

Parables of the Kingdom

"And he spake many things unto them in parables."

- Matthew xiii,3

Joel iii,9-end

Matthew xiii,24-52

Psalm 78, vss.1-11

New Book of Worship, Psalm 34, pp.53,54

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew consists almost entirely of parables. It begins with the familiar parable of the "Sower." Then follow in order the parables of the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure hid in the field, the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, and the drag-net. It is in this chapter that we find the words, "without a parable spake he not unto them." The whole Word is a parable, having deeper meanings within the letter.

The parables in this chapter form a series picturing how the kingdom of heaven is developed in us. The parables start with the words, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." The Lord is the sower, as the author of all truth. As the sower He has gone forth in every age of the world and into every land. His truth is sown in every individual mind. But the seed is variously received. Our regeneration begins by our learning what is good and true, the planting of seed in the garden of the mind. If the mind receives it and it is carried out into the life, it will bring forth fruit.

But the harvest does not come immediately. Tares grow up with the wheat. The parable of the tares tells of the perils which threaten the seed of truth, of the efforts of evil to counteract the work of the Divine Sower. In this parable the trouble is not with the ground; it is said to be the work of the devil. The tare is a poisonous weed which ripens in approximately the same number of days as the wheat and is so near like it that it is only when the heads ripen that they can be clearly distinguished. Should the tares be harvested with the wheat, the wheat would be useless, for bread made with this mixed flour produces dizziness and serious illness. In the field the roots of the wheat and tares so intertwine that one cannot be pulled up without destroying the other. So both wheat and tares must be let grow until the harvest. Then the tares can be gathered into bundles and burned.

On the natural plane how familiar this experience is to all of us! Every gardener knows that he does not have to plant weeds. They spring up of themselves. And this common experience the Lord made use of to teach of the kingdom of heaven. Explaining the parable to His disciples He said: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels." The thorns in the parable of the Sower stand for our hereditary tendencies to evil. They are in the ground of every man's mind from

birth. But the tares are sown. They stand for false suggestions that come into the mind. They are insinuated by evil spirits cooperating with man's self-love. And they are sown in the night, when men sleep - while they are immersed in the things of the senses and paying little attention to spiritual things. We think them to be our own thoughts, and the enemy goes on his way unsuspected. We do not recognize the origin of our sensuous thoughts.

"But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." An evil may grow up in our minds and for a long time we may fully believe it to be good. Yet in time its character is disclosed. Then our natural desire is to get rid of what is bad immediately. The point of this parable is that this is impossible. The best that can be done at the moment is to understand that the evils are there and must be recognized and removed when we can identify them. Recall Peter's zeal when he declared that he would follow the Lord through everything and never forsake Him. And note how Peter was astonished at the Lord's prophecy of his denial. And yet he did deny the Lord. Character keeps pace with regeneration. We cannot put away evil and false things in our own strength. If we seek to get rid of our evils by our own power, we root up at the same time our trust in the Lord.

Next in our chapter follows the parable of the mustard seed. Truth, like seed, is full of vitality. The mustard seed contains great heat, representing the warmth of love which lies within spiritual truth. It is called the least of all seeds because at first spiritual truth seems of little value to us, but within it is the power to develop into a complete system of intellectual life. The simple truths of the decalogue are mental seeds of the greatest vitality, for they are the laws of heavenly life and growth.

Then comes the parable of the leaven. Leaven signifies temptation. Progress in spiritual life comes by means of temptations. The kingdom of heaven is the government of Divine love and wisdom. It is wherever the Lord is known and His laws kept and loved. But this kingdom does not grow in us uninterruptedly. There are too many things in us which we are loath to see displaced. As soon as we learn a truth there comes the temptation to reject it. Truth is given us for the purpose of pointing out our evils so that we can see, recognize, and get rid of them. There is a difference between theory and practice.

The parable of the leaven is followed by that of the treasure hidden in the field. In the former evil is hidden within the good and must be worked out; in the latter the good is hidden within the external. When the treasure is discovered, the man knows he must buy the field in order to obtain it. And the purchase price is the giving up of self-love and the love of the world. Self-love and its offspring are man's own - all that he hath of himself. The treasure and the field are the Lord's. But once a man has discovered the treasure, we read that "for joy"

he selleth all that he hath and buyeth the field. This is not now felt to be a difficult work, for the joy in his new-found treasure makes him willing to part with his old possessions. And when he has sold all, the treasure is his. It is not necessary for one to give up his natural wealth - either his physical or his mental riches - but it is necessary that he give up holding them selfishly, and instead use them as the Lord's. If we secretly try to keep something of our selfishness, the purchase will fall through.

The treasure was hidden in the field. The treasures of spiritual life are all about us, yet how little we know of their existence! There are truths hidden within the letter of the Word in abundance, which will bring blessings when we learn and understand them.

But there is still one further important step in our spiritual progress. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." What is this pearl of great price?

The most important of all knowledge is knowledge concerning God. Our idea of God determines the essential character of our life. When we understand and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is God in His Divine Humanity, we have found the pearl of great price. Mystery concerning the Trinity in the Divine is removed. Few grasp the importance of a true understanding of God. The teaching about God is for the great majority linked with incomprehensible dogmas. The Lord said, "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father." That time is now come.

The last parable in the series is that of the net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind, and when it was drawn to the shore, the good were gathered in and the bad were cast away. This is a parable of judgment. It declares that after the evil are separated from the good, the evil shall be cast into a furnace of fire and that there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The "furnace of fire" is not something outside of man; it is his own burning passions. The weeping is the anguish felt by the evil because they cannot satisfy their evil desires. The evil have to be kept in restraint. Gnashing of teeth is the collision of thought. Falsity is not consistent or harmonious, and evil desires, if carried out, bring in the end penalties and suffering.

First the sower, the insemination of truth; then the tares, the manifestation of evil and falsity as the effect of acquiring truth; then the realization of the tremendous possibilities within every little seed of truth; then the leavening process, the temptations through which one must pass; then the finding of the treasure hid in the field, the acquisition of good and truth as selfish ambitions are put aside; and finally the selling of all that we have to purchase the pearl of great price, the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only God of heaven and earth, the only source of all that is good and true. When we have passed through these stages, we are ready to recognize the inevitability of the separation of the good and the evil in the other life. And may we all be found ready to "enter in through the gates into the city" and come into the rest of the sabbath day.

Amen