

Visitor Pulpit.

WHAT THE FARM LABORERS CAN DO AND WHAT THEY CANNOT DO.

A NEW SERMON BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how."

Last Lord's-day morning our subject was the laborers upon God's farm and their great Master; and then we tried to show how far human agency was necessary in the work of the Gospel.

It is remarkable that the parable before us is peculiar to Mark. No other evangelist has recorded it, but we do not think any the less of it on that account.

A LESSON FOR SOWERS,

for the laborers upon the farm of God. It is a parable for all who are concerned in the kingdom of God.

WHAT WE CAN DO

and what we cannot do. Let this stand as our first head. Notice, then that we can sow. Any man who has received the knowledge of the grace of God in his heart can teach others.

WHAT WE CAN KNOW

and what we cannot know. We can know when we have sown the good seed of the word that it will grow; for God has promised that it shall do so.

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT

if we work for God, and what we may not expect. According to this parable we may expect to see fruit.

"SOW BESIDE ALL WATERS."

Imitate the sower, who was not so penny-wise that he would only cast the seed where, according to his judgement, all was good soil, but who, feeling that he had other work for his judgement beside the selecting of the soil, threw the seed right and left as he went on his way, and denied not a handful even to thorny and rocky soils.

Still, wise sowers discover favorable opportunities for sowing, and gladly seize upon them. While we are to work for God always, yet there are seasons when it were casting pearls before swine to talk of holy things; and there are other times when if we were slothful it would be a shameful waste of propitious seasons.

For little though it seem to teach the simple truth of the Gospel, yet it is essential. How will men hear without a teacher? The farm never brings forth a harvest without sowing. Weeds will grow without our help, but not so wheat and barley.

Servants of God, the seed of the word is not like thistle-down, which is borne by every wind, nor like certain seeds wafted by their own parachutes here, there, and everywhere but the wheat of the kingdom needs a human hand to sow it, and without such agency it will not enter into men's hearts, neither can it bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

This seed should be sown upon the times as such that one sowing may not suffice. Sow again and again, for many are the foes of the wheat, and if ye repeat not your sowing ye may never see a harvest.

I have heard that Captain Cook, the celebrated circumnavigator, was in one respect an admirable example to us. Wherever he landed, in whatever part of the earth it might be, he took with him a little packet of divers of English seeds, and he was often observed to scatter them in suitable places.

YOU CANNOT MAKE IT GROW,

for you do not know how it grows. The text saith, "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." That which is beyond the range of our knowledge is certainly beyond the reach of our power.

After the germ has been put forth, can you make it further grow, and develop its life into leaf and stem? No; that, too, is out of your power.

grow this a mystery; ripening is a mystery; and these three mysteries are as fountains sealed against all intrusion.

Certainly this is true of the rise and progress of the Word of God in the heart. It enters the souls itself ye know not how. Naturally men hate the word, but it enters and it changes the heart, so that they come to love it, but we know not how.

WE CAN REAP

the ripe ears. After a season God the Holy Spirit uses His servants again. As soon as the living seed has produced first of all the blade of thought, and afterward the green ear of conviction, and then faith, which is as full corn in the ear, then the Christian worker comes in for further service, for he can reap.

Christian workers begin their harvest work by watching carefully to see when men evince signs of faith in Christ. They are eager to see the blade, and delight to mark the ripening ear. They often hope that men are believers, but they long to be sure of it; and when they judge that at last the fruit of faith is put forth, they begin to encourage, to congratulate, and to comfort.

He does not rest till he has introduced the convert to the communion of the faithful. For our work, beloved, is but half done when men are made disciples and baptized. We have then to encourage, to instruct, to strengthen, to console, and to succor in all times of difficulty and danger.

The reaper is the man who gathers in the converts, and he fulfils an honorable and useful office. If I preach the Gospel to-day, and some shall be converted, I shall be the sower; but if going home to the respective towns in which you live, you who have dropped in here as strangers, shall be received into the churches of your own pastors, they will be reaping what I have sown.

WHAT WE CAN KNOW

and what we cannot know. We can know when we have sown the good seed of the word that it will grow; for God has promised that it shall do so. Not every grain in every place; for some will go to the bird, and some to be scorched by the sun; but as a general rule God's word shall not return unto Him void, it shall prosper in the thing whereto He hath sent it.

We also can know, because we are told so, that the reason for this is mainly because there is life in the word. In the Word of God itself there is life, for it is written, "The Word of God is quick and powerful,"—that is, "living and powerful." It is "the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth forever." It is the nature of living seeds to grow, and the reason why the Word of God grows in men's hearts is because it is the living word of the living God, and where the word of a king is there is power.

fruit of itself." We must mind what we are at in expounding this, for human hearts do not produce faith of themselves: they are as hard rock on which the seed perishes. But it means, that as the earth under the blessing of the dew and the rain is, but God's secret working upon it, made to take up and embrace the seed, so the heart of man is made ready to receive and enfold the Gospel of Jesus Christ within itself.

You, the sower, are thus taught by the parable that spiritual life and growth are of God, and come by the seed and the soil far more than by you. So far as the truth is concerned, its intrinsic power is the same whoever preaches it.

Still there is a something which we cannot pry. I repeat what I have said before, you cannot look into men's inward parts and see exactly how the truth takes hold upon the heart, or the heart takes hold upon the truth. Many have watched their own feelings till they have become blind with despondency, and others have watched the feelings of the young till they have done them rather harm than good by their rigorous supervision.

Thou knowest not the way of the Spirit. His work is wrought in secret, and thou canst not tell whence he cometh or whither he goeth. "Explain the new birth," says somebody. My answer is, "Experience the new birth, and you shall know what it is." There are secrets into which we cannot enter, for their light is too bright for mortal eyes to endure.

III. Thirdly, our text tells us

WHAT WE MAY EXPECT

if we work for God, and what we may not expect. According to this parable we may expect to see fruit. The husbandman casts his seed into the ground, and the seed springs and grows, and he may expect a harvest. I wish I could say a word to stir up the expectations of Christian workers; for I fear that many work without faith. If you have a garden or field, and you sow seed in it, you would be very greatly surprised and grieved if it did not come up at all; but many Christian people seem quite content to work on, and they never reckon upon results so much as to look for it expectantly.

But we may not expect to see all the seed which we sow spring up the moment we sow it. Sometimes, glory be to God, we have but to deliver the word, and straightway men are converted; the reaper overtakes the sower, in such instances, but it is not always so. Some sowers have been diligent for years upon certain plots of ground, and apparently all has been in vain, till at last the harvest has come, a harvest, which, speaking after the manner of men, had never been reaped if they had not persevered to the end.

A crop of mushrooms may soon be produced, but a forest of oaks will not reward the planter till generations of his children have moulded into the dust. It is ours to sow, and to hope for quick reaping; but still we ought to remember that "husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain," and so must we. We are to expect results, and not be despondent if we see them not to-day or on the morrow.

his little garden. This afternoon Master Johnny will be turning over the ground to see if the seed is growing. There is no probability that his mustard and cress will come to anything, for he will not let it alone long enough for it to grow. So it is with hasty workers; they must see the result of the Gospel directly, or else they will leave off, and distrust the blessed word. Although the people may have taken the word into their minds and may be considering it, certain preachers are in such a hurry that they will allow no time for thought, no space for counting the cost, no opportunity for men to consider their ways, and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

I am solemnly convinced that some men are prevented from being saved by being told that they are saved already, and by being puffed up with a notion of perfection (when they are not even broken in heart. Perhaps if such people had been taught to look for something deeper they might not have been satisfied with receiving seed on stony ground: but now they are content with that which comes of seed sown on unbroken rocks; they exhibit a rapid development, and an equally rapid decline and fall. Let us believably

EXPECT TO SEE THE SEED GROW;

but let us look to see it advance after the manner of the preacher firstly, secondly, thirdly, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

We may expect also to see the seed ripen. Our work will lead up by God's grace to real faith in those he hath wrought upon by his word and Spirit, but we must not expect to see it perfect at the first. How many mistakes have been made here. Here is a young person under impression, and some good sound brother talks with that young brother and asks profound questions. He shakes his experienced head, and knits his furrowed brows. He goes into the cornfield to see how the crops are prospering, and though it is early in the year, he laments that he cannot see an ear of corn; indeed he perceives nothing but mere grass. "I cannot see a trace of corn," says he. No brother, of course you cannot; for you will not be satisfied with the blade as an evidence of life, but must insist upon seeing everything at full growth at once. If you had looked for the blade you would have found it, and it would have encouraged you.

Do not despise the day of small things. Do not examine the newborn babe about Calvinism, in its different shades to see whether he is sound after your idea of soundness; ten to one he is a long way off sound; and you will only worry the dear heart by introducing difficult questions. Speak to him about his being a sinner, and Christ a Saviour, and you will in this way water him so that his grace in the ear will become full corn. It may be that there is not much that looks like wheat about him yet, but by-and-by you shall say, "Wheat! ah, that it is, if I know wheat. This man is a true ear of corn, and gladly will I place him among my Master's sheaves." If you crush the blades, where will the ears come from? If you cut off the green ears, where will the ripe ones be? Expect grace in your converts, but do not look to see glory in them just yet. It is enough if you see heaven begun: do not look to see it complete in them here below.

Expect, then, brethren—for you may expect it—

TO SEE A HARVEST,

but do not expect to see every seed springing up. "There," says one, "that is a discouraging word. There is an old worldly proverb which saith, 'Blessed are those who expect nothing for they shall never be disappointed.' I do not believe in that proverb but I believe in a moderate form of it: 'Blessed are those who do not expect what is unreasonable, for they will not get it.' If you young people who begin to work for God expect that every word you speak will be useful to those who hear it, it will not happen, and you will grow discouraged; therefore I would raise your expectation as high as truth permits, and no higher. I would have you climb to the top of the ladder, but if I encouraged you to go any higher you will soon be going down the other side, under the notion that you are ascending.

The results of our ministry in these days will be mixed, even as they were when Paul preached, and some believed and some believed not; we must be prepared for that, and yet I bid you let your expectations be very large, for you may have a sixty or a hundred-fold of fruit from the seed if God be with you, and that will abundantly repay you, even if the crows and the worms should eat their share of the grain.

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