

# SOIL LESSON AND TEXTS

## JESUS TEACHING BY PARABLES—FOUR KINDS OF HEARERS

Sunday School Lesson for February 12, by the Rev. Titus Lehmann, Pastor of the St. Paul's Evangelical Church.

### TEXT OF THE DISCUSSION

(Mark IV, 1-10, 13-20.)

And again he began to teach by the sea side. And there is gathered unto him a very great multitude, so that he entered into a boat, and sat in the sea; and all the multitude were by the sea on the land.

And he taught them many things in parables, and said unto them in his teaching,

Hearken: Behold, the sower went forth to sow:

And it came to pass, as he sowed, some seed fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured it.

And other fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth; and straightway it sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

And other fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

And others fell into the good ground, and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; and brought forth, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

And he said, Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

And when he was alone, they that

were about him with the twelve asked of him the parables.

And he saith unto them, Know ye not this parable? And how shall ye know all the parables?

The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; and when they have heard, straightway cometh Satan, and taketh away the word which hath been sown in them.

And these in like manner are they that are sown upon the rocky places, who, when they have heard the word, straightway receive it with joy;

And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway they stumble.

And others are they that are sown among the thorns; these are they that have heard the word,

and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

And those are they that were sown upon the good ground; such as hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundredfold.

is a good thing. However, when we become so completely absorbed in some affairs of our life that we can not think of anything else, then our diligence becomes a vice. Two classes of dissipating influences distract such minds. "The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word." Oh, how the distractions of life take us away from the worth while affairs. We are a driven people, hounded from one pursuit to another. A divided heart has some religion, but it is a dwarfed, stunted and feeble kind.

A very striking example of that which a dissipating of one's interest may do to a person is found in those words of Charles Darwin which have become classic in their way. He says: "Up to the age of thirty or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the words of Milton, etc, gave me great pleasure. Pictures gave me considerable and music very great delight. But now for many years I can not endure to read a line of poetry. I have almost lost my taste for pictures and music. There is a law of atrophy in the spiritual world. My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding out general laws out of a large collection of facts. If I had my life to live over again, I would have made it a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature." What happened to Darwin in an aesthetic sense happens also with regard to the spiritual nature of man. We dare not let anything crowd out that which is most worth striving for in our lives.

#### Gold-Pan Hearts.

Here is a heart which is like the gold pans used by the early prospectors, who sifted all kinds of materials through these and at the end retained that which was pure gold. All the rest is washed out. The fruitful heart which Jesus speaks about is the one which gives undivided attention to the Word, one which responds to the vision splendid. We have here a permanence of religious impressions. The "good ground hearers" are those that not only hear the Word of God, but accept it and show fruits in their lives.

All of us can receive truth, but there must be co-operation between the seeds and soil, between the grace of God and man. Improving the heart soil is the life work of every Christian. Three suggestions are given in our text to make permanent religious impressions: "An honest and good heart," "keep the Word" and "bring forth fruit in patience."

Earnestness and sincerity of purpose are necessary. Meditation is a second requisite for permanence. Think deeply about the great truths, read other Christian books. Let the truth penetrate your heart. Be patient. Active and passive endurance, fortitude and forbearance are vital. Give heed then so that your heart may be able to accept the great truths of the Master.

cathedral service, heard the music and had observed the hushed and reverent worshippers. He himself, has had, however, no part in the service. He does not see, he does not understand.

Why that my soul should be consigned To infelicity,  
Why always must I feel as blind To sights my brethren see,  
Why joys they have found I can not find, Abides a mystery.

The truth about the matter is that only the person whose heart is attuned to God can find Him. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Yet the hopefulness in the situation is this that such a responsiveness can be developed. Hearts are hardened by much hearing and not doing the truth. "Every duty we omit obscures some truth we might have known." We become "Gospel-hardened," people who permit themselves to be mere "sermon-tasters," who let the truth sail by them and let every bird of fancy snatch it away.

