Matt. 13:22 *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) We are not to understand that those who hear and embrace the wonderful Word of God are to abandon their daily obligations to family, friends, and their fellow man. On the contrary, those who would faithfully follow our dear Lord are cautioned that it would be a mark of infidelity if they were to use our calling in Christ Jesus as an excuse to evade that responsibility. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told him, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."—I Tim. 5:8

It is manifest that one cannot avoid altogether the cares of this world of imperfection. In his wisdom, our dear Lord was not overlooking that reality, but was exhorting those who would follow him to avoid the pitfall of allowing earthly concerns and ambitions to overwhelm their budding spiritual vitality. When writing his epistle to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul exhorted them, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Rom. 12:2) All who heed these admonitions should be aware of the need to detect the evidence of thorns in their consecrated life, and to take the measures necessary to control and eventually eradicate them.

Those who have made a consecration to our loving Heavenly Father must continually resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. These enticements are characterized by the Apostle Paul, who admonishes us, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand

against the wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11) In his letter to the brethren at Ephesus, he continued by then identifying seven various elements of the armor. He explained, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vss. 12-18

Those who neglect to do all that is advised by the apostle in the foregoing passage of scripture are those who will be vulnerable to the Devil’s wiles. They are not “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9) Their attempt to please the world demonstrates their loss of the holy fear of displeasing their Heavenly Father. “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body.”—Matt. 10:28

SEED UPON GOOD GROUND

The Lord concludes his wonderful parable of the sower by pointing to the seed that falls upon what he refers to as ‘good ground.’ He thus teaches, “On the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15) He states that these hear God’s Word, ponder its teachings, and then bring forth fruit with patience. Patience is the significant thought, and is the vital difference between the believers who constitute the good ground of the parable, and those merely professing believers he spoke of in the other categories of the parable.

Thus, the ‘stony ground’ believers did not have sufficient depth in which to cultivate patience. They could not endure the tribulation that inevitably comes to all who endeavor to hold fast the Word of God. Others who were enticed by the pleasures of this world could not endure the perceived thorny privations of a life of sacrifice. On the other hand, throughout the present Gospel Age the ‘good ground’ believers have endured with patience the various trials of a fully consecrated life.

MANKIND TO LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS

The ‘good ground’ believers in the Christ realize that, in due time, the whole human family will be required to consider the wonderful providence of a loving Heavenly Father as recorded by the prophet Isaiah, who wrote, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are

in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”—Isa. 26:9

At the time of his First Advent, the Master’s message of the kingdom of heaven was not intended to convert the multitudes to whom he spoke. It was only for those who had a ‘hearing ear’ for the High Calling in Christ Jesus during the present age of sacrifice. Thus did the Apostle Paul encourage the consecrated during this present Gospel Age by saying, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”—Heb. 2:1

THE APPOINTED TIME

The Prophet Habakkuk was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write, “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Hab. 2:3) Prophecy reveals that the present Gospel Age has been the appointed time of waiting for the ‘vision’ of Christ’s kingdom.

Many centuries later, the Apostle Paul pointed back to Habakkuk’s prophecy and proclaimed that Christ Jesus was the vision, and that it would be his Second Advent for which his faithful followers would be patiently waiting. “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” (Heb. 10:36,37) The apostle reveals that waiting for the Lord’s Second Advent would prove to be a test of patience. He warned that this period of waiting would constitute a severe test of faith for many who were walking in the narrow way of sacrifice.

HOLDING FAST THE TRUTH

Paul wrote to encourage the brethren at Rome, and emphasized that it was the Heavenly Father who is the supreme example of patience. He told them, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." (Rom. 15:4,5) In his epistle to Titus, the apostle mentions a special characteristic that should mark every child of God. "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."—Titus 1:9

Through divine revelation, the Apostle Paul understood that the due time for the return of Christ and the gathering of his disciples unto him would be many centuries into the future from his day. The apostle proclaims: "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."—II Cor. 12:4-7

THE PROMISED INHERITANCE

In his gospel, John recorded some of our dear Lord's final words as his earthly ministry was drawing to a close. In his prayer to the Heavenly Father, Jesus spoke of his faithful followers, those who were of the 'good ground' class and, therefore, well-grounded in the fundamental doctrines and wonderful promises of the Truth. He said, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me."—John 17:19-25

As the present Gospel Age comes to a close, let us strive with greater diligence to make our calling and election sure and inherit the long-promised blessings of the Christ, of which the worldly-wise remain unaware. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that

come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”—I Cor. 2:6-9

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11 ■