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What Say the Scriptures?

Basic Bible Studies No. 8 - God's Secret Purpose

"Christ in you, the hope of glory. " - Colossians 1:27.

WE ARE now to consider a Scripturally declared Divine Purpose so truly astounding as to tax the powers of belief. Inasmuch as this wonderful Purpose is conditioned on the fact of the antecedent Advent, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, as preface to our study we may first profitably linger over some thoughts, relative to those momentous events.

Regarding the historic interval occupied by Jesus' life, Lindsay in his work the *Chrono-Astrolabe*, pertinently writes:

"Christianity exists now, and we know from Greek, Roman and Jewish history that there was a time when it was not. The Jews were strictly forbidden to hold intercourse with foreigners; but, notwithstanding their exclusiveness, the Gentile writers often mention them. The Founder of Christianity, at what time soever he lived, gave his followers a law the very reverse of exclusiveness, by going to all nations to make known his doctrines. Not a word about Christianity is mentioned by Caesar, Cicero, Livy, Virgil, or Ovid, and to believe that it existed without being mentioned by them is preposterous credulity. A century after these writers, Christians are mentioned by Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny, and Suetonius, and the *advent* of their Master must have been in the interval. Four different accounts of the life and death of Christ are given; the difference of authorship is proved by apparent discrepancies, and the truthfulness is confirmed by the general harmony. Luke relates several dates with great minuteness, and this affords a strong argument of veracity. He says John commenced his preaching in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and that soon after, Jesus also commenced, when he was about thirty years of age. He also says that Christ was born in the reign of Augustus, and both he and Matthew place this event a little before the death of Herod. Now, from Ptolemy's canon we know exactly the times of Augustus and Tiberius, and the time of the death of Herod is determined from Josephus. The time thus obtained for the origin of Christianity is *just the interval of those Roman writers who do not mention it and those who do*, and there is no other time possible that can be fixed upon for its origin. False religions may arise from small beginnings as well as true; the utmost care and caution are necessary to discriminate, and credulity is as culpable as skepticism. A remarkable

dissimilarity is observed in the teaching of the founder of Islamism and of the Founder of Christianity. The former affirmed that he had interviews with heaven, and, without giving any proof of the truth of his assertion, condemned all who disbelieved him to future punishment. The latter never found fault with the Jews for disbelieving His word, but for denying the evidence of their senses, or attributing His gracious miracles to demons. The Jews were trained from infancy to entertain the highest respect for the laws of Moses, and the most thorough contempt for all other religions. That a handful of persons thus trained should spontaneously arise and denounce those laws that they were taught to venerate is contrary to experience. No such example in the annals of history is anywhere found, and its occurrence would be as great a miracle as any in the Bible. No cause conceivable could effect such a change, except miracles addressed to the senses, or a direct voice from heaven; and those who deny those miracles as being contrary to experience, are compelled to admit a still greater miracle. Christianity certainly had an origin, and no other than that assigned to it would consist with experience. The books of the New Testament, also, can be proved to have been written in the first century, and not long after the events recorded in them. They could not have been written in the century before, *for the events recorded did not then exist*, neither could they have been written in the century after, *for they are quoted and commented upon by a host of writers that then lived*. The writers of the second century are quoted by those of the third; and thus a regular chain of writers, that has never been broken, never will, never can be broken, has been formed from the Apostles to the present day."

To the crucifixion and death of Christ all the New Testament writers bear united testimony. The reality of Jesus' death would appear to be amply evidenced by the spear thrust, but St. John (as if anticipating the suggestion of negative criticism that the body when removed from the cross was simply in some state of suspended animation) additionally testifies that from the pierced side issued "blood and water." Medical authorities consider this as external evidence of a most extraordinary occurrence, even the rupture of the heart -- the blood exuding from it into the pericardium having separated into red clots and water serum. Jesus died literally of a broken heart! "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." - John 19:35.

Christianity has well been called the "Religion of the Empty Tomb," for the resurrection of the Savior is indeed the sole basis for all Christian hope. St. Paul emphatically states: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. . . . But now *is* Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." - 1 Cor. 15:17, 20.

As we consider the Scripture account of this wondrous miracle, we note that Jesus was "put to death indeed in flesh but made alive in spirit" (for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God"), and confirmed his change of nature to the disciples in his subsequent remarkable manifestations. Through these his resurrection was proved an accomplished fact; and nonetheless a fact even if his earthly body had *remained in the tomb*. Its disappearance, however, evidences the profound wisdom of God; for by this circumstance has been provided, in the disciples' and opposed authorities' consequent reactions, *a historical certainty* of the resurrection of Jesus. The possibility of deception was precluded, for in the succeeding events these two groups alone were involved. This will be clearer if we consider the three possible explanations for the disappearance of the entombed body, namely

1. It was removed by the Jewish authorities.
2. It was removed by the disciples.
3. It was removed by an act of God.

1. Assuming the authorities had removed the body, is it logical to believe they would have remained silent before the bold insistence of the Apostles (mentioned twelve times in the Book of Acts alone) that Jesus had risen from the dead, when such preaching could have been so easily disproved?
2. On the other hand, if in some manner the disciples had removed the body from the close-guarded tomb, can reason believe they would have endured the bitter persecution and even death which befell them, in the propagation of a falsehood?
3. These two hypotheses based on the human elements involved being inadmissible under logical scrutiny, we are returned to the Bible's own account. A careful reading of one of the Gospel records (John 20:3-8) reveals that the linen wrappings and headband lay in the empty sepulcher exactly as when swathed round the body - their undisturbed position indicating its *miraculous* removal. It was this sight that convinced John he was beholding the evidence of an immediate act of God!

With assurance does Peter later declare: "Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead. To him give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." - Acts 10:40-43.

To which St. Paul adds the confirmatory words: God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." - Acts 17:31.

Having "showed himself alive by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3) during forty days, Jesus, in a final demonstration of his Messiahship to his disciples, dramatically ascended until hidden from their sight by a cloud. They then received the angelic message: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you *into heaven*, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." - Acts 1:11.

From these and similar Scriptures it becomes evident that a period intervenes before Jesus returns, that there are thus two Advents separated in time -- the first to provide the Ransom *Price*, and the second to complete the Ransom *Work*. But why this intervening period? The question brings us at once to a consideration of our study subject:

GOD'S SECRET PURPOSE

We have thus far in our Scripture studies discerned the outline of God's wondrous Purpose on behalf of suffering humanity -- a deliverance of the "groaning creation" from sin and degradation to eternal life -- to be effected by the Messiah as the Divine Agency when the Kingdom of God is established on this earth. Then shall God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven: "He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25:8). To this glorious theme of Earth's Coming Joy, we will return in the final study of this series.