#### Spongy Heart.

This second group which the Master speaks of is like a sponge which absorbs some of the truth, but does not hold on to it. The seed falls on the rocky soil; it gets an opportunity to catch hold a bit, but soon after, because it does not go deep enough, it withers. We have here a striking word picture of a shallow, superficial, surface-minded personality. As the truth comes in its glorious power, one accepts it enthusiastically, but it is the enthusiasm of a straw fire, which flares up and dies down shortly. The truth can not get down into the heart. There is no conviction, and when troubles and difficulties arise such folk simply fall away.

"We meet with such people in life. There is nothing deep about them; all

they do and say is on the surface. There is lacking a depth of character. Many of the superficial ideas which men had are being tested in these days. All of us have possibly seen the rugged and ragged little trees along the timberline in the mountains. There is not very much soil there, the roots can not strike so very deep, and yet because there is hardship there these trees survive the blasts and storms. Then again we have seen great trees in the rich meadow land. A fierce wind comes along and they are blown down. They were not able to stand the stress and strain. In these days mere outward and superficial Christianity will never do. We must be firmly rooted in God Himself if we are to come through.

The shallow ground was stony ground. It is among the folk who take life too lightly and flippantly that we find most often a stony heartlessness.

#### Jelly-Bag Hearts.

It is indeed a most peculiar and homely phrase which Coleridge uses here. He refers, of course, to the canning season when the women folk cook their different kinds of materials for jellies and put the juices in jelly-bags. The best runs through, is Coleridge's contention. The jelly-bag heart is the one which takes a part of the truth, but lets the best get away from it. It is a soil in which thorns and the wheat grow together, but the thorns grow faster and crowd out the good plants, so that these are choked. It is a half-hearted proposition. Divided attention robs one of the fullest understanding. There are too many dissipating influences that come in and deprive one of real benefits. The seed enters in, but can not come up properly.

To be diligent in one's daily task

TO MAKE the speculum of the larger telescopes foils the optician's skill in casting. If he uses too much or too little heat, the getting in of a grain of sand, a slight change in the temperature of the weather, all goes to pieces. The glass must be recast. When a piece of work like this is completed it is indeed a difficult task well done. Rarer and more difficult still than the costliest part of the most delicate instrument is the completion of Christian character. Let any little thing interfere and the process is incomplete. In the parable which we have before us are given some of the causes of failures and the requirements that are necessary to round out a Christian life and character.

Jesus enmeshes immortal truth of God and man in pictures so that man might understand. The parables which Jesus uses are illustrations of great truths and carry their moral in their warp and woof. In the presentation of the parable of the sower and the four kinds of soil we have a symbol of man's response and reception to truth. As Jesus sits on the hillside teaching He looks out upon the fields beyond, where men are at work tilling the soil. A sower is casting out the seed with a broad and wide swing of the arm. Some of the seed falls on the hard-trodden pathway, some on the rocky soil, some in the thorns and some into the fruitful field.

As Jesus tells this story He indicates in His interpretation later on that there are four kinds of hearers of the truth. How do we respond to any kind of instruction which is given? How do pupils react to the lesson presentation? With what kind of attention is the message of the pulpit or lecturer received? A great deal of the development of the soul depends on our response to the stimuli given. That which gets us, we get. Coleridge, the great English author, in discussing this parable has a very novel manner of characterizing the different kinds of hearers. We take his suggestions as our general outline.

#### Hour Glass Hearts.

These are the hearts that are like the hour glass which lets the sand pass right through it without having a very definite impression made upon it. The first group of hearers, as they are supposed to listen to the Word of God, simply throw it off, as water rolls off a duck's back. It is hard pathway heart, which does not even permit the seed to enter. It is the indifferent mind, the inattentive hearer that is insulated against the truth. There is a want of spiritual perception there. It is not the wrongness of impressions which tread religion down, but that outside religion yields in turn to other outside impressions which are stronger. It is thought that is dissipated. Inattentiveness of spirit, produced by want of spiritual interest is the cause for disappointment.

Thomas Hardy, in that sad and yet gripping poem, "The Imperceptible," pictures a person who does not seem to respond to religion. He does not seem to perceive spiritual and religious values. He had attended a