**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-031**. **SEED AMONG THORNS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection."*

*Luke 8:14*

No sensible sower would cast his seed among growing thorn-bushes, and we must necessarily understand that the description in this verse is not meant to give us the picture of a field in which these were actually growing, but rather of one in which they had been grubbed up, and so preparation been made for the sowing of the seed. They had been grubbed up, but they had not been grubbed out. The roots were there, although the branches and the stems had been cut down, or if the roots were not there, abundant seeds were lying buried, and when the good seed was sown it went into ground full of them--and that was the blunder out of which all the mischief came.

**I. These three different instances of failure in this parable represent to us, first, the seed carried off at the very beginning, before it has sunk into the ground and before it has had time to germinate.**

It lies on the surface and it goes at once. But suppose it is safely piloted past that first danger, then comes another peril. It gets a little deeper into the ground, but there is a shelf of rock an inch or two below the skin of soil, and the poor little rootlets cannot get through that, and so when the hot Syrian sun shines down upon the field, there is an unnatural heat, and a swift vegetation. There is growth, but the same sun that at first stimulated the unnaturally rapid growth, gets a little hotter or continues to pour down during the fervid summer and dries up the premature vegetation which it had called into feeble life. That second seed went further on the road towards fruit.

But suppose a seed is piloted past that second risk, there comes this third one. This seed gets deeper still, and does take root, and does grow, and does bear fruit. That is to say, this is a picture of a real Christian, in whom the seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God, has taken root, and to whom there has been the communication of the divine life that is in the seed; and yet that, too, comes to grief, and our parable tells us how--by three things, the thorns, the growth of the thorns, and the choking of the word.

Luke puts the interpretation of the thorns even more vividly than the other Evangelists, because he represents them as being three different forms of one thing, cares and riches and pleasures, which all come into the one class, of this life. Or, in other words, the present world, with all its various appeals to our animal and sensual nature, with all its possible delights for part of our being, a real and important part of it; and with all the troubles and anxieties which it is cowardly for us to shirk, and impossible for us to escape--this world is ever present to each of us, and if there is anything in us to which it appeals, then certainly the thorns will come up. The cares and the wealth and the pleasures are three classes of one thing. Perhaps the first chiefly besets struggling people; the second mainly threatens well-to-do people; the third, perhaps, is most formidable to leisurely and idle people. But all three appeal to us all, for in every one of us there are the necessary anxieties of life, and every one of us knows that there is real and substantial good to a part of our being, in the possession of a share of this world's wealth, without which no man can live, and all of us carry natures to which the delights of sense do legitimately and necessarily appeal.

So the soil for the growth of the thorns is always in us all. But what then? Are these things so powerful in our hearts as that they become hindrances to our Christian life? That is the question. The cares and the occupation of mind with, and desire for, the wealth and the pleasures are of God's appointment. He did not make them thorns, but you and I make them thorns; and the question for us is, has our Christianity driven out the undue regard to this life, regarded in these three aspects--undue in measure or in any other respect, by which they are converted into hindrances that mar our Christian life? Dear brethren, it is not enough to say, I have received the word into my heart. There is another question besides that--Has the word received into your heart cast out the thorns? Or are they and the seed growing there side by side? The picture of my text is that of a man who, in a real fashion, has accepted the Gospel, but who has accepted it so superficially as that it has not exercised upon him the effect that it ought to produce, of expelling from him the tendencies which may become hindrances to his Christian life. If we have known nothing of the expulsive power of a new affection, and if we thought it was enough to cut down the thickest and tallest thorn-bushes, and to leave all the seeds and the roots of them in our hearts, no wonder if, as we get along in life, they grow up and choke the word. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon; that is just putting into a sentence the lesson of my text.