But now we shall trace in the Scriptures another Purpose of God which (like Ezekiel's "wheels within wheels, full of eyes round about") is hidden within the frame of his Purpose for the nations. This inner Purpose is the divine selection of *a class to be associated with Christ* in the

work of blessing all the families of the earth. These comprise a "Little Flock," who, instead of being restored to human perfection, will be granted a share with Christ in the First Resurrection -- a change from earthly nature to heavenly nature -- far above angels, principalities, and powers, like unto their glorified Redeemer and Head. This unspeakable honor St. Paul refers to as "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). The very contemplation of such a prospect fills the mind with an overwhelming sense of wonder and awe.

Inasmuch as this, the Heavenly Hope of the Bible, is so generally misunderstood as applicable to all who have taken the initial necessary step of belief in Jesus (God's requirement for justification from Adamic sin unto eternal life on this earth - a most glorious prospect in itself), we shall draw copiously from the Scriptures to show that this Hope is limited to those who go on to self-sacrificing discipleship in "following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," numbering in all "an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1-4). These alone have "liberty to enter into the holiest [eventually the actual presence of God] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has made for them" (Heb. 10:19, 20). It was to open this "way" that Jesus died nineteen centuries before God's Kingdom was due to be established, and for their selection the Gospel-Age interim was set apart. This, says St. Paul, is "the sacred secret which had been hidden away from the ages and from the generations, but now hath been made manifest unto his saints -- unto whom God hath been pleased to make known what is the glorious wealth of this sacred secret among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26, 27, *Rotherham*). The Old Testament is replete with predictions regarding the restoration of the earth and its inhabitants when God's "footstool" shall be made glorious, but within its pages we find no direct word concerning spiritual hopes. And yet, hidden in types and figurative language, in the light of the New Testament, these can be traced.

First, there is that most beautiful of marriage proposals, Psalm 45, verses 10 and 11 (Psalm 45:10-11): "Hearken, O daughter and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord and worship thou him." Here the elect Church of this Gospel Age is pictured as a Bride, the ultimate Wife of the great King, Immanuel. To this view of the Church' the Apostle's words agree: "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." - 2 Cor. 11:2.

Again, the same truth was foreshadowed in Abraham's selection of a wife for his son Isaac, through the instrumentality of his servant Eliezer. Thus God through the medium of the holy spirit calls the Church to be associated with Christ, the Bridegroom, who will receive her at his second advent. And in the blessing bestowed upon Rebekah, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions" (Gen. 24:60), we may glimpse the Bride of Christ sharing with him the work of blessing all the families of the earth (Gal. 3:29). Intermingled with St. Paul's practical exhortations to the Ephesian Church, this same truth is emphasized: "Submitting yourselves one to another in reverence of Christ -- ye wives unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. Because a husband is the head of his wife, as the Christ also is the head of the assembly, he being the savior of the body. Nevertheless as the assembly submitteth herself unto the Christ, so the wives unto their husbands in everything. Ye husbands be loving your wives, even as the Christ also loved the assembly and delivered himself up in her behalf, that her he might sanctify, having purified her with the bath of water in declaration, that he might present unto himself the assembly all glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any of such things, but that she should be holy and blameless. So ought the husbands also to be loving their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself. No one in fact ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Christ the assembly, because members are we of his body. For this cause will a man leave his father and his mother and will cleave unto his wife. And they two shall become one

flesh [Gen. 2:24]. This sacred secret is great. I however am speaking as to Christ and the assembly." - Eph. 5:21-32, *Rotherham*.

Note again the words of John the Baptist: "He that bath the Bride is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore, is fulfilled" (John 3:29). John does not identify himself with the Bride class. He was the last of the Prophets; a faithful member of the House of Servants of the Mosaic Dispensation, but did not live on to attain the Gospel privilege which followed Jesus' redemptive work. Of him Jesus said: "There has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist, and yet I say unto you, the least one in the Kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). These words are understandable only as we recognize that the humblest position in the Bride class being selected during this Age, is a higher honor than that which belongs to the very noblest of the previous dispensations.

In Hebrews 12:23 we read a most significant expression: "the Church of the Firstborn." On the memorable night thirty-five centuries ago when Israel was delivered from bondage, the tenth plague which slew the firstborn of Egypt, was stayed in each Israelite home where the blood of the "Passover Lamb" was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels. These miraculously spared firstborn were exchanged by divine command (Num. 3:12, 13) for the tribe of Levi, who were set apart from the other eleven tribes to a mediatorial work in connection with the Tabernacle (and later Temple) sacrifices and services. In the division of the Promised Land, the tribe of Levi received no inheritance; rather, as the Lord himself said: "I am thy part and thin inheritance" (Num. 18:20; Deut. 10:8, 9). We may accept these facts and the wealth of other Levitical functions as divinely ordained types prefiguring Jesus and his associated saints and their mediatorial work in the Millennial Kingdom.

Turning from these representations of the elect in type and figure, we consider some of Jesus' teachings relative to this class. To the disciples, his presence and ministry marked the proximity of the long awaited Messianic Kingdom. All their hopes and expectations were of an earthly nature. Gradually and in small portions he imparted to them the wondrous truth concerning their special relationship to himself - truth which they comprehended only after the Pentecostal blessing of the holy spirit. We submit a number of Scriptures in which this truth, this emphasis upon a class chosen by divine arrangement, is embodied -- Scriptures the more impressive when contrasted with God's promise to bless *all* the nations eventually.

Matthew 7:14 - "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

John 12:26 - "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be."

Matthew 13:11 - "It is given unto you [the disciples] to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them [the people in general] it is not given."

Matthew 11:25 - "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Luke 12:32 - "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

John 15:5, 16, 19 - "I am the vine, ye are the branches.... Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you.... I have chosen you out of the world."

John 14:3 - "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

John 17:6, 20, 16, 24 - "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word... They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."

Matthew 24:31 - "He shall send his angels . . . and gather together his Elect."

Matthew 25:21 - "Good and faithful servant - . . . I will make thee ruler over many things."

To which may be added two verses from the Book of Revelation:

Rev. 3:21 - "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."

Rev. 2:26 - "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations."

The Apostolic letters -- directed exclusively to these "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1), and for their spiritual edification, encouragement and instruction-are commentaries in themselves upon our theme. The following selections should prove conclusively the Scripture basis for the doctrine of a "high calling," a secret purpose of God, during the Gospel Age.

2 Pet. 1:3, 4 - "Exceeding great and precious promises - that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."

Acts 15:14-17 - "How God . . . did visit the Gentiles, to take out a people for his name."

Rom. 8:28-30 - "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

1 Pet. 1:2 - "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God."

Eph. 1:4 - "Chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

1 Pet. 2:9 - "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood."

1 Thess. 1:4 - "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

Rom. 8:28 - "The called according to his purpose."

Rev. 17:14 - "They that are with him are called, and chosen."

2 Pet. 1:10 - "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

1 Cor. 1:26-29 - "Ye see your calling, brethren, ... not many wise men after the flesh, . . . not many noble, are called."

