

The Joy of Harvest

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately illustrates that the true joy of harvest is the spiritual rejoicing over souls saved and the fulfillment of faith through God's grace.

Scripture: Isaiah 9:3, Psalm 108:5, John 15:11, Luke 15:7, Matthew 9:37-38, James 5:7, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Salvation", "Faith", "Christian Fellowship"

Description

In 'The Joy of Harvest,' C.H. Spurgeon vividly portrays the spiritual joy experienced when souls are saved, likening it to the abundant joy of a bountiful harvest. He emphasizes the fulfillment of faith, the importance of mutual encouragement among believers, and the supreme joy Christ has over repentant sinners. This sermon encourages believers to rejoice in God's work and to continue laboring zealously for His Kingdom.

Transcript

"They joy before You according to the joy in harvest." Isaiah 9:3.

HARVEST crowns the year with God's goodness. When the harvest is abundant, there is universal joy. Everybody rejoices. The owner of the land is glad because he sees the recompense of reward. The laborers are glad for they see the fruit of their toil. Even those to whom not a single ear may belong, nevertheless sympathize in the common joy because a rich harvest is a gift to all the nation. It is a joyous sight to see the last loaded wagon come creaking down the village road, to note the youngsters who shout so loudly yet know so little what they are shouting about, to mark the peasant on the top of the wagon as he waves his hat and gives vent to some gleeful exclamation—and to see them taking it all to the stack or barn. There is joy throughout the village! There is joy throughout the land when the harvest time comes! They that divide the spoil shout loudly, their joyous clamor reaches the heavens!

A better joy than this, however, greets the more auspicious season when a sinner finds his Savior, when the prayers that he has sown, like handfuls of seed, come up and the good yellow ears of confidence in his Savior are brought to maturity. The joy of those who have found the Savior is greater than harvest time—they can say with the Psalmist, "You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey." Burst, you barns! Overflow, you wine vats! But you cannot give such joy to your possessors as Christ, really grasped and laid hold upon, can give to a soul that feels its need of Him! The joy of harvest is far exceeded by the joy of simple faith!

We, as a Church, like Christian Churches in all ages, have had times of ingathering when we have rejoiced before God as with the joy of harvest. And there comes even a brighter day than has ever dawned upon this poor misty earth—the day of the coming of the Son of Man, when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, when Christ shall thrust in His golden sickle and shall reap the harvest of this world! And then shall the righteous rejoice before Him with a greater joy than ten thousand harvest years have ever known!

I. Let us talk, then, of our own joy at the present time as the joy of harvest. The joy of receiving as members of the Church these converts from the world is THE JOY OF REALIZATION and, therefore, is like the joy of harvest!

Faith realizes what she sought and expected. It is an act of faith, in some sort, when the farmer casts his good seed into the earth to die. He loses sight of it for a long time. It must rot and decay under the clods. It is not quickened unless it dies. But he believes that it will be ultimately to his gain to sustain a loss of those golden handfuls. When he sees the harvest, his faith is honored and proved to be sound sense. Thus, too, his cherished hopes are fulfilled. When he first saw the green blade appearing above the soil, he had hope of golden ears. When the whole field grew green and looked like his own pastures, then he thought full sure that harvest time would come and each day, as he has walked across his field, or round about it—as he has seen first the blade, and then the ear—he has hoped to see the full corn in the ear. And now his hopes are all fulfilled in the harvest before him! His labor is all repaid. Many a time have his workmen plodded to and fro over that ground. It was toilsome drudgery—to plow, to harrow, to sow—then there was much weeding, the hoe

had to be in frequent use. But now he grudges no labor that has been spent—he has a good return for all his outgoing in the incoming of his harvest! Harvest is the realization of faith, of hope and of labor.

