

## THE GARDEN PLOT OF THE HEART

Luke 8:4-15

In His preaching and teaching Christ often used parables. In His use of them He called attention to an incident or something with which His listeners were very familiar and proceeded to draw a spiritual application from it. To Dr. G. Campbell Morgan we are indebted for this clear and concise definition: "A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; some familiar thing of earth is placed alongside of some mysterious thing of heaven that our understanding of the one may help us to an understanding of the other." The word "parable" signifies the putting of things side by side for comparative purposes. A circumstance in nature or an incident in life is thrown alongside some great spiritual truth for the purpose of teaching the latter. Christ used parables very much as we use illustrations whereby our Lord concealed spiritual truth from His foes who were incapable of comprehending it and, at the same time, revealed it to His friends who were capable of understanding, receiving and appreciating it.

In compliance with the will of God that the gospel should be preached everywhere, Christ made a tour of the cities and villages, proclaiming "the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." Two things about this tour are impressive--Christ went where the people were and He made preaching His primary business. The twelve apostles accompanied Him, as did certain women who had been saved from Satan's power. Contrary to Oriental notions of propriety, our Lord exalted women into the Circle of His service, and, out of hearts of gratitude, they looked after the comforts of Christ and His associates. These women were the forerunners of that large company of godly women who, through the centuries, have been ministering to the Lord through kindness to His ministers.

This passage contains a splendid description of a picturesque and memorable sight. Christ's popularity had not waned, as was attested by the fact that a great multitude had assembled to hear Him teach and to watch Him heal. Upon His withdrawal to the seashore, the crowds followed Him thither. To protect Himself from the pressure of the throng, and to get better control of His audience, Christ stepped into a boat and pushed off a little distance from the beach. From that novel pulpit He addressed the multitudes, who had lined the shore and were eagerly awaiting His instructions, in the terms of the story related in our scripture.

From the boat Christ was looking toward the hillside. Amid these surroundings He spoke His first parable of which we have a record. In it He employed the figure of a sower using the old-fashioned method of broadcasting his seed, which is still in vogue in many places. It is possible that Christ saw a sower scattering seed on the hillside when He spoke this parable.

### I. The Sower.

Interpreters of this and kindred passages, like Matthew 13:37, have regarded the sower in this parable as a representative or type of the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. Then, they have thought of the sower also as a type of all of Christ's servants down through the centuries--preachers, evangelists, teachers, missionaries, Christian writers, publishers, parents and friends--whom He has chosen to scatter the seed of the Word of God. Truly, it is a marvelous privilege and a tremendous responsibility to be a preacher or a teacher of the Word.

### II. The Seed.

According to the plain statement of our Lord in verse eleven, "The seed is the Word of God." It is to be sown in the hearts of men wherever they dwell, without reference to their character or condition. It is to be scattered promiscuously, without any thought of the character of the ground upon which it falls.

We owe the Word of God to all men everywhere. It has not been given to us simply to enjoy or to hoard. We should dedicate ourselves anew to the task of proclaiming it far and wide, doing our best to see to it that all have an opportunity of hearing the glorious gospel of Christ.

### III. The Soil.

The soil represents human hearts. The character of the hearer determines the effect of the Word upon him. The results of the sowing of the gospel seed always and everywhere depend on the condition of the hearts of those to whom it is addressed. That which one takes from the Word depends on what he first brings to the Word.

As Christ faced His vast audience on the seashore, He clearly discerned four distinct classes of hearers. These same four classes are represented in my audience now. The four kinds of soil are:

#### 1. The wayside.

Fields in Palestine were usually without fences, so paths were frequently made across them. These pathways were trodden down solid under the feet of men and the hoofs of animals. As the sower scattered his seed, some of it fell on these hard pathways, but they were unable to penetrate the soil, germinate, root and grow. The fact that the seed lay on top of the hard surface was not the fault of either the sower or the seed.

Since there was no loose soil to cover the seed, soon after the sower's back was turned the birds picked them up and devoured them. Therefore, the sowing was to no avail. With the world having rolled its heavy wheels over the thinking of many, their hearts are like that when they listen to the preaching of God's Word. How difficult it is to get beneath the surface of the person whose life has been a highway for every sort of thing! The wayside soil represents those who simply hear the Word, and remain utterly indifferent to it, the hard-hearted hearers upon whom no impression is made. These indifferent hearers of the gospel are characterized by an utter religious insensibility. They experience no anxiety of conscience, no fear of condemnation and no desire for salvation.

There were those present that day on whom the message of Christ was utterly wasted. They may have heard it with their minds wandering fruitlessly in every direction. They heard His words but did not take them in. Their souls were impenetrable to the truth because of the traffic over them of so many different things. How fatal it is to face the appeal of the gospel repeatedly without ever taking it seriously! No wonder the Saviour sought to arrest people with the solemn warning, "Take heed how you hear." What a pity when the preached Word does not find an entrance and Satan and his emissaries steal it away, as the birds pick up the seed from the hard path! Satan snatches away the Word from the hearts of the lost, lest believing it they should be saved. Satan takes away the Word by causing forgetfulness of it, or he prevents its reception by creating prejudices against it or by getting the mind occupied with other things. His greatest desire is to prevent people from believing the Word, accepting Christ and being saved. He is satisfied when the lost reject Christ's offers just like a tile roof throws off hail. The fact that the seed was trodden down indicates contempt for it. They who carelessly hear the Word, in reality, despise it and hold it in contempt. They who reject the Word, in effect, trample it under their feet.

#### 2. The stony.

This is not soil where stones are mixed with the earth, but it is a thin layer of dirt on a ledge of rock. It means bedrock covered with a shallow layer of earth. This thin layer of soil underlaid by a bed of rock is workable, but the

trouble is there is so little of it. There was an instantaneous response; the seed sprouted quickly, but the thin layer of soil was not sufficient to permit the roots to grow, so the plant withered quickly under the heat of the sun. The taproot simply could not go down and enable the life of the plant to be permanent. The seed was sown; it got in but not down.

Christ said that many people are like that in their religious lives. Many made a quick response to the appeals of Christ. They could hardly wait until He had finished preaching to dash forward and say gushingly, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Their interest was easily enlisted; their feelings were quickly touched. They became eager enthusiasts, but they were as quick to quit as they were to start. They were shallow and superficial. They sought to live in the realm of their emotions instead of their convictions. They listened to the voice of inclination rather than to the voice of duty.

Shallow hearers are those who hear the Word with joy, are carried away with emotional enthusiasm, allow their feelings to gush but do not have any staying power. They are simply shallow, impulsive, emotional and unstable listeners. They hear the Word, but they quickly forget it. They are enthusiastic but shallow. They become interested quickly in almost any new fad or cause. When the newness is worn off, they take up something else. They eagerly follow some fresh voice in the pulpit--for a time. Then they forsake the house of God and stay at home on the slightest pretext. The preacher says something they don't like because it applies to their conduct which is wrong, and they quit the church. When it is popular to be religious, they like to declare their faith, but, when criticism comes and pressure is brought to bear, they are willing to surrender it without a struggle.

In the case of shallow, superficial and emotional hearers, the Word is joyfully received, quickly starved and completely scorched. They have little depth of character. They are easily excited but always fickle. Shallow ponds are easily stirred, but the great depths of the ocean are never easily moved. Those who are quickly moved and show great emotion usually retreat just as quickly from any stand they may take.

### 3. The thorny.

A part of the soil on which the seed fell was unclean. The seeds of thorns, briars and thistles lurked within it. The seed easily penetrated the soil which had not been thoroughly cleaned; it germinated, and it sprang up. The thorns, briars and thistles came up also; and, at length, the latter overtopped the grain. The thorns took the moisture from the roots, shut out the light and the air and ultimately suffocated the grain. There was no harvest of grain because these other plants drew all the moisture and richness of the soil and absorbed them in their growth. People cannot raise a crop of wheat and thorns or thistles at the same time and in the same place.

The thorny-ground hearers are those who allow the affairs of this world to interfere with the growing of the proper crops. The thorns represent anxious care about the affairs of this present life. To these things, the thorny-ground hearer gives unrelaxing attention; and, by them, he is absorbed and engrossed. Spiritual fruitfulness is prevented by cares, riches and pleasures of this life.

The lives of many Christian have been choked and their fruitfulness prevented by carelessness, indifference, business, pleasure, selfish ambition and the like. Far too many have mixed motives. The soil of their lives is supporting more than one crop. They are divided in their loyalties. They make very poor disciples because they have too many conflicting purposes. A man is often present at a

worship service, but only in body. His mind is in his office, at his business or in a place of amusement. He is planning, plotting or playing but giving no heed to the Word that is being spoken, for his heart is far away. He does not care to have the precious seed enter his heart. It makes no difference whether the preacher is presenting the matter of heaven or hell, life or death, love or hate, things that have to do with the present life or the one to come. His soul is impervious, so the seed cannot enter. He is not gospel-hardened, but he is sin-hardened. Anything, however innocent or good it may be in itself, becomes a thorn if it dwarfs or crowds out something better.

4. The good.

The good soil was well broken up; it had good depth and moisture; it was cleansed of thorns and thistles; it was thoroughly prepared, and it brought forth fruit in varied quantities. It was not hard as a footpath, so the seed entered; it was not shallow, so the seed germinated and took root; it was not preoccupied, so the seed germinated, took root, sprang up and brought forth fruit in various degrees of fruitfulness, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold and some one-hundred-fold.

The harvest came from the good soil. Only in the case of the good soil did the seed bear fruit. The heart of the fruitful Christian is not hardened by resistance, is not shallow, is not divided between love for God and love for the world, but it receives and cherishes the Word and brings forth fruit with patience. The measure of the fruitfulness which God's Word brings forth in the lives of His children is determined by their willingness to receive it and to permit it to work in their lives. The heart which is good soil is one which accepts God's will, walks in His ways, endures affliction for His sake and awaits His recompense.

Some hearers were more fruitful than others, not because they had a greater capacity, but, because they gave hospitality to the message. There are certain qualities in fruitful hearers which should be cultivated by those of us who are God's children.

(1) Attention.

The good hearer stirs himself up to listen. He trains himself to follow the speaker. He leaves other things behind. He has an open mind. He is an eager seeker after truth. When he hears the truth he does not let it go in one ear and out the other. He resolves to make the most of it.

(2) Meditation.

Meditation is to hearing what digestion is to eating: it assimilates what we hear for our edification and growth in grace. But, alas! meditation as a Christian exercise is rapidly disappearing from among us.

(3) Obedience.

The fruitful hearer accepts the Word which he hears, appropriates it and appreciates it. As one puts his faith into practice it becomes fuller and richer.

(4) Fruitfulness.

The honest hearer will bring forth fruit in the form of an unselfish and gentle disposition, of good works and of a useful Christian life.