James 2:5; "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?"

1 Thess. 2:12 - "Walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his Kingdom and glory."

2 Pet 1:3 - "Called us to glory and virtue."

Rom. 8:16, 17 - "Joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him."

Gal. 3:27, 29 - "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the promise."

2 Tim. 2:12 - "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

1 John 3:2, 3 - "When he shall appear, we shall be like him."

Phil. 3:14 - "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Phil. 3:20, 21 - "Our polity is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

1 Cor. 12:12-28 - "For as the body is one, and hath many members, ... so also is [the] Christ."

Rom. 12:5 - "We, being many, are one Body in Christ."

Eph. 5:30 - "We are members of his Body."

Eph. 1:22, 23 - "The Church which is his Body."

1 Cor. 6:2, 3 - "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . [and] angels?"

1 Cor. 15:47-49 - "The first man is of the earth, earthy - the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy - and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

1 Cor. 15:53 - "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Rev. 20:6 - "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection - on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

There thus emerges a Scriptural portrait of a body of Christians who in gratitude for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, emulate him in the consecration of their lives to God's will; and under the Divine disciplinary experiences are transformed into Jesus' likeness. They are "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20, 21), the grand meeting place of God and mankind in the Millennium. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my special treasure" (Mal. 3:17). St. Paul describes their change to glory when the "secret of God is finished" (Rev. 10:7) in these words: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). This is described elsewhere (Rev. 19:7) in these words: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." In the Reign of Glory to follow, the Bridegroom and the Bride will lift up poor humanity from sin and sorrow, from degradation and death, and give to each and all the fullest opportunity to return to human perfection and to Divine favor and everlasting life. Then shall "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." - Matt. 13:43.

From the heart of each saint who has "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:18-20), there wells up a joyful echo to John's words of praise (Rev. 1:5, 6)

"Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;
To him be glory and dominion
Forever and ever.
Amen."

- *W. J. Siekman*

The subject of the ninth article in this series will be: "THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN."

"If that I May"

"If that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended' of Christ Jesus." - Philippians 3:12.

THE Apostle's letter to the Church at Philippi breathes a most intimate and affectionate spirit. Paul addresses them as "brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1), and discloses boldly the secrets of his own spiritual experiences, for their encouragement and ours.

Here, too, we have Paul revealing his most sacred ambition in relation to his failures and successes, his desires and temptations, his sacrifices and their compensations.

We are also brought into the closest contact with a great and noble saint. "If that I may apprehend," or as some translations state the matter, "If that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." In these remarks of the Apostle and in those of the context, Paul reveals an ardent desire to attain a great and notable award-an urge of soul to secure the prize which had been offered, fully accepting the invitation given by God, the Creator of heaven and earth-an invitation to become a joint-heir with Christ Jesus in his Kingdom.

Paul sincerely appreciates being apprehended by Christ Jesus and the lofty privilege offered him. He also recognizes the obedience required; and he explains freely to what extent he is prepared to sacrifice to obtain the treasured objective: "If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from among the dead." We read in verse eight; "I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse that I may win Christ, and be found in him."

Saul of Tarsus was a man of distinct character, with outstanding virtues and capabilities, ready at all costs to accomplish those things he considered imperative and just. After conversion those characteristics and virtues were exercised in another direction, and for a more noble objective.

Instead of an aspiration and zealous quest for fame, or righteousness according to the Mosaic law, Paul's energies were directed to heavenly and spiritual awards-to preach Jesus of Nazareth; to dwell with Christ; to experience a change of nature; and to receive the crown of life, promised to overcomers. In this affectionate letter to the Church at Philippi, the Apostle is giving the reason for the change in his life, and describing, according to the standards of men, what were the earlier convictions and achievements. Everything formerly prized now sinks into insignificance in comparison with Christ. To be found in him, and to be filled with his righteousness, becomes the worthy end of life. "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." - Phil. 3:13, 14.

If there could be such a thing as righteousness springing from legal obedience, Paul discards this entirely, and boldly declares his longing and hunger for the righteousness of God through *faith*. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. . . . If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Phil. 3:7, 11.) That was the extent to which Paul was prepared to go, the sacrifice he was willing to make. He testified elsewhere that all who presented their bodies (themselves) as a living sacrifice, were making but a reasonable sacrifice or service to God, which to God was made acceptable through Christ, and accounted as holy. - Rom. 12:1-3.

PAUL'S HOPE AND FAITHFULNESS .

When Paul was giving his first defense before King Agrippa, as recorded in Acts 26:6, he states, "Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our Fathers." The promise being (Gen. 12:2, 31): "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: . and in thee and *in* thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, [the hope of the resurrection of the dead] King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:7, 8; Jer. 31:17.) "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I did even to persecuting the saints." And then, after relating his apprehension, Paul says, "Whereupon, O King, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." - Acts 26:19.

This strong urge to obey the Lord's command, this determined aspiration of the Apostle was not the end of his quest, nor the assurance of victory. The intervening years, before victory was complete, put to the severest test Paul's obedience, patience, endurance, as well as proved his faithfulness in the shame, ignominy, persecution, and death he was permitted to suffer for the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Did the Lord not say, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel! For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:15, 16.) This prompt, whole-hearted acceptance of the call to discipleship was indeed an indication of a strong faith and also pointed to a triumphant entry into the Kingdom of our Lord.

This letter to Philippi, it is generally understood, was written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome while in the custody of the Praetorian Guard, some few years before his second imprisonment when beheaded by Nero.

There are two outstanding testimonies in the Apostle's life which he has recorded that have proved to be a great inspiration to many of the Lord's saints, and should encourage all who have accepted the same call as Paul, and for those who are ever conscious of their failings and lack of faith, who also aspire to the same crown of life.

Let us notice first the Apostle's testimony inverse twelve of this early letter "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended;" "laid hold of. Note the beautiful spirit of humility from such a leader of men: "I count not." I have not yet attained that for which I was "laid hold," as some translate it. I am not yet perfect. -I acknowledge my faults. I am in the race, but not yet accounted the winner. I run not uncertainly; so fight I, not as one beating the air, but I buffet my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. (1 Cor. 9:27.) I count not to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfect, but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended.

The Apostle realized *then*, at that time, he was only at the beginning of his experiences in "the Way," and he reveals to us, his brethren, that the same temptations, the same heart searchings, the same urge of soul for growth in grace awaited him as we also encounter. Let us take courage.

