**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**8. THE SOWER**

*"He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, "Behold, a farmer went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn't have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell amongst thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." "*

*Matthew 13:3-9*

*"Hear, then, the parable of the farmer. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the roadside. What was sown on the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and immediately with joy receives it; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. What was sown amongst the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and produces, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty."*

*Matthew 13:18-23*

THE FIRST parable of the Sower is one of two which our Lord Himself explained. Herein lies the great value of the two parables. We are not left to any speculation as to what our Lord meant, because of the record of His explanation of them to His own disciples.

First let us see the picture which He presented, that of a sower; then consider His explanation of that story, as He told it to the crowds, and from these two careful considerations finally deduce the instruction which they convey for us.

The picture of the sower is perfectly natural, but with Eastern rather than Western colour. There are senses in which those born and brought up in the country are familiar with a sower going forth to sow, at least as it used to be done. We know the picture of the sower in our own land. Yet we come to clear apprehension of the story only as we remember that this was in the East. In Thomson's *Land and the Book* he therein described the sower in the Eastern lands very clearly, as he wrote:-

" 'Behold, a sower went forth to sow.' There is a nice and close adherence to actual life in this form of expression. These people have actually *come forth* all the way from June to this place. The expression implies that the sower, in the days of our Saviour, lived in a hamlet, or village, as all these farmers now do; that he did not sow near his own house, or in a garden fenced or walled, for such a field does not furnish all the basis of the parable. There are neither *roads*, nor thorns, nor stony places in such lots. He must go forth into the open country as these have done, where there are no fences; where the path passes through cultivated land; where thorns grow in clumps all around; where the rocks peep out in places through the scanty soil; and where also, hard by, are patches extremely fertile. Now here we have the whole four within a dozen rods of us. Our horses are actually trampling down some seeds which have fallen by this wayside, and larks and sparrows are busy picking them up. That man, with his mattock, is digging about places where the rock is too near to the surface for the plough; and much that is fallen there will wither away, because it has no deepness of earth. And not a few seeds have fallen among this *bellan*, and will be effectually choked by this most tangled of thorn bushes. But a large portion, after all, falls into really good ground, and four months hence will exhibit every variety of crop."

Keeping that Eastern picture in mind, look at the picture first generally. There are four things in the story as Jesus told it that arrest attention; first, the sower; secondly, the seed; thirdly, the soil; and, lastly, the sequence.

Then we are concerned with our Lord's explanation of the picture. Notice that the sower is not named. He began bluntly, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." It was an actual fact, but so far as the teaching is concerned, He did not name the sower, neither did He do so in His explanation. He did not say who the sower was who sowed the seed. However, going to the thirty-seventh verse we read this. When the disciples asked Him to explain the parable of the tares, He said, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man." That applies equally to this parable of the sower.

Notice in the next place that the chief value of the picture is the seed and its relation to the soil. These things are foundation principles, be borne in mind as we approach the detailed study of these wonderful parables. The sower is not referred to, but unquestionably the Lord was referring to Himself as He said, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man."

Then again, bear in mind there is one Sower, and one soil. The Sower is the Son of man. What is the soil? He does not name it. The hard highway, the thorns, the rock, do not constitute soil. The ground does. If we would know what the soil is once again we trespass upon the next parable. Following the statement in verse thirty-seven, "He that soweth good seed is the Son of man," He says, "and the field is the world." Let us keep that carefully in mind.

We are next impressed by the fact that there are various conditions of the seed, and various responses of the soil. As our Lord explained His parable, when He referred to the seed, He did so by speaking of persons. These words of explanation are found, beginning at the nineteenth verse,

"When any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the wayside." Verse 20: "He that was sown upon the rocky places." Verse 22: "And he that was sown among the thorns." Verse 23: "He that was sown upon the good ground."

Our Lord is interpreting the Kingdom, and His work in the Kingdom, and He speaks of seed. He employs the masculine pronoun which covers all human souls. The seed then, as viewed at this point, must be considered in that way. There are varied responses made by the soil, and those responses depend upon the condition of the seed that is sown in the soil. That will become plainer as we proceed.

Take the first. "*He* that was sown by the wayside." Mark the emphasis. What about him? Birds came and devoured them. "Any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart." We see a personality, and something more, a person as a seed, the seed of the Kingdom, falling upon the wayside but the birds of the air have devoured that which was sown in his heart, that which made him a seed of the Kingdom. To such the soil is unresponsive. It fell by the wayside. It could not be received, and the emphasis - strange as these things seem to merge and mix - is not upon the soil that is an adaptation, it is upon the seed. If the seed has lost its vital power because the birds have devoured it, then the soil is unresponsive.

Again, "*He* that was sown upon the rocky places." When this man was sown, the sun is "risen," and the seed is "scorched." Who is he? Mark the emphasis, "He that heareth the Word, and straight-way with joy receiveth it, yet hath he not root in himself." He endures only for a little while. "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, straightway he stumbleth." Therefore he also is a seed of no value in the sowing of the world, and to such an one the soil is cruel and non-productive. So the rocky places.

Take the next, "*He* that was sown among the thorns." Again, Who is he? He is the one who has heard the Word, but has allowed the care of the present age, and the deceitfulness of riches to choke the Word, and so he, as a seed, with a Kingdom value, becomes un-fruitful. The thorns grow up and choke them. The soil in that case is destructive.

Once more, "*He* that was sown upon the good ground." Who is this? "He that heareth the Word, and understandeth it," who bears fruit, and brings forth fruit. To such the soil is good ground, is responsive, productive, and constructive.

In this narrative, taken as our Lord explained it, there may seem to be a difference, a disparity. Some may be inclined to say there is a contradiction between the incidence of the teaching in the story and that of the explanation. As a matter of fact, there is no difference or disparity. In the former, emphasis is laid upon the soil. In the latter, the emphasis is laid upon the nature of the seed that falls upon the soil. The seed sown, as we have seen, are men and women. But behind that sowing of human life in the world, with Kingdom intention, there is another sowing, that of the Word in the heart. Turning to Luke's account, there it is seen clearly that the sowing of the Word in the heart of the individuals is the first thing. That being so, these individuals, men and women are sent out into the world, the very seed of the Kingdom. The ultimate seed is the Word itself. The world is the field, to which we come again; and the planting of that field is of men and women in whom the Word of God has been planted. Men and women fructified by the implanted Word, become seeds of the Kingdom in world affairs

The soil is always the same. The figures employed by our Lord simply describe the response made to it. To men who hear the Word, but do not understand, the soil is unreceptive. To men who hear, and rejoice, but fail to obey, the soil is non-productive. To men who hear, but who respond to the age about them, the soil is destructive. The men who hear and understand in the full sense, to such the soil is receptive, productive, and constructive. Here in this first parable we have an interpretation of the Lord's own work in relation to the Kingdom principles.