So is it with the conversion of souls. We sow the Word of God in faith. How often have I preached the Gospel here and I have felt that there was no power whatever in it, of itself, to convert souls, and no power whatever in souls to make it converting to them! Yet I felt and knew that God would honor His own Truth and make it quickening to those whom He had ordained unto eternal life. And you, sitting in these pews and offering your silent prayers, have hoped that it would be so, too. You have anticipated it. Your faith has been exercised with my faith, expecting that God's Word would not return unto Him void. And I know that many of you, earnest men and women, have looked out for results—you have had a quick ear to catch a hopeful word from your own children. You have had a quick eye to notice the tears of any who sat in the same pew with you. And sometimes your hopes rose very high—and sometimes sank very low. But now that you have seen many of these in whom you have been interested, brought in and added to the Church, you seem to go beyond hope and you bless God that His Word has been honored and that souls have been saved!

I cannot tell how many of you have labored for those particular persons who are to be added to us. I know that some of you have, but I venture to say that you who have prayed the most, will rejoice the most. You who have spoken most to souls. You who have labored most to bring them to Christ will have the greatest part in the present joy of harvest! As for you loiterers, who do nothing but look on—as for you who are ready at meal-time to come in and dip your bread into our vinegar, but have nothing to do with the labor, you who have not toiled with us side by side—you will have little joy. You will perhaps stand by and be suspicious concerning the results. Like the elder brother, you will be angry and not come in while we have music and dancing over the Brother who was lost and is now found—who was dead and is alive! But you

who have believed the most, you who have hoped the most, you who have worked the most—you shall keep the feast and rejoice before God with the joy of harvest! Glory be unto God! He has not failed us! His Word has not returned unto Him void! He has heard the cry of His children! He has given to us to sow in tears and to reap in joy!

II. Change the note a little and observe that the joy of harvest is THE JOY OF CONGRATULATION.

I think I may congratulate you, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, on the ingathering of converts into the Church. There is a time for rebuke and there is a time for expressing our mutual comfort in one another. Let us congratulate one another that the Spirit of God is with us as a people and with us in no mean measure. Oh, what would other churches give to have such an increase as we have had year by year? God has been pleased to add to us, year by year, pretty nearly after the rate of four hundred members in a year till our numbers have been swollen beyond our most sanguine hopes. Oh, how greatly has He multiplied the people and increased our joy! Surely the Spirit of God is with us! Every month we have testimony that the Word has been made useful. I do not think there has been a sermon preached here which God has not blessed. Ought we to restrain the expression of our gratitude through any fear of trespassing on humility, when we can say, from positive facts, that there have been those who have come to us and professed either that they have found the Savior, or that they were led to tremble under a sense of sin through the Word every time it has been preached? Surely, the Spirit of God is manifestly with us! Shall we not recognize His Presence? Must we not now adoringly bless Him, that though we are not worthy that He should come under our roof, He does deign to abide with us and make the place of His feet glorious?

Let us congratulate one another that our prayers, notwithstanding all the faults that mar them and the infirmities that cleave to them, are being heard! They are penetrating Heaven, they are entering the pearly gate, they are going up before the Throne of the Most High! Through Jesus' blood, which they use as their great prevailing weapon, they are moving the arm which moves the world! Blessings are coming down upon our sons and daughters, upon our kinsfolk and acquaintances in answer to our wrestling, believing prayers! Let us congratulate one another. If we were depressed, if we were like a wilderness, we would console one another. Let us now felicitate one another, interchange our cheerful smiles and our thankful greetings! Let us take the right hand of fellowship over again and, looking back upon the past, vow for the future, in God's name, that if He will but strengthen us, nothing shall daunt our courage, nothing shall restrain our zeal! What He has done shall make us aspire to more! What has been accomplished by us, as a people, shall be but a steppingstone to more daring attempts, to more zealous adventures, to more arduous labors for the promotion of His Kingdom and the extension of His sway! Let us, then, have the joy of congratulation! As the farmer congratulates the men, and as the men congratulate the master, as the one says, "Blessed be you in the name of the Lord," and the others

reply, "We wish you a blessing in God's name," so now let us congratulate each other upon God's mercy which we have received!

III. And is not the joy of harvest particularly A JOY OF GRATITUDE?

I envy not the man who can see the Church increased and yet not feel a sacred, grateful joy. I know some little narrow souls, so compressed within their own selfishness, that to feed their own souls and cherish their own feelings seems to them the only aim and end of Gospel ministry. Whether souls, other than their own, are lost or saved, they care not. It has been the lot of some of us to be, at times, cast among a

narrow-minded class of people who say, with a supine satisfaction, "There are very few that shall be saved." And the fewer the number in their fellowship, the more confident they grow of their own election! The appearance of a candidate for Baptism or church membership is the signal for all of them to put on their spectacles and look him through and through to see if he is not a hypocrite. I do not know that their churches are so particularly pure, but I do know that it is particularly difficult to get into them! I do not know that they are worth getting into, but I do know that they ought to be worth it, considering the time it takes before one can possibly be received into their enclosure! You must be summered and wintered and tried this way and that before you can be received—and when you are received, the members are sure to rub their hands together and say, "Well, it's a serious thing to receive members." And they are about as glad as I suppose a poor man might be who had 19 children, when there is another coming to eat of the scanty loaf! They seem to think that the addition of so many new members would make the whole of the old members so much the poorer. For my part—and I think I can speak for all here—we greatly rejoice when new converts are welcomed into the Church—and the more there are brought into the Christian family, the more joyful we shall be! We will bless our God—without ceasing will we bless His name, that He does add to us, for this is His work! Jesus sees of the fruit of His passion. The Spirit sees the result of His operation. The Divine Father sees His own children returning to His own board and herein we do rejoice, yes, and we will rejoice with the joy of gratitude!

IV. I have been trying to think over the various causes for joy we may have concerning those who are just now added to us, but I do not think I can sum them all up. THE JOY OF SYMPATHY, however, cannot be lacking.

In many cases you may not know the persons admitted, yet you may enter into the fellowship of their circumstances. A parent's joy may kindle some fellow-feeling. There are fathers and mothers here who feel the tears rising in their eyes because a dear boy or a dear girl has been before the Church and borne witness to faith in Jesus—and is now to be publicly received with the right hand of fellowship into communion with that Church of which the parents have long been members. Estimate the prayers uttered or unexpressed, the sighs that have gone up to Heaven, the many fears, the motherly pangs, the fatherly cares—and now share the joy of the parents while they say to you, "Magnify the Lord with us, and let us exalt His name together!" Here, too, are wives who see their husbands saved and there is much joy occasioned thereby. There will be a happy household now. Here are sisters and brothers who have watched over brothers and sisters with the most sedulous attention and importunate prayer and, at last, they see them relent the stubbornness they once indulged and confess the Savior whom once they despised!

But, oh, pardon me when I entreat you to sympathize with me and to share my joy, for it is a joy that overflows just now, and would gladly call kinsfolk and friends to rejoice with me! What a mercy to be the means of saving a soul from death and hiding a multitude of sins! How precious is that promise, "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever." As I sight that constellation in the Scriptural heavens, my heart beats with grateful emotion. But I do not ask you to share only my joy, but to share the joy of earnest teachers and other workers in this Church! Need I mention names? You know the persons without my breathing their names. The men, the women who love the souls of sinners and have been blessed in our midst in bringing them to Jesus are entitled to your sympathetic greetings! Rejoice with them! They have reaped their golden sheaves and they are rejoicing with the joy of harvest! I pray you to share their joy and to increase their joy! Sunday school teachers— God blesses you so that out of our school there come many additions to the Church. You who conduct our catechumen classes, God

blessees you—and we have additions from your midst. Young men who preach in the street, you missionaries who toil in your little rooms and serve God by speaking a word of exhortation—you have all been honored this month—there has been some fruit from every department of service! Therefore let us join in sympathy with the laborers whom God has thus honored, in thanking God for their success in souls saved!

And may I not ask you to rejoice because there is One who loves souls better than I do, better than you do and who rejoices more than any of us? It is the Man who bought them with the wounds in His hands, and feet, and side! He looks down upon those who have come up to Him from the wilderness and are looking to Him alone for salvation. Their eyes that were once red with weeping, now flash with hallowed joy! His eyes, that were full of pity, beam with satisfaction and unfeigned delight sits upon the Savior's brow! I cannot see Him with these dim mortal eyes, but I know by an inward consciousness that He is here. Each soul that has trusted Him has been another jewel for His crown, another flush of pleasure in return for His pangs of grief. Come, then, let us rejoice with Him! Jesus, Companion of our sorrow, Captain of our salvation, when You are glad we are exceedingly refreshed!

Nor is this all, for in yonder skies there are those who wait upon our Master, who once waited on Him on earth, and are now glad to hymn His praise before His Throne. Oh, could you hear their songs, you would find that they are just now louder and sweeter than is ever known. "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah," always rolls up to the Throne of God and the Lamb. But now it is deeper, its volume is more mighty and its note more sweet as they sing over the ingathering of souls into God's Church. Christ Himself said, "I say unto you, there is joy in the Presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." How much more joy is there when, by scores and even by hundreds, repenting sinners find the Savior!

Think what might have been the lot of those who profess now to have been saved. You have need of an inspired Prophet to tell you that. Some of them might still have been where they once were—upon the ale-house bench, with the drunkard. Yes, and where some of them were who have been washed and cleansed—with the harlot in her midnight sin. There are young ones to be added to this Church who have never gone into open sin, but if they had not been called by Grace, little do we know what might have been the career of vice before them. Temptation might have led to sin, sin might have ripened into habit, habit might have gathered force until they became ringleaders in mischief—but they are washed, they are cleansed! And O Satan, what a harvest you have lost! What soldiers have been taken from your ranks! How much mischief might they have done which now they shall scrupulously avoid, for Grace has turned them in another road and filled their mouths with another song!

Think, too, of what they now shall be through Divine Grace. I cannot depict to you each case. I know that there are some here upon whom we look with the hope that they will be teachers of others. We have, especially, holy mothers bringing up their children in God's fear and holy fathers seeking the conversion of their little ones. Their seed, as a generation which the Lord has blessed, shall become, in later years—some of them—pillars of the Church, honored and honorable! They shall serve their Master in this life, they shall bear testimony to His faithfulness in death and they shall sing His praise forever!

Still, with all this joy of harvest, there is one mortifying reflection. I would not say much about it lest it should dampen your joy. It is this. Out of those who are added to the Church, there are always some who are not saved. Let us judge carefully and watch earnestly. Some come like Judas with a lie in their right hand and put on Christ by profession who are not followers of Christ in spirit and in truth. Search yourselves, Brothers and Sisters, and if you are not Christ's, do not dishonor His name by venturing to be

called by it!

And there is another grievous thought. While so many are gathered in, there are many who are left out. Some of you have been with us in our best days and I am afraid I shall have to ring that text again in your ears, as I have done before—"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, but you are not saved, you are not saved." Your sister is saved, but you are not saved! Your wife is saved, but you are not! Two of you sleep in one bed—one has been taken and the other left. Two of you grind at one mill in your daily work—one has been taken and the other left. You are not saved, you are not saved! And when the time comes for you to die, these will be sad words to ring in your ears with a more doleful sound than death-knell ever knew, "Not saved! Not saved!" Amidst the joy of harvest, let us not forget to pray for those who are still wandering in the paths of sin or pandering to the vanities of the world.

Another harvest is coming when Christ shall gather together His people. There will be, first of all, the ingathering of the righteous. Do not make a mistake about the Day of Judgment, as though the righteous and the wicked were to be judged together, for remember that first of all there will come the day when the righteous shall be gathered. If you read the 14th Chapter of the Book of Revelation, you will find that the harvest precedes the vintage. [See Sermon #2910, Volume 50—the

HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE.] The righteous are gathered as the

harvest of the earth and afterwards the vintage of the world is gathered—that is, the wicked. The harvest is gathered into the garner of God—and the vintage "into the great winepress of the Wrath of God"—and there the grapes are trodden under foot till the blood flows out, even up to the horses' bridles! Well, there is to come a harvest of the righteous and what joy there will be when you see the countless number that swells the ranks of the blessed! O you angels, you had need to be twice ten thousand times ten thousand when, at the ingathering of sheaves that no man can number, you welcome the multitudes of the redeemed! What shouts there will be when millions upon millions mount to the upper skies! It was a time of great joy when all Israel passed through the Red Sea, but how much greater joy will there be when ten thousand times ten thousand, even myriads of myriads, shall enter into their eternal rest!

There will be joy in the persons saved—each one will have a separate song or make a distinct note in the one song. What joy over Magdalene and the dying thief! What joy over Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus! Each separate case shall stand out clear and bright, as though it were better than another and yet each one shall claim that his is the choicest exhibition of Divine Love and Faithfulness. What joy when, all together, the Lord's jewels shall be put into His casket!

Think of where they shall be gathered from—from poverty, from sickness, from beds of dust and silent clay. They shall be gathered from slander and rebuke, from persecution and from suffering, from the lion's jaws and from the flames—they shall be gathered, ten thousand times ten thousand of them—from sin and suffering, to sin and suffer no more!

To where will they be gathered? Gathered to their Savior, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven! Remember that they will all be gathered, not one will be absent and everyone will be gathered in a perfect state, not one unripe for Heaven, not one green ear, not one child of God unfit for his heavenly heritage, but all ready and prepared through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit! Oh, that my eyes could see the glorious day! The pearly gates stand wide open and first comes the Savior up the eternal hills, leading the van fresh from the battlefields of Armageddon, where, for the last time, He has fought and triumphed over all His foes! And here comes the

noble army of martyrs waving the palm branches and then the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the great assembly of the ministers and preachers of the Word, and the hosts of those who have come through great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! Listen how Hell gnashes her teeth! How the infernal lake is stirred to envious burning while the fiends see these brands plucked from the fire as they ascend to Heaven! Listen to the symphonious harpings of the myriads of spirits as from the battlements of Heaven they look on with wonder and gaze upon the new inhabitants of Jerusalem who are coming to people it and make it even more glorious than it was before! Listen how they begin the song, "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory." And listen how the multitude of the redeemed join in the chorus, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father—to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever!"

And they sing again and yet again, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns." May you and I be partakers of the joy of harvest and not be yonder with those among whom there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth because they would not trust the Lamb, because they would not come to Him that they might have life—but chose their own delusion and followed out their own corruptions till they met with the due dessert of their evil deeds! God bless you, dear Friends, every one of you, and make you partakers of the present joy and the everlasting felicity of the saints, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MATTHEW 9:35-38; 10:1; 13:3-8; 18-23.

Matthew 9:35. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. This was His answer to the blasphemous slanders of the Pharisees. A glorious reply it was! Let us answer calumny by greater zeal in doing good! Small places were not despised by our Lord—He went about the villages as well as the cities. Village piety is of the utmost importance and has a close relation to city life. Jesus turned old institutions to good account—the "synagogues" became His seminaries. Three-fold was His ministry—expounding the old, proclaiming the new, healing the diseased.

Observe the repetition of the word, "every" as showing the breadth of His healing power. All this stood in relation to His royalty, for it was "the Gospel of the Kingdom" which He proclaimed. Our Lord was "the Great Itinerant"—Jesus went about preaching and healing. His was a Medical Mission as well as an evangelistic tour. Happy people who have Jesus among them! Oh, that we might now see more of His working among our own people!

36. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. A great crowd is a demand upon compassion, for it suggests so much sin and need. In this case the great need was instruction—"they fainted" for lack of comfort. They "were scattered abroad" for lack of guidance. They were eager to learn, but they had no fit teachers. "Sheep having no shepherd" are in an ill plight. Unfed, unfolded, unguarded—what will become of them? Our Lord was stirred with a feeling which agitated His inmost soul. "He was moved with compassion." What He saw affected not only His eyes, but His heart. He was overcome by pity. His whole frame was stirred with an emotion which put every faculty into forceful movement. He is even now affected towards our people in the same manner. He is moved with compassion if we are not.

37, 38. Then He said unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the Harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest. His heavy heart sought solace among "His disciples" and He spoke to them. He mourned the scantiness of workers. Pretenders were many, but real "laborers" in the harvest were few. The sheaves were spoiling. The crowds were ready to be taught, even as ripe wheat is ready for the sickle; but there were few to instruct them and where could more teaching men be found? God only can thrust out, or "send forth laborers." Man-made ministers are useless! Still are the fields encumbered with gentlemen who cannot use the sickle. Still the real ingatherers are few and far between. Where are the instructive, soul-winning ministries? Where are those who travail in birth for their hearers' salvation? Let us plead with the Lord of the Harvest to care for His own harvest and send out His own men. May many a true heart be moved by the question, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" to answer, "Here am I! Send me."

Matthew 10:1. And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. See the way of making Apostles! They were first disciples and afterwards teachers of others—they were specially His, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were "called unto Him" and thus their higher call came to them. In the Presence of their Lord they received their equipment—"He gave them power." Is that so with us in our own special office? Let us come to Him that we may be clothed with His authority and girded with His strength! Their power was miraculous, but it was an imitation of their Lord's—and the words applied to it are very much the same as we have seen in use about His miracles of healing. The 12 were made to represent their Lord. We, too, may be enabled to do what Jesus did among men. Oh, for such an endowment!

Matthew 13:3. And He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow. He had much instruction to give and He chose to convey it in parables. What wonderful pictures they were! What a world of meaning they have for us as well as for those who heard them! This parable of the sower is a mine of teaching concerning the Kingdom of God, for the seed was "the word of the Kingdom." (See verse 19). "Behold"—every word is worthy of attention. Maybe the Preacher pointed to a farmer on the shore who was beginning to sow one of the terraces. "A sower," read, "The Sower." Jesus, our Lord, has taken up this business of the Sower at His Father's bidding. The Sower "went forth." See Him leaving the Father's house with this one design upon His heart—"to sow."

4. And when He sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up. When HE sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside—even when the Chief Sower is at work, some seed fails. We know He sows the best of seed and in the best manner, but some of it falls on the trodden path and so lies uncovered and unaccepted of the soil. That soil was hard and beaten down with traffic. There, too, on the wayside, we meet with dust to blind, settlements of mud to foul and birds to pilfer—it is not a good place for good seed. No wonder, as the seeds lay all exposed, that the fowls came and devoured them up. If the Truth of God does not enter the heart, evil influences soon remove it.

5, 6. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Among the rocks or on the shallow soil with the unbroken rock-pan underneath, the seed fell—for if the sower had altogether avoided such places he might have missed some of the good ground. In these stony places the seed speedily

sprang up because the rock gave it all the heat that fell on it, and so hastened its germination. But, soon up, soon down. When the time came for the sun to put forth its force, the rootless plants instantly pined and died. They had no deepness of earth and "no root" What could they do but wither quite away? Everything was hurried with them—the seeds had no time to root themselves and so in hot haste the speedy growth met with speedy death. No trace remained.

7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. The ground was originally a thorn-brake and had been cleared by the thorns being cut down. But speedily the old roots sent out new shoots and other weeds came up with them—and the tangled beds of thistles, thorns, nettles, and what not, strangled the feeble shoots of the wheat. The native plants choked the poor stranger. They would not permit the intrusive corn to share the field with them—evil claims a monopoly of our nature. Thus we have seen three sets of seed come to an untimely end.

8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. This would repay all losses, especially at the highest rate of increase here quoted. To the bird, the weather and the weeds, three sets of seeds have gone. Yet, happily, one remains to increase and fill the barn. The sowing of good seed can never be a total failure—"other fell into good ground." The harvest was not equally great on every spot of fertile soil. It varied from an hundredfold to thirtyfold. All good ground is not alike good and, besides, the situation may differ. Harvests are not all alike in the same farm, in the same season and under the same farmer—and yet each field may yield a fairly good harvest. Lord, if I cannot reach to a hundredfold, let me at least prove to be good ground by bearing thirtyfold.

18. Hear you therefore the parable of the sower. Because you see behind the curtain and have Grace given to discern the inner meaning through the outer metaphor, come and hear the explanation of the parable of the sower.

19. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and understands it not, then comes the Wicked One, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. The Gospel is "the word of the Kingdom?" It has royal authority in it. It proclaims and reveals King Jesus and it leads men to obedience to His sway. To hear but not to understand is to leave the good seed on the outside of your nature and not to take it into yourself. Nothing can come of such hearing to anyone. Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word—"Then comes the Wicked One," even at the moment when the seed fell. He is always afraid to leave the Truth of God even in hard and dry contact with a mind and so he catches it away at once and it is forgotten, or even disbelieved. It is gone, at any rate. And we have not in our hearer's mind a cornfield, but a highway, hard and much frequented. The man was not an opposer. He "received seed" but he received the Truth as he was, without the soil of his nature being changed—and the seed remained as it was till the foul bird of Hell took it off the place and there was an end of it. So far as the Truth was sown in his heart, it was in his natural, unrenewed heart and, therefore, it took no living hold. How many such hearers we have! To these we preach in vain, for what they learn, they unlearn, and what they receive they reject almost as soon as it comes to them! Lord, suffer none of us to be impervious to Your royal Word, but whenever the smallest seed of Your Truth falls on us, may You open our soul to it!

20. 21. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the Word, and with joy receives it; yet has he not root in himself, but endures for awhile: but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, by-and-by he is offended. Here the seed was the same and the sower the same, but the result somewhat different. In this case there was earth enough to cover the seed and heat enough to make it grow quickly. The convert was attentive and easily persuaded. He seemed glad to accept the

Gospel at once. He was even eager and enthusiastic, joyful and demonstrative. He hears the Word and with joy receives it. Surely this looked very promising! But the soil was essentially evil, hard, barren, superficial. The man had no living entrance into the mystery of the Gospel, no root in himself, no principle, no hold of the Truth of God with a renewed heart. And so he flourished hurriedly and showily for a season but only for a season. It is tersely put, "He endures for awhile." That "awhile" may be longer or shorter according to circumstances. When matters grow hot with Christians, either through affliction from the Lord, or persecution from the world, the temporary Believer is so sapless, so rootless, so deficient in moisture of Grace, that he dries up and his profession withers. Thus, again, the sower's hopes are disappointed and his labor is lost. Till stony hearts are changed it must always be so. We meet with many who are soon hot and as soon cold. They receive the Gospel "anon" and leave it "by-and-by." Everything is on the surface and, therefore, is hasty and unreal. May we all have broken hearts and prepared minds, that when the Truth of God comes to us it may take root in us and abide.

22. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the Word and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful. This class of hearers we know by personal acquaintance in this busy age. They hear the Word, they are affected by the Gospel, they take it as seed into their minds and it grows well for a season. But the heart cannot belong to two absorbing objects at the same time and, therefore, these men cannot long yield themselves up to the world and Christ, too. Care to get money, covetousness, trickery and sins which come from desires to be rich, or else pride, luxury, oppression and other sins which come of having obtained wealth, prevent the man from being useful in religious matters, or even sincere to himself—"he becomes unfruitful." He keeps his profession. He occupies his place, but his religion does not grow. In fact, it shows sad signs of being choked and checked by worldliness. The leaf of outward religiousness is there, but there is no dew on it. The ear of promised fruit is there, but there are no kernels in it. The weeds have outgrown the wheat and smothered it! We cannot grow thorn and corn at the same time—the attempt is fatal to a harvest for Jesus. See how wealth is here associated with care, deceitfulness and unfruitfulness. It is a thing to be handled with care. Why are men so eager to make their thorn-brake more dense with briars? Would not a good farmer root out the thorns and brambles? Should we not, as much as possible, keep free from the care to get, to preserve, to increase and to hoard worldly riches? Our heavenly Father will see that we have enough—why do we fret about earthly things? We cannot give our minds to these things and also to the Kingdom

of God.

23. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the Word and understands it; which also bears fruit, and brings forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Here is the story of the Word's success. This fourth piece of land will repay all charges. Of course no one parable teaches all the Truth of God and, therefore, we have no mention here of the plowing which always precedes a fruitful harvest. No heart of man is good by nature—the good Lord had made this plot into "good ground." In this case, both thought and heart are engaged about the heavenly message and the man "hears the Word and understands it." By being lovingly understood, the Truth gets into the man and then it roots, it grows, it fruits, it rewards the sower. We must aim at the inward apprehension and comprehension of the Word of God for only in this way can we be made fruitful by it. Be it ours to aim to be among those who would bear fruit an hundredfold! Ah, we would give our Lord ten-thousand fold if we could! For every sermon we hear we should endeavor to do a hundred gracious, charitable, or self-denying acts. Our Divine Sower, with such heavenly seed, deserves to be rewarded with a glorious harvest!

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