PAUL'S ASSURANCE

Later on, in writing to Timothy at the end of his course (2 Tim. 4:6), after giving spiritual advice and fatherly counsel to Timothy with an astounding confidence and assurance, he says, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure *is* at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Perhaps you and I would be strengthened in the faith if we would more confidently anticipate such an assurance, if not already possessed, and have it borne home to our hearts, individually by the holy spirit, and through the Word, that we are the Lord's, or sweeter still, as the Song of Songs records, "I am my Beloved's, and he is mine. (Song of Solomon 2:16.) This is a persuasion of faith that is immovable, because of the inner convictions of fellowship with the Lord and with our Heavenly Father. We read of the Ancient Worthies (Heb. 11:13), who saw the promises afar off, that they were persuaded of them, embraced them, and confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The intervening years of the Apostle's pilgrimage were spent in fulfilling the urge of the soul to attain that end for which Paul counted every other thing as refuse; and he details for us his desires and aspirations in that quest: *That I may know him*; that I may win Christ; that I may be found in him; that I may have a righteousness *not my own*; that I may have the righteousness which is of God *by faith*; that I may know the power of his resurrection and experience the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming by this means conformed to his death, death to the human will. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psa. 116:15.) "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify ...the deeds of the body, ye shall live." - Rom. 8:13.

Continuity of purpose was the secret of Paul's life and victory, a victory that will be ours through the same obedience and faithfulness.

One may not have to the same degree the Apostle's zeal and energy of service, but one does need the same spirit of devotion to the Lord, the same willingness to sacrifice self, if he would finish his course and pilgrimage as Paul did. The giving up of oneself in consecration to do the Lord's commands- is a glorious experience in human life, and the outworking and inworking of Romans 12:2. "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." This is one of the greatest of privileges, one of the highest honors ever conferred upon man, and the noblest life that man can live before God. The fruitage of such devotion is that, the life becomes hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3.) With this experience of growth in spiritual understanding we shall realize the gracious provision made by our Heavenly Father in Christ Jesus for the covering of our unwitting imperfections and lack. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5:21.) With such gracious provision and convincing assurances in the Word, shall we not continue to say with Paul, "If by any means I may lay hold of *that* for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

APPREHENDED THAT GOD MAY WORK IN US

What a wonderful thought and experience for us, dear brethren: "*That* for which; I am apprehended by Christ Jesus."

Who am I to be apprehended? Less than the least of men, but laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Apprehended! For what purpose? To accept Jesus as my Redeemer, and then by consecration of myself, my will, to become a new creature in Christ, a new creation of God, to be breathed upon by God's holy spirit, to be molded and fashioned by the greatest of potters, and through these experiences to become like Christ himself-dominated by lofty ideals for without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Marked with unfailing purity: "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even 1 as he is pure."

We are to be filled with the deepest sympathy for others: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." Thus we are directed to and for the highest purpose in God's universe, to live in the unbroken consciousness of God's presence and fellowship, being changed from glory to glory by the spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18.) Each member is a unit of the Body of Christ, the Messiah.

Oh that I may be one found worthy! *Oh that I may* apprehend that for which I am apprehended by Christ Jesus my Lord! It is indeed a heavenly, a holy, a high calling. No wonder the Apostle decides for himself, "If by any means. The words of a beautiful hymn by Isaac Watts expresses our deepest sentiments:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Shall have my soul, my life, my all.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the Christian faith proved a tremendous surprise for all who knew him or of his zeal and activities in defense of the law. In the interests of the Church at Philippi and for our encouragement in this 'day,-Paul records his former standing and moral status before men: A Hebrew of Hebrews; a Pharisee of Pharisees; in zeal a fanatical partisan against every apparent opposition; touching righteousness which is according to the law, blameless.

These may have been lofty ideals according to human standards, but now a conversion has taken place, a change of heart and mind, with a change of ideals to be followed and achieved. The attainments of the flesh are inadequate and inappropriate for the Lord's service, except where these can be directed in service by God's holy spirit. Paul reaches out for the attainments and ideals of that spirit-love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law; and for that great objective, the crown of righteousness (Gal. 5:22; 2, Tim. 4:8.) Having decided "this *one thing* I do, forgetting those things behind; and reaching forth unto those things which are before," material things become refuse to Paul, moral attainments forgotten; Let us take a lesson, brethren. How often we have found that we bring, and depend upon for quite a long way in our Christian walk, some of the moral virtues of the past for our standing, which should have been forgotten and left behind, and which have also hindered our spiritual progress. Habits were formed, doctrines held. Some of those cherished virtues and mind-treasures, are difficult to discard. What a joy, what a peace of mind, what restfulness of faith is ours when we realize they are gone, and one is assured by, growth in grace that it is, now, just my Lord and I, and we can say with the poet:

"Oh, the peace the Savior gives,
Peace I never knew before;
And my way has brighter grown,
Since I've learned to trust Him more."

HUMAN ATTAINMENTS WORTHLESS

Forgetting the things behind was no easy task for Paul, since "touching the righteousness which is in the Law" he was blameless; but this he leaves behind, realizing now it could never give him life. The most it had done for him was to lead him to Christ, the Messiah. (Gal. 3:24.) Paul had thought the Law to be unto life, but found it to be unto death; for, he says, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:9.) So now he wishes to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Then Paul needed to adjust his understanding of Israel's Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed. The Messiah was not coming to fight their battles, free them from oppression and the Roman yoke. Christ had come, and they as a people had failed to recognize him. (John 1:11.) Paul now understood that Christ Jesus came, not to be ministered unto, but to give his life a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:28.) Paul now accepts Jesus as a corresponding price for Father Adam, and declares to Timothy: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Tim. 2:5, 6.) Then Paul discerns it is not Israel according to the flesh who is the real seed of Abraham, because God hath said the promise was to a seed (Gal. 3:16, 29) not seeds, and that seed was Christ, and if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. The promise was not through the Law that Abraham should be heir to the world, but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom. 4:13.) The Apostle leaves behind the cherished thought of Israel, that they were eternally the chosen people of God, and all other nations were forever outside the pale of hope for recognition by their Creator. There again Paul was realizing that the Law, as he now understood it, was a shadow, only, of better or good things to come. It was just types and symbols of realities now to be disclosed by God.

Paul, being enlightened by the holy spirit, was specially chosen of God to disclose and unfold the mystery of Christ, the Anointed Messiah, and used of God to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery which has been hid in God, but now made manifest to his saints (Eph. 3); and he rejoices greatly in the privilege of apostleship to the Gentiles.

SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

Respecting the ordinances and sacrifices of the Law, Paul records that the blood of bulls and goats sprinkled in the holy of the tabernacle could never be to God a satisfaction for sin. (Heb. 9:12.) Christ by his own blood entered in once into the holy, having obtained eternal redemption for us, whereas the Law with all its ordinances could never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the corners thereunto perfect.

The Apostle now leaves behind the Law, and embraces the substance and reality. The bullock of the atonement day represented Jesus being offered in sacrifice, and the goat which followed to complete the day's offerings for sin, represented the close followers of Jesus in his sacrifice; and for this reason he urges the Church, the consecrated ones, to continue their course of sacrifice exactly as did Jesus: "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. . . . Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." - Heb. 13:11.

Thus the Apostle must have realized the need of leaving behind, the types and shadows of things which had now become real, and to complete his quest for life, to achieve his purpose to lay hold of that for which also he was laid hold of by Christ Jesus, and to press forward to those things which were before.

The truth regarding the "mystery " of the Christ St. Paul zealously taught, thus manifesting to all his complete break from the past understanding of the Law. Having also the possession of the holy spirit and it having possession of him, Paul counted everything apart from Christ Jesus as refuse. These are truths which created in him a whole-hearted and a sincere devotion and love for God and the divine commands, enabling him to finish his course triumphantly. These are also some of the truths of God's Word that all who follow Christ must pursue and feast upon daily if we too would reach our goal, the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Paul was ever reaching forward to that goal. This involves training, restraint, and suffering for all who follow Paul as he followed Christ, forsaking, forgetting, leaving behind much that was previously cherished, but of no help or use to one in the life of faith. Paul aspired always to attain the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, and to a full grown stature in Christ Jesus. He was able to testify, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) Let us have that same spirit, and let us be as fully persuaded and confident in the Lord. God is faithful, who has touched our hearts, and Christ, who has apprehended us.

But with the conviction of the call ever let the urge of our heart be, "If that I may," and respond, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height; nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God," that I may triumphantly "lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus,"

- G. A. Ford, Eng.

The First of the Kingdom Parables

"The seed is the Word of God. Take heed therefore how ye hear." - Luke 8:11, 18.

OF all the parables of our Lord, the -parable of the Sower is doubtless best known and remembered, yet like all other portions of our Father's Word, it grows richer and more precious through study and reflection. That it is foremost amongst the parables in importance, and that a proper understanding of it is of assistance in understanding the others, is plainly indicated by our Lord, when, on finding the disciples unable to grasp its significance, he remarked: "Know ye not *this* parable? And how then will ye know-all parables?" or to quote from the Weymouth translation: "Do you all miss the meaning of *this* parable? How then will you understand the rest of my parables?" Mark 4:13.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

In St. Matthew's account, which appears in chapter 13 of the Gospel which bears his name, the parable of the Sower is the first of seven parables which seem to bear a relation to one another similar to that which the seven messages of our Lord to the churches, given by St. John in the Revelation, bear to each other. Together these seven parables are known as the Parables of the Kingdom,' and their teaching seems to portray the successive eras of the Gospel Age from the beginning of this dispensation to its close. In them we have a vivid delineation of the trials and resistance which the Kingdom of Heaven was to encounter from the Adversary, from its first introduction into the world until the end of the Age. At this time, however, we propose to consider the parable of the Sower by itself, apart from the others with which it is associated, and seek to develop its own particular lessons.

First, let us refresh our minds, by reading it, taking St. Matthew's account, reading the first nine verses of chapter 13: "Behold," says our Lord, Matt. 13:3, (reading from Weymouth translation), "The sower goes out to sow. As he sows, some of the seed falls by the wayside, and the birds come and peck it up. Some falls on rocky ground, where it has but scanty soil. It quickly shows itself above ground, because it has no depth of earth; but when the sun is risen, it is scorched by the heat, and through shaving no root it withers up. Some falls among the thorns; but the thorns spring up and stifle it. But a portion falls upon good ground, and gives a return, some a hundred for one, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, every one who has ears!"

In explaining the parable, as he did later on when alone with his disciples, our Lord showed that the seed is the Word of 'God, that is to say, the Word of God respecting the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10), the Word which, when "understood" (Matt. 13:23), "received" (Mark. 4:20), and "kept" (Luke 8:15), will produce "sons of the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:39), and that the four different conditions of soil on which the seed fell represent four kinds of hearers. We shall consider these in detail later on, but first we wish to notice the moral Jesus draws from the parable. It is stated by our Lord in St. Luke's account in these words: "Take heed how ye hear." - Luke 8:18.

ABSURD RESULTS REACHED IF DETAILS OF PARABLE PRESSED TOO FAR

"Take heed how ye hear." In this sentence we have the moral, the lesson, which Christ himself drew from the parable. And it is instructive to note that *his* moral, which is the natural lesson, and which was drawn by a divine wisdom, nevertheless indicates, not the force and beauty of the parable, but the weakness and insufficiency of even the most perfect parabolic forms of instruction, and the absurd results we will reach, if we attempt to press every little detail too far. Our Lord, summing up the lessons of the parable, declares that we are to be careful what we hear and how we hear it; but how can the ground exercise any care as to what seed it will receive, or as to the conditions into which it will receive it? The ground must take whatever seed the sower casts upon it; and if the good seed should be choked by thorns or fail for lack of soil, the ground is not to blame for that; its conditions depend, not on its own care but on the farmer's care. In actual farming, it is not the ground but the farmer who is responsible for the condition of the soil. It is *he* who should have burned off the thorns or added the necessary soil; it is *he*, not the ground, who is to blame if the wrong seed be sown, or the ground yield no fruit.

Thus, from the very first parable uttered by our Lord we learn that we must not push his analogies and comparisons too far; that natural phenomena and processes are inadequate expressions of spiritual truth; that we must bring an understanding and discriminating heart to even the most-perfect words ever uttered. To give its full force to the moral of this parable we must supplement the parable. We must remember that different hearers of the Word are not only like different conditions of soil, but also like different farmers. We must remember that just as the farmer, by skill and application, may compel the ground to bring forth, despite the curse which has fallen upon it, so we, by a wise application, may constrain these otherwise barren hearts of ours, to bring forth fruit unto God. *We can* determine what seed we will receive into our hearts; and therefore we are to see to it that we receive only the good seed, which will produce sons of the Kingdom, not the tare-seed, which, as our Lord shows in the next parable, the enemy will be only too happy to scatter on our hearts if we permit him. *We can* determine the conditions of the soil into which the good seed is to fall; and therefore we are to see to it that there lie, a good soil for the good seed, a soil rich enough, and deep enough, to bring it to perfection.

ONE- SOWER AND ONE SEED

It is interesting to note that the possibility that two kinds of seed might be sown, one good, one evil, is not even mentioned, much less dwelt on. We know, of course, that there are two kinds of seed continually being sown in the hearts of men. One is a good seed, the other evil. One is a seed of truth, the other of error. There are seeds of love and seeds of hate; seeds of kindness and seeds of unkindness; and elsewhere in the Scriptures these different seeds, and how they may be distinguished, are discussed. But they are not under discussion in this parable, which refers throughout to only the good seed.

Then, too, we are sometimes represented as sowers, sowing seed in the hearts of each other; and then the lesson is that we should be careful to sow only the good seed unmixed with our best guesses and fancies, and be careful to prove all things which others seek to sow in our hearts, and hold fast to that only which is good. But, once again, we note that that is not the lesson before us in this parable. There is only the one Sower here, and it is the Lord himself.

WHAT IS THE GOOD SEED?

