

CHAPTER 13

In this chapter, we have,

I. The favour which Christ did to his countrymen in preaching the kingdom of heaven to them (v. 1-2). He preached to them in parables, and here gives the reason why he chose that way of instructing (v. 10-17). And the evangelist gives another reason (v. 34, 35). There are eight parables recorded in this chapter, which are designed to represent the kingdom of heaven, the method of planting the gospel kingdom in the world, and of its growth and success. The great truths and laws of that kingdom are in other scriptures laid down plainly, and without parables: but some circumstances of its beginning and progress are here laid open in parables.

- 1.** Here is one parable to show what are the great hindrances of people's profiting by the word of the gospel, and in how many it comes short of its end, through their own folly, and that is the parable of the four sorts of ground, delivered (v. 3-9). and expounded (v. 18-23).
- 2.** Here are two parables intended to show that there would be a mixture of good and bad in the gospel church, which would continue till the great separation between them in the judgment day: the parable of the tares put forth (v. 24-30), and expounded at the request of the disciples (v. 36-43); and that of the net cast into the sea (v. 47-50).
- 3.** Here are two parables intended to show that the gospel church should be very small at first, but that in process of time it should become a considerable body: that of the grain of mustard-seed (v. 31, 32), and that of the leaven (v. 33).
- 4.** Here are two parables intended to show that those who expect salvation by the gospel must be willing to venture all, and quit all, in the prospect of it, and that they shall be no losers by the bargain; that of the treasure hid in the field (v. 44), and that of the pearl of great price (v. 45, 46).
- 5.** Here is one parable intended for direction to the disciples, to make use of the instructions he had given them for the benefit of others; and that is the parable of the good householder (v. 51, 52).

II. The contempt which his countrymen put upon him on account of the meanness of his parentage (v. 53-58).

~~411~~ MATTHEW 13:1-23

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

We have here Christ preaching, and may observe,

1. *When* Christ preached this sermon; it was the same day that he preached the sermon in the foregoing chapter: so unwearied was he in doing good, and working the works of him that sent him. Note, Christ was for preaching both ends of the day, and has by his example recommended that practice to his church; we must *in the morning sow our seed, and in the evening not withhold our hand*, ²¹¹⁶Ecclesiastes 11:6. An afternoon sermon well heard, will be so far from driving out the morning sermon, that it will rather clench it, and fasten the nail in a sure place. Though Christ had been in the morning opposed and cavilled at by his enemies, disturbed and interrupted by his friends, yet he went on with his work; and in the latter part of the day, we do not find that he met with such discouragements. Those who with courage and zeal break through difficulties in God's service, will perhaps find them not so apt to recur as they fear. Resist them, and they will flee.

2. *To whom* he preached; there were *great multitudes gathered together to him*, and they were the auditors; we do not find that any of the scribes or Pharisees were present. They were willing to hear him when he preached in the synagogue (^{411B}Matthew 12:9, 14), but they thought it below them to hear a sermon by the sea-side, though Christ himself was the preacher: and truly he had better have their room than their company, for now they were absent, he went on quietly and without contradiction. Note, Sometimes there is most of the *power* of religion where there is least of the *pomp* of it: *the poor receive the gospel*. When Christ went to the *sea-side*, *multitudes* were presently *gathered together to him*. Where the king is, there is the court; where Christ is, there is the church, though it be by the sea-side. Note, Those who would get good by the word, must be willing to follow it in all its removes; when the ark shifts, shift after it. The Pharisees had been labouring, by base calumnies and suggestions, to drive the people off from following Christ, but they still flocked after him as much

as ever. Note, Christ will be glorified in spite of all opposition; he will be followed.

3. *Where* he preached this sermon.

(1.) His meeting-place was the sea-side. He went out of the house (because there was no room for the auditory) into the open air. It was pity but such a Preacher should have had the most spacious, sumptuous, and convenient place to preach in, that could be devised, like one of the Roman theatres; but he was now in his state of humiliation, and in this, as in other things, he denied himself the honours due to him; as he had not a house of his own to live in, so he had not a chapel of his own to preach in. By this he teaches us in the external circumstances of worship not to covet that which is stately, but to make the best of the conveniences which God in his providence allots to us. When Christ was born, he was crowded into the stable, and now to the sea-side, upon the strand, where all persons might come to him with freedom. He that was truth itself sought no corners (no *adyta*), as the pagan mysteries did. *Wisdom crieth without*, ^{<400>}Proverbs 1:20; ^{<430>}John 13:20.

(2.) His pulpit was a ship; not like Ezra's pulpit, that was *made for the purpose* (^{<400>}Nehemiah 8:4); but converted to this use for want of a better. No place amiss for such a Preacher, whose presence dignified and consecrated any place: let not those who preach Christ be ashamed, though they have mean and inconvenient places to preach in. Some observe, that the people stood upon dry ground and firm ground, while the Preacher was upon the water in more hazard. Ministers are most exposed to trouble. Here was a true rostrum, a ship pulpit.

4. *What* and *how* he preached.

(1.) *He spake many things unto them.* Many more it is likely than are here recorded, but all excellent and necessary things, things that belong to our peace, things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven: they were not trifles, but things of everlasting consequence, that Christ spoke of. It concerns us to give a more earnest heed, when Christ has so many things to say to us, that we miss not any of them.

(2.) What he spake was in parables. A parable sometimes signifies any wise, weighty saying that is instructive; but here in the gospels it generally signifies a continued similitude or comparison, by which spiritual or

heavenly things were described in language borrowed from the things of this life. It was a way of teaching used very much, not only by the Jewish rabbin, but by the Arabians, and the other wise men of the east; and it was found very profitable, and the more so from its being pleasant. Our Saviour used it much, and in it condescended to the capacities of people, and lisped to them in their own language. God had long *used similitudes by his servants the prophets* (³²⁰Hosea 12:10), and to little purpose; now he uses similitudes by his Son; surely they will reverence him who speaks from heaven, and of heavenly things, and yet clothes them with expressions borrowed from things earthly. See ⁴¹²John 3:12. So descending in a cloud. