

SOWING AND REAPING

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Psalm 126:6.

This verse suggests several things to us.

I. The Seed.

Christ said, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). Its origin is divine. It is invaluable. Our text calls it "precious." It is precious because it is inspired. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17). The seed is precious because it is a gift from God, it meets human needs, it is adapted to all classes, it produces beneficial results, and nothing can take its place. Truly the Word of God is precious. It is precious because it tells of a priceless Saviour, it is to hungry souls what bread is to their bodies, it clothes the lives of Christians with fruitfulness, and it opens before their eyes the gates of glory and enables them to see their destiny of joy in the presence of the Saviour.

II. The Soil.

The soil in which the seed must be cast is the soul of man. Using the seed, or the Word of God, the appeal must be made to the entire nature.

1. The mind.

With it we must appeal to the understanding, with all its powers of spiritual discernment, or reasoning, of memory, and of anticipation.

2. The heart.

With it we must appeal to the affections, which have been gathered around objects that are unworthy of them, and that may and should be directed to God.

3. The will.

With it we must appeal to the will, which has to determine whether or not one will receive Christ as Saviour, and His service for their portion.

We shall certainly fail unless we direct our efforts to the mind, the heart, and the will, when we sow for our Lord.

III. The Sower.

Much Christian effort is a kind of sowing. Above all things the Christian is a sower. It matters not in what part of the field he labors, it is his business to sow. Christ was the great sower, and all of His followers must sow. To the child of God has been entrusted by the Lord the "precious seed" or the Word of God, and he goes forth daily to sow, not by accident or involuntarily, but with a set and deliberate purpose in life, the seed which will bear a golden harvest. In the furrows of life he should sow the seeds of love, kindness, sympathy, and gentleness.

1. His energy.

He "goeth forth." In Palestine the fields were frequently at a considerable distance from the humble home of the husbandman. Sometimes he had to go six or eight miles to reach the field which he cultivated. For purposes of mutual protection, groups went out from their homes in the early dawn and returned again as the evening shades were falling.

The expression "he that goeth forth" shows a set purpose, as well as a fixed and definite design. He does not waste his time in berating other sowers, or in telling what wonderful things he is going to do in the future; not does he allow his zeal to evaporate in sentiment or song. He "goeth forth" as an active worker. This sort of thing is needed in spiritual husbandry. There are many who will talk, some who will pray, but not all of them will go to the work. If only the much talk and many prayers could be translated into active and strenuous work, a tremendous change would take place in the church. It must be admitted that the rank and file of church members do but little aggressive work for the Master. Take out of the average church from a dozen to a score of earnest workers, and little seed will be sown and few harvests reaped. "Goeth forth" expresses decision, direction, and deeds. There must be personal activity in approaching the unsaved, and there must be the sowing of the precious seed of the gospel of Christ.

There is a necessity for going forth. God's Word demands it. It is not meant for some, but for all Christians. Every child of God is under obligation to go forth. Having received the message of the gospel from others, we are debtors and obligated to pass it on to others. Necessity is laid upon every follower of Christ to go forth.

What is meant by going forth? He goes forth from God. The child of God has received a divine commission from heaven. This going forth implies that the worker had been with God in prayer. Our truest strength lies in prayer. The Lord endows with marvelous power the person who has learned to live close to Him, and to walk in the light of His countenance.

The sower, or the Christian, goes forth into the world scattering the seed of gospel truth. He proclaims to men the love of God, which was manifested in the gift of His Only Begotten Son. He proclaims free grace and dying love. He calls people to repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. All of us are sowers. It is not a question of whether or not we will sow. The question is, Shall we sow the precious seed of the Word of God or bad seed? Shall we sow the seed of truth or of error?

2. His emotion.

"He that goeth forth and weepeth." This strong language indicates that he has a deep sense of his own insufficiency for the task, that there is an urgent need for the work to be done, that the time which remains in which the work can be done is brief, and that there is a heavy responsibility resting upon him to do the work faithfully. There may or may not be tears in his eyes, but there will be tears in his heart. He weeps because of his awareness of the weight of the responsibility, the discouragements in the way, meager results of former sowing, and the inability to reach those who need Christ most.

The useful and effective worker for Christ is a person of tenderness, and not a Stoic; not one who does not care whether or not souls are

saved. The Lord employs and uses a person of tenderness, who is in earnest, who loves lost souls, and who is filled with compassion for them. He weeps because he realizes that he is such a poor instrument for the use of such a good and great Master.

3. His errand.

"Bearing precious seed." This precious seed is the living Word of God for a lost world; truth for the souls which are wandering in fatal error; the glorious gospel of the blessed God. It is precious because it is the gift of God's love, because of the price paid for it, and because of its wonderful fruit -- peace, love, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We must express the truth as it is in Christ with the firm conviction that there is life in it, and then something will come of it. God has said: "My word shall not return unto me void."

What did Christ do to win the lost? What did Paul do to rescue the perishing? Two things signalize the lives of Christ and Paul. Intensive prayer was one of them. Extensive witness-bearing, publicly and from house to house, was the other element in their success. We can do nothing better than follow in their steps. We cannot improve upon their methods. Risks have to be taken and sacrifices have to be made if any harvest of consequence is to be reaped.

IV. The Sowing.

1. The spirit.

The spirit in which we are to sow the seed is that of tender interest, brotherly affection, inexhaustible faith, and patient hope.

2. The methods.

We may preach, teach, converse with, use the printed page, and write letters to the unsaved.

3. The conditions.

They may be favorable or unfavorable. We may go forth hopefully, expecting great things; or we may be discouraged and disheartened, for we may feel that the hearts are hard, and the minds are dull, and the determination is to reject the truth and the claims of God.

V. The Success.

As to the character of the harvest which is promised, it is abundant. For seeds in the hand there shall be sheaves on the shoulders. The harvest is also gladdening. The sower goes forth with a compassionate heart-longing, but he returns rejoicing. Moreover, this harvest is sure.

1. His return.

"He shall doubtless come again." This pictures his return from the field. So shall the servant of God, as he wends his way homeward, be seen, not with downcast and disappointed look, but with rejoicing because of the success of his toil. Such men, ere they reach home, find their way lit up with the sunset glow and the eventide light, which the joy of the harvest brings to them. The return of the faithful sower is consciously successful, personally honored, and abundantly recompensed.

2. His rejoicing.

"He shall doubtless come again with rejoicing." At last when Christian service is done, the disappointments and toils of the Christian life will only be raw materials to produce everlasting song. Oh, how we will thank and praise God that He accounted us worthy to do anything for our Lord!

How many are the springs of that joy! Among them are the following: that he has been saved himself; that he has been allowed to engage in the work; that he has been kept faithful and persevering in the work; and that he has been made successful in the work.

3. His reaping.

"Bringing his sheaves." What a beautifully suggestive picture! The seed is not called his, but the sheaves are his. It is true of the spiritual sower also. The seed belong to God, and so do the sheaves, but the sheaves also belong to the sower. It was thus that Paul regarded everyone who was saved under his ministry. He regarded him as his son, in the gospel. So it is with those whom we win to Christ. Some of them will reach home before we do, others will get there about the same time, and still others will follow.

God's Word tells us that there must be a personal activity in approaching the unsaved, and that there must be a sowing of the precious seed of the gospel, and that these seed must be watered by a compassionate love-longing. Then, there will follow the harvest of the precious fruit into God's eternal storehouse. He says that the harvest is without doubt and immediate, because he brings his sheaves with him, and it shall be characterized with great joy. What God commands He will bless, if the obedience is cheerfully and promptly given. The outgoing sower will become the incoming reaper. God's Word will not return unto Him void. This He declared; this I believe.

Is there not enough in the anticipation of all this to make us "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"? The Lord has given us the "precious seed," has enabled us to sow it, and has promised us success if we are faithful in our task, and longs to be able to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." And how glad we shall be to hear that welcome plaudit!