The reason for limiting the seed, in the parable, to only the good seed, and referring to only the one Sower, is that the Master is giving us, here, the first, the most elementary lesson, concerning the Kingdom class; other lessons will follow. Here, in this parable, the Master's one lesson is as to the frame of heart and mind which should be ours when the good seed comes our way.

The good seed in this parable is not a discussion of the intricacies of difficult doctrinal points, things upon which even inspired Apostles differed,; as did, for example, Peter and Paul. It does not include things in Paul's writings which even Peter admitted were hard to understand. It is the Word of God which, in its simplicity, discloses the wondrous character of God that any one in the right attitude of heart cannot fail to understand-that word which will produce .in one, who embraces it, a whole-hearted consecration of mind and life.

In the parable we have a description of four kinds of hearers: three of, them unprofitable, and one, a good or profitable hearer. Let us consider these in the order in which they appear in the parable.

"THIS IS HE THAT WAS SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE"

Of the three sorts of unprofitable hearers, the first set before us is he to whom the "Word is as seed sown by the wayside. As the sower goes over the field, scattering seed broadcast, some of it falls on the path or close by the side of the path, which runs through the field-where the earth has not been broken up by the plow -- and lies on its hard surface until it is either trodden down and crushed beneath the feet of passersby, or is caught up by the birds which flock around the sower's heels. And the spiritual significance of this familiar, rural scene, is explained by our Lord in these words: "When any one heareth the Word, and understandeth it not, then cometh the Evil One, and snatcheth away that. which was sown in his heart, lest he should believe and be saved."

"THIS IS HE THAT WAS SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE"

Now observe the soil of the path and under the path may be as deep and as rich as the best of the field; its natural capacity for yielding fruit may be very large; but it has been trodden hard by many passing feet, so that the seed cannot penetrate the surface, but lies there, an easy prey, to the birds; only rotting, not growing, even should it escape their keen eyes and the bruise of the passing heel.

The, first unprofitable hearer, therefore, is not a man of a cold, hard, nature, nor of a nature all overrun with growths of evil; he is simply negligent, uninterested, indifferent. Unlike the good hearer, he does not understand the Word; that is, *he does not perceive its bearing on himself*, its true worth and importance to *him*. He has no objection to listening to it, but it does not penetrate to the depths of his being; it excites no personal interest, does not throw out slight root-filaments on every side, to twine around the thoughts and affections which lie closest to his heart. The Gospel message does not *grip* him, as when you tell him something that will be helpful in his business, or advise him along other lines of earthly interest.

How has he reached this condition? What has made him thus impervious to spiritual truth? Alas! he has made his heart a highway-has suffered *all* thoughts, evil as well as good, to pass to and fro. For many a day his heart has lain open like a public thoroughfare; all base, and low, and sensual imaginations, have claimed their right of way over it, not less than those which are pure and

noble, till the soil, good enough in itself, has been trodden hard, and can no more take seed, or bear fruit, until the keen, grinding plowshare of affliction has been driven through it.

He has felt the Word fall upon his heart, perhaps, hard though it be; he has dimly, and from afar, apprehended that there is a life, a reality, in the truth of God, which he has not hitherto recognized; and he has thought, from time to time, as the seed has fallen upon him, that it would be well for him to look into the matter for himself, some day; but about the time he should be reaching a decision for God, something else interferes, and the impression of the good seed, which fell *upon*, but not *in*, his heart, disappears.

"HE THAT WAS SOWN UPON THE ROCKY PLACES."

The second unprofitable hearer is he to whom the Word is as seed sown in rocky places. In the great field in which the sower goes forth bearing precious seed, there are places in which the hard rock crops up close to the surface; and the seed which falls into the shallow soil that covers the face of the rock, springs up very quickly in the heat which the rock holds and radiates; but because there is little moisture and no depth of earth, the sun scorches them, and they wither *as* quickly as they grow. And, says our Lord, translating these familiar, natural symbols into spiritual truths: "He that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the Word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and, when tribulation *or* persecution ariseth because of the Word, straightway he stumbleth."

This second hearer, then, is a man of shallow, *superficial*, character, who does nothing thoroughly, brings nothing to perfection.

And that surely is a very fine touch, which describes a man of this superficial stamp as being of a hard and impenetrable heart. Under the light, thin, surface of easily-stirred dust, there *lies* a bed of rock. For it is among those who lead a life of light enjoyment, and who tread a round of trivial cares, and ambitions, and pleasures, that we learn how heartless men can be. It is *not* among the poor, or the busy, but among the elegant votaries of pleasure and fashion that men, and women too, are trained to stifle emotion, to harden themselves into indifference, to cultivate that selfishness which is death to all love, and to all nobility of character.

And when a man of this sensitive, yet shallow, character, has the Word of God earnestly pressed upon him, it often happens that, struck by its novelty, and moved by the emotion of the moment, he forthwith receives it with joy; not only understands and assents to it, but, like the good hearer, receives it unto himself, suffers it to dwell and work in him and shape his course. For a while his life is changed; he is eager to give his susceptible and easily-moved heart altogether to this new, stimulating, excitement. Nothing in his experience was ever comparable to it. He will break through all rules of good taste, and good sense, to show his esteem for it, and to make others esteem it as he does. He lives in a rapture, and would have all men share it with him.

But like all other raptures, it is quickly past, its force is soon spent. The times change, and he changes with the time. He has no root in himself, and cannot withstand any influence that is brought to bear upon him. A strong temptation comes, and he has no strong faith with which to meet it. The excitement is over, and now the consecrated life looks as dreary to him as all previous forms of life had looked. "Tribulation or persecution ariseth and immediately he is offended." He does not *keep* the Word; his nerveless hands cannot hold it fast. As quickly as he received it, so quickly he lets it go.

"HE WHO RECEIVED SEED AMONG THE THORNS"

The third unprofitable hearer is he to whom the Word is as seed sown among thorns. For besides the trodden and rocky places, there are broad patches in the field which are thick with the seeds of thorns; and these spring up with the good seed, *but faster than the good seed, so that it is choked before it can yield fruit.*

Now, if we ask: "Who among all the hearers of the Word corresponds to this thorn-infested soil?" our Lord Jesus replies: "He who received seed among the thorns is he who, when: he has heard the Word, goeth his way; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of life, and the lust of other things entering in, choke the Word, and he bringeth no fruit to perfection."

We observe that the ground is good enough to grow either wheat or thorns, *but not good enough to grow both;* that is to say, not good enough to bring both to perfection. Here, on this soil, the seed has a better chance than; before. It gets *into* the soil, takes root, springs up, *forms the ear, even* It is not trodden down, nor snatched away; nor is it scorched for want of moisture or depth. Long after the farmer, going his rounds, has discovered that the sides of the path will be bare, and seen the withered stalks of the seed sown on rocky places, he has hopes-that: this on the thorny ground is doing fairly well, though there are too many weeds among it. But *when it has well-nigh accomplished its task,* and its promise is at its best, it is choked by quicker growths, and not suffered to mature the full corn in the ear.

Now it is thus with some hearers of the Word. Like the good hearer they understand, receive, they even hold fast the seed. They do not suffer the impression it has produced to fade away instantly, like seed picked up by the birds, the very moment it has fallen: nor do they renounce it as soon as it demands a firm resistance to temptation, or a patient endurance of trial, like the seed that after it has sprung up withers in the stalk. They *keep* the Word through all such trials and tests as these. Nevertheless they suffer it to be choked *when it is on the point of bearing.* Much as they love it, they love much besides it; and these other loves grow very quickly, and overtop the growth of the good seed, and suck away the juices which should nourish *it;* insomuch that the life and power of the Gospel message are gradually neutralized and drawn out of them, and though fruit is formed in them, *they do not bring it to perfection.*

What are the thorns which thwart and choke the Word? Some of them are: "The cares of this world," those daily recurring anxieties about what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewith we shall be clothed, which distract our attention; so that while the Word of God draws *us* one way, these petty cares and worries draw us another way.

Other of these thorns spring from the deceitfulness of riches, from the peculiar and subtle cunning with which they beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ. And though, like the cares of the world, riches are *not* in themselves evil, yet all careful observers of human life have admitted that wealth has a special trick of gradually withdrawing men from the love and service of the truth. As a rule rich men are content with the world-as it is-naturally-for, as they think, the world, has dealt very kindly with them, and therefore they see no need for bettering it. Wealth has many wiles; it is full of deceit; and no man is worthy of greater honor than the rich man who keeps himself unspotted from the world and its ways. As we recall from time to time, the many examples of Christian grace which characterized Brother Russell's ministry, we may well pause once and again to remember that among the many tests he successfully endured was this one which few to whom it is applied prove able to withstand.

The pleasures of life and the lust of other things are more common weeds or thorns, but hardly less fatal. They ruin thousands where the deceitfulness of riches ruins one. Who that has gone through life with open eyes, has not again and again seen the young man, who, while still young, gave himself ardently to God, beguiled away from the simplicity of Christ by the lure of pleasure and the excessive pursuit of other objects? He does not suddenly and completely fall away; but first this object attracts him and then that, and between them they choke his early devotion. There is not one of these objects perhaps which, if the issue were distinctly raised, he would not sacrifice for Christ's sake. But among so many quick-springing thorns, the good seed has but a poor chance, and seldom brings its fruit to perfection. How many a fair, bright, promise has been thus nipped in the bud! Let us see to it that we come not into their number. Let us see to it that these deadly thorns do not make its unfruitful hearers of the word of truth, and grace.

"HE THAT RECEIVETH SEED INTO GOOD GROUND"

We come now to a happier task, the consideration of the good hearer. And, as we note the various points in our Lord's description of him, may we be encouraged and strengthened in our determination to develop in ourselves, by God's grace, the characteristics he portrays, characteristics which, if found in us, will enable us to yield a rich fruitage from the good seed of the Word of God which he has sown in us.

Each of the three Evangelists will be found to help us; for St. Matthew tells us that "he that receiveth seed into good ground is he that heareth the Word and *understandeth* it"; St. Mark, that it is he that heareth the Word and "*receiveth*" it; and St. Luke, that it is he, who, "having heard the Word, *keepeth it in an honest and good heart*, and bringeth forth fruit with patience."

The first characteristic of the good hearer 'is that he *understands* the Word. Scholars tell us that the Greek word here rendered "understand" is very significant. It denotes a state of mind in which having compared one statement with another, having weighed each apart, and then placed them side by side, having viewed truth as truth, and then in its relation to himself, a man gives it the assent of his whole intelligent being, and affirms, not only that it is true, *but that it shall be true for him*; that he believes it, will act upon it, and, *so far as lieth in him, will see that his life is governed by it*. It includes the assent of the reason, or the intellect, the determination of the will, and the sympathy of the heart. So that the very first characteristic of the good hearer of the Word, is a very large and comprehensive one. Before any one of us can claim to be *such* a hearer, we must have personally studied and considered the truth as it is in Jesus, and have weighed any objections to it of which we have been cognizant, and have found such objections wanting. We must have felt how well adapted it is to our own individual needs, and have been gripped with a strong conviction that it is from God, and that it is for us. Not only must our reason, our intellect, consent to its being true; we must also determine to act upon it, and find our sympathies and affections engaged by it. This done, we will have the *first* qualification of the good hearer; for we hear nothing to advantage while we doubt it, or dislike it, or do not mean to let it influence our life. It is only when we listen in faith, in love, and with a resolve to benefit by what we hear, that we are in a condition to make the most of the divine Word of truth, and to get the most from it.

St. Mark's word is equally significant with St. Matthew's and carries the thought still further. According to Mark, the good hearer is one who *receiveth* it; and to receive it, in Mark's sense of the word, is "to take it into oneself." It implies that the good hearer is so charmed and won by the peculiar fitness of the gracious Gospel message to his own' dire need, so touched and penetrated by it, that "with joy" he embraceth it, receives it into his very being; he prepares, so to speak, a habitation, a sanctuary, for it, in the innermost recesses of his spirit, from which, like the

Shekinah in the tabernacle and the temple, it sheds a hallowing and enlightening influence, through all the courts and avenues of his life.

The model hearer, then, is one, who not only understands the Word, not only gives it the sanction of his intelligence, and will, and affection, but, in virtue of this sanction, admits it into himself, to become a part of him, to become the guiding and shaping spirit of his life.

"IN A GOOD AND HONEST HEART"

St. Luke tells us that in the good hearer the heart into which the Word is received, will be "a good and honest" heart; that is to say, a heart sincere and earnest. Obviously a man with an untrue heart will not make a good hearer of truth. We cannot be good hearers unless our hearts are good-candid, open, sincere; hearts like little children's; hearts like Nathaniel's, of whom our Lord could say, "Behold an Israelite -indeed, in whom is no guile." If we would know the secrets of truth, we must be unselfish, unprejudiced; we must care rather to be on the side of truth, than to find the truth on our side.

Then, too, having received the Word into an honest heart, the good hearer will "keep" it or "hold it last." He will not let it go, whatever allurements he may meet. He will not suffer the good seed to be withered by wayside influences, nor-choked by incoming cares or pleasures of life, nor obstructed by rocky impenitences. He has found it hard to get the truth, and having got it, he will not part with it. At times it may be very difficult to hold it fast. A great gain may be his, or an intense delight purchasable at a very small cost of being untrue to his convictions; a terrible danger may be averted, by a lie on his part or even by being evasive or by leaving a wrong impression; a friend he greatly desires to please may be made happy by only as light deviation from the path of integrity; but he will hold fast his integrity and truth. He will be assured that the jaws which he has deduced from the Word, the laws by which he commonly governs his life, *must not be reconsidered, much less repealed, while the storm of passionate desire is beating upon him; that then, most of all, he needs to abide by them.* This is the good hearer-the man who is a doer of- the Word, and a doer when doing is most difficult, not a hearer only. He never forgets what manner of man he is, or should 'be; but, looking with a constant gaze into the perfect law of our liberty, walks by it, and is blessed in his deed.

Again, the good hearer, who understands the Word, who receives it into a good and honest heart, and holds it fast, also brings forth fruit, *"with patience."* And of all his characteristics, this, as it is the most valuable, so also is it the hardest to attain. To wait, is even harder than to labor and to obey. Unless we are to shave our harvest very soon, we have hardly the heart to sow. The farmer has, long patience -- must have it -- till he receives the early and the latter rain. The winter frost must mellow the seed lying in the genial bosom of the earth; the rains of spring must swell it, and the suns of summer mature it. So with us. To become a good hearer, that is, a good doer, of the Word, is a task which requires long patience. We must suffer many a killing frost, many a darkening shower, many a burning sun, before the good seed, cast into our heart by the great Sower will gladden us (and him) with its thirty, or its sixty, or, it may be, its hundred-fold. But, if we do but wait with patience, or with *"cheerful constancy,"* as the word here translated patience more exactly means; if with cheerful, constant endurance we bring forth fruit, the more precious will be the harvest. It is only ill weeds that spring up apace; and God is not unjust that he should forget our labor of love. In due time we shall reap, if we, faint not. We shall reap all that we have sown and more than we sowed. For he that giveth seed to the farmer and bread to the eater, will multiply the seed we have sown, and give us to eat of the fruit of our toils. One day, nearer somewhat than when we first believed, all the seeds he has planted in us, which we have received in a good and honest heart, which we have kept, and cultivated, will have grown to maturity, and we shall awake "in his likeness." Let us be patient, therefore; let us be steadfast; let us stablish our hearts before him. Thus may it be with us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

- P. L. Read.

Interesting Selections

Parakletos

When the captain of a rescue ship megaphones to a ship in distress, "I'll stand by until the morning. I've come to save you, do not -fear!" that message exactly expresses the - Greek name for the Holy Spirit. He is our faithful "Standby."

The word is derived from a verb meaning *stand-by*; it means one who can be relied on. All the many translations of the word in different Bible versions are based on this thought. The *least* probable one is Comforter, because that could mean mere sympathy after a calamity. ***The Revised Standard Version*** says Counselor. Others say Advocate, Spokesman, Helper. Our language does not have a wholly satisfactory word to describe one who *encourages*' even while standing by, waiting for the right moment to help.

"Fierce and wild the storm is raging'
Round a lonely bark,
On to doom she's swiftly driving
O'er the waters dark.
Joy, oh, joy, behold a savior,
Through the night his message hear,
'I'll stand by until the morning,
I've come to save you, do not fear!"

- *Contributed.*

"God looks not at the quantity of the gift, but at the quality of the giver."

Something Pending

Something is coming! -- An old Jewish rabbi, acting as a guide in Jerusalem, said to a visitor one day, "Very few of the people coming into the land [Palestine] are orthodox Jews in the strict sense. Most of us have limited faith in our Scriptures. We are being brought back by blind impulse -just as birds are drawn to the south in winter. We feel that something tremendous is portending . . . and yet is far larger than this little country' of Israel. Something is going to burst that is bigger than an atom *bomb.*" - *Selected.*

Where Shall I Work?

"Father, where shall I work today?"
And my dove flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed me toward a tiny spot
And said, "Tend that for Me."
I answered quickly, 'No, no, not that!
Why no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done.
Not that little place for me."
And the word He spoke, it was not stern,
He answered me tenderly:
"Oh, little one, search that heart of thine,
Art thou working for them or Me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee."

- *Anonymous.*

"Thou Lord, Art Good"

The eternal purpose of God is to bless! "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." (Psa. 145:9.) This sweeping statement takes in the utmost bounds of the material universe and also the humblest creature as well as the most exalted sentient being. *"The whole creation in his care."*

The great Creator and upholder of the universe has blessings in reserve for all the willing and obedient. *Has he not already blessed you and me* "with all spiritual blessings in Christ"? that presently -- if proven "more than conquerors" -we may be his instrument for dispensing the supreme blessing of perfect human life and eternal happiness to countless millions -- the groaning creation-in harmony with his divine will for the restitution of all things.

There is only one way of becoming permanent members of the Great Messiah, the life-giver of the race, and that is by patiently and perseveringly cultivating and developing in ourselves the character-likeness of our dear Redeemer and Head. For as the Apostle points out, God has predestinated that all who will be of the Elect Church -- the future blessers of mankind-must be copies of his Son -- in character -- in heart. - Rom. 8:29.

Surely! -- from the standpoint of our Father's Word, all earthly honors are vanities in comparison with the heavenly glories and blessings which may be attained by the "called, chosen, and faithful" of this Gospel Age -- if *we will but follow the divine directions*. Wherefore, my dear brethren, "give all diligence to make *your calling and election sure.*" - 2 Pet. 1:10.

- A. Hardwick - Eng.

"The Angel of the Lord"

"The Angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth." - Acts 5:19.

Who shall "roll away the stone" of your buried hopes today,
Or barriers insurmountable that seem to bar your way?
Or the cares that oppress with a weight you scarce can bear,
And it sometimes seems God 'heard not your deep and fervent prayer.

But God is unchanged, He hears you, and at His bidding still
The shining ones of Heaven speed His purpose to fulfill.
Pray on! maybe at midnight, or the breaking of the day,
"The Angel of the Lord" will come, and roll your "stone" away.

Or, the Hosts of Heaven waiting God's purpose to achieve,
E'en now may be upon their *way* your burden to relieve:
Limit not, in thought, God's power to things that you can see,
For even Angel hosts may speed to do. His will for thee.

'Twas at God's behest that "order" from chaos came to be,
And flight, where all was darkness, was born at His decree:
Yet His Father-heart is caring for you in your distress,
And if you trust Him fully, He, through all, will fully bless:

He will strengthen, rest, and guide, protect you all the way
As you walk with Him by faith, as a little child, each day --
However vast your need may be, He'll meet it to the brim
As you your "All" surrender, unreservedly, to Him.

- E. Bentall.

Recently Deceased

Brother. Charles J. Henkel Sr., Baltimore, Md. - (December).
Sister M. Hogburn, Waddington, Eng. - (July).
Sister Mary Liebneski, Grand Rapids, Mich. - (December).
Brother C. F. Main, Parkside, S. Aus., Aus. - (1953).
Sister C. F. Main, Parkside,-S. Aus., Aus. - (1953).
Sister Esther Minnier, San Gabriel, Cal. - (November).
Sister G. R. Naylor, Riviera, Texas - (July).
Brother Alexander" Smudsky, Waterbury, Conn. - (January).
Brother Harry L. Young, Pen Argyl, Pa. - (September).