

Behold, A Sower Went Forth To Sow

A Sermon by Candidate David C. Roth

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside...some fell on stony place...and some fell among thorns....But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt. 13:3-8).

The people of the land of Canaan around 30 A.D. had a unique teacher in their midst, a Divine teacher, Jesus Christ, God incarnate. He was the greatest teacher ever to grace the face of the earth. He alone was able to teach these very external-minded people the truth about life after death, about the kingdom of heaven. He taught them what heaven is like, and He did it in such a way that they could understand it. He accommodated the Divine truth to their modest understandings.

To some who heard, this parable was no more than an illustration of what happens when a farmer sows seed in good or in bad soil. To the others, who later heard the meaning of the parable explained by the Lord, it was seen as it was: an allegorical example of how the people of the church receive the Lord's doctrine- how they receive His truths.

What they, and many even today, don't realize is that every detail in the Lord's teaching, and thus in His Word, is a key to a spiritual vision which can be unlocked and unfolded and so seen in each story. The parable of the sower does teach us about the kingdom of heaven. It teaches us how we must receive the Word of the Lord in order to enter into His heavenly kingdom. It also uncovers for us the kind of barriers we put up in our lives which prevent us from loving and living the truths of the Word which will bring healthy and happy relationships here on earth, and ultimately lead us to heaven.

The sower in our parable is the Lord, and the seed is the Word or truth. The ground in which the seed is sown is the mind and life of the individual, or the church in him or her. We are taught that the church is in each one of us according to how we receive the Lord and His Word. The integrity of the church is said to be according to two things: the soundness and purity of its doctrine, and the degree of charity within it. So it could be said that the four types of ground on which the seed fell in our parable are like various states of the church within us. We can then

qualify these various states according to these two requisites.

However, in general these four states could be distinguished as three destructive states and one good state. The first three states, as they are represented in the parable, are not heavenly states; only the fourth state is a heavenly state. However, if we see ourselves in one of these prior three states, we can take heart in the fact that with some hard work on our ground (our attitude), we can break out of our destructive state and move on to a more fruitful one. Symbolically speaking, there is much that can be done to salvage a field which is hard, full of stones, or thorny. We can plow, remove the stones, or weed out the thorns, and then something can grow.

Let's now consider each one of these kinds of ground to see how they reflect the types of attitudes, and ultimately the life, which we can have toward the Lord's Word and toward our neighbor.

"And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them."

The wayside is ground which is packed down very hard and is dry; it could even be said to be just rock with no soil at all (see AC 5096). There is no way that seed can take root on this type of ground. There is no capacity for the ground to receive the seed in its current state. The obvious result is that the birds of the air come and take the exposed seed away. If we don't improve the soil, it is like trying to plant grass on a concrete slab. All we are doing is feeding the birds.

The hard rock or ground is said to be our persuasion or our firm, unwavering, or what might be called "bullheaded" set of false ideas. It is a set of confirmed false beliefs, and such falsity that has bound up and imprisoned our ability to think freely and to be open-minded. You can imagine a person maybe yourself at some point who is convinced that his way to do a certain thing is the only way to do it, and that everybody else is wrong. This is an example of a false persuasion. The Writings describe people living under a false persuasion as follows:

"[Such people] are in the persuasion that falsity is truth and truth falsity. This persuasion is such that it takes away all freedom to think anything else, and consequently holds the very thoughts in bonds and as it were in prison" (AC 5096).

A person with this attitude has no time for truth; it is nothing to him. He

has no concern for it. The truth of the Word cannot possibly take root in a person who does not care about the truth (see D. Life 90). Is this talking about us when we don't make the time to worship the Lord or to read His Word? Or when we hear a truth and we reject it because it means having to change our opinion, or admit that we were wrong?

Until the falsity of this state is dispersed, the truth will be destroyed by our own hardened, misguided understanding, an understanding formed by our reasoning from sensory experience alone and so founded upon falsities. This is what is meant by the birds which come and devour the seed which is sown. Falsity will consume the truth in us unless we receive it with a willing heart, a heart which chooses to follow the Lord's Word and not our own thinking and reasoning faculties. It is what happens to the truth we learn unless we examine ourselves, put away the false ideas, and then begin to live by the truth- truth which leads to good.

If we want to depart from this destructive attitude, we must break the bonds of this state by shunning the love we have for our own false ideas and the evil love from which it springs. When this happens, we can then be set free to start thinking openly and honestly and so see clearly the path which leads toward a life of genuine good.

The second destructive state described in this parable is illustrated by the following:

"Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away."

This section describes a person who does care for the truth but not for its own sake, which is not to care interiorly, and therefore the truth has no permanence and grants no conviction.

This type of person loves truth outwardly, not inwardly. He or she loves truth for the sake of being able to appear intelligent and wise. He gathers in truths and hoards them for the sake of glorifying himself. "Look how smart I am, see how many degrees I hold, and observe how many books are on my shelf." Truth is not learned for the sake of showing this person how to change his own life to better fit with the Lord's plan. With him truths can still be called truths, but they are not truths taken for what they really are: ways to show how to live a good

life.

In this parable "earth" signifies good because it "receives truths as soil does seed," and allows truth to take root and be of use. When truths have no root in good they are only temporary and superficial. They can look beautiful and make us look pious, but if we receive them for selfish reasons alone they will be of no real use to us when evil spirits rise up and attempt to destroy us and our truths. This is what is meant by the sun rising up and scorching the seedlings. If we remain in this state, then our spiritual life will look like nothing more than a sun-scorched desert rather than the oasis it can become.

The Writings tell us that "the love of self lets man down into what is his own, and holds him there, for it looks continually to self, and man's own is nothing but evil, and from evil comes every falsity" (AE 401:35). It is okay to love to learn truths and to want to be intelligent, so let's thank the Lord that He has given us intelligence, but then humble ourselves to Him and pray that He show us how to utilize our knowledges to best serve our neighbor and the Lord.

We can never have a new will or desire for following the Lord implanted within us as long as we don't attempt to put self-love where it belongs, that is, below service to others and below love to the Lord and His Divine uses. When we do this, we can then make the truths we learn our own, truths which the good of the new will would need in order to be born and to survive safely.

Our parable describes a third destructive state which is envisioned in the following: "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them." This verse describes the state of those who have let evils or bad habits take control of their lives. As the Lord's unfolding of the parable to His followers described, "these are those who hear the Word, and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and they become unfruitful."

When we are in this state, we allow the desires of the flesh and the love for merely sensual and worldly delights to get in the way of truth when we hear it. Basically what we are doing is rejecting the truth because what we are currently doing feels good and we don't want to give it up. We will allow no truth to lead us away from those things which we love most of all. As the Writings describe those in this state, "They reject the

truth as soon as they hear it, and if they listen to it they stifle it. As they deal thus with truths they do not know what good is, for truth and good act as one" (DP 278a:3).

When we are involved in an evil, because it is something we love and therefore brings us delight, it seems to us that we are in freedom. So when we hear anything that would lead us away from our mirage of freedom we reject it. Take for example an individual caught up in justifying his own behavior to cover his dishonest actions. "Yes, I changed some figures on my tax return, but I needed the money so that I could pay for my child's orthodontic work. I can't send the government money now or they will put me in jail. What's \$200 to a billion-dollar operation?" To this person truth seems like a set of handcuffs waiting to be secured firmly around his wrists, severely restricting his freedom.

But this is only an illusion. The Lord teaches us very plainly that if we know the truth and abide in it, it will make us free. But as long as we insist on holding onto our own insane ideas of freedom, we do nothing but close ourselves off from the genuine delights and peace which accompany true freedom heavenly freedom. This freedom can come about only when we shun the evils of our life and live the truths of the Word. The means for us to do this is always available to us. Just as the sower casts his seed on all types of ground, so too does the Lord give His truth to all. As the Lord teaches in the gospel of Matthew, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45). He does not withhold His truth from us no matter what state or destructive behavior we are involved in. But it is our own individual decision whether or not we will receive His truth and put it to use.

The final state to discuss is one of usefulness. We read, "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." This verse describes the reason why the sower sowed the seed in the first place: to bear fruit. Why would a farmer spend all the time he does plowing, picking out rocks, adding fertilizer, planting, and weeding in his field if he was not expecting a crop? He wouldn't. The Lord doesn't give us truths without a reason, without the possibility of use. He gives us the truths in His Word because He knows that if we prepare our minds to receive them, they can bear fruits of good in our lives, and this will bring us real happiness, not some self-created illusion of joy based solely on what our nervous system feeds our brain.

The seed which fell on good ground is illustrative of what happens when we love the truths that are in the Lord's Word and do them from Him. When we do this we are said to bear fruit (see D.Life 90). In this case "fruits" signify the doing of good from love or charity (see AR 934, AC 3310). The state represented by the good ground which bore fruit is distinguished into three states itself: a hundredfold, sixty, or thirty. This means that we can receive enough of the Lord's Word to allow us to bear either a lot of fruit or just some.

The important thing is that we are doing good, that we are bearing some fruit, any fruit, which can be of use. When this happens, we will be brought into closer contact with the angels of heaven, and they will give us more and more help and strength to work and to till the field of our mind. If we stop and think on which of the following would be easier to prepare, plant, and maintain an acre of ground by ourselves or do the same with as many willing helpers as were needed or desired the answer is quite clear. When we shun evils as sins and look to the Lord for help, He will most certainly send it in abundance.

But we will never reach this state unless we believe that the Lord's Word is Divine truth and holds the answers for life change within it. Beginning with this belief and then gradually responding to the truth in the Word is what will break up the rocky crust of our minds and allow moisture to seep in to soften the soil, making our rational minds ready- ready to receive the seeds of truth which will soon sprout into the tiny seedlings that are the beginnings of a life of good. And in time, with more continued work on the ground of our mind, by pulling out the suffocating evils and keeping the ground workable, we can enable these little seedlings of good to grow and become good for food, that is, for genuine spiritual goods.

The truths of the Lord's Word are of utmost importance to us. They will do so much for us if we let them. The Lord is the greatest teacher and has the best lessons ready for us, accommodated for each and every one of us no matter what state we are in. His parables teach us as well today as they did when He spoke them to His followers.

So the question is, how are we going to choose to receive them? Will we reject them? Will we gather them in for mere appearance? Will we let our hereditary evils choke any good that may come from them? All these are ways which lead to spiritual starvation.

Or will we open up our hearts and minds to them and feed on the produce of the spiritual goods which they can bear? The choice is ours. It is the Lord's good pleasure that we inherit the kingdom, that is, that we go to heaven. As the Lord said to those who followed His Word in their lives,

"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34).

Amen.

Lessons: Matt. 13:10-13, 31-35, 44-52; Luke 8:4-15; AC 5096