**II. Further, note the growth of the thorns.**

Luke employs a very significant phrase. He says, When they have heard they go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life. That is to say, the path of daily life upon which we all have to walk, the common duties which necessarily draw us to themselves, will certainly stimulate the growth of the thorns if these are not rooted out. Life is full of appeals to our desires after earthly good or pleasure, to our greed after earthly gain, to our dread of earthly sorrow, of pain, of loss, and of poverty. As surely as we are living, and have to go out into the world day by day, so surely will the thorns grow if they are left in us. And so we come back to the old lesson that because we are set in this world, with all its temptations that appeal so strongly to many needs and desires of our nature, we must make thorough work of our religion if it is to be of any good to us at all, and we are not to go on the Christian pilgrimage with one foot upon the higher level and the other upon the lower, like a man walking with one foot on the kerbstone and the other on the roadway. Let us be one thing or the other, out and out, thorough and consistent. If we have the seed in our hearts, remember that we are responsible for its growth.

Let us make certain that we have cast out the thorns. There is an old German proverb, the vulgarity of which may be excused for its point. You must not sit near the fire if your head is made of butter. We should not try to walk through this wicked world without making very certain that we have stubbed the thorns out of our hearts. Oh, dear friends! here is the secret to the miserable inconsistencies of the great bulk of professing Christians. They have got the seed in, but they have not got the thorns out.

**III. Lastly, mark the choking of the growth.**

Of course it is rapid, according to the old saying, Ill weeds grow apace. They are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection. The weeds grow faster than the seed. Possession is nine-tenths of the law, and they have got possession of the soil, and their roots go far and strike deep, and so they come up, with their great, strong, coarse, quick-growing stems and leaves, and surround the green, infant, slender shoot, and keep the air and light out from it, and exhaust all the goodness of the soil, which has not nutriment in it enough for the modest seed and for the self-asserting thorn. And so the thorn beats in the race, and grows inches whilst the other grows hairbreadths. Is not that a true statement of our experience? If Christian men and women permit as much of their interest and affection and effort and occupation of mind to go out towards the world and worldly things, as, alas! most of us do, no wonder if the tiny, yellow, rather than green, blade is choked and gets covered with parasitical disease, and perhaps dies at last. You cannot grow two crops on one field. Some of us have tried; it will never do. It must be one thing or another, and we must make up our minds whether we are going to cultivate corn or thorn. May God help us to make the right choice of the crop we desire to bear!

Our text tells us that this man, represented by the seed among thorns, was a Christian, did, and does, bear fruit, but, as Luke says, brings no fruit to perfection. The first seed never grew at all; the second got the length of putting forth a blade; this one has got as far as the ear, but not so far as the full corn in the ear. It has fruited, but the fruit is green and scanty, not ripened, as it ought to be, since it grows under such a sky and was taken out of such a seed-basket as our seed has come from. It brings forth no fruit to perfection;--is not that a picture of so many Christian people? One cannot say that they are not Christians. One cannot say that there are no signs of a divine life in them. One cannot say but that they do a good many things that are right and pure, and obviously the result of a Divine Spirit working upon them; but all that they do just falls short of the crowning grace and beauty. There is always something about it that strikes one as being incomplete. They are Christian men and Christian women bringing forth many of the fruits of the Christian life, but the climax somehow or other is always absent. The pyramid goes up many stages, but there is never the gilded summit flashing in the light--No fruit to perfection.

Dear brethren, let us take our poor, imperfect services, and lay them down at the Master's feet, and ask Him to help us to make clean work of these hearts of ours, and to turn out of them all our worldly hankerings after the seen and temporal. Then we shall bear fruit that He will gather into His garner. The cares and the pleasures and the wealth that terminate in, and are occupied with, this poor fleeting present are small and insignificant. Let us try to yield ourselves up wholly to the higher influences of that Divine Spirit, and in true consecration receive the engrafted word. And then He will give to us to drink of that river of His pleasures, drinking of which we shall not thirst, nor need to come to any of earth's fountains to draw. If the Saviour comes in in His power, He will cast out the uncleanness that dwells in us and make us fruitful as He would have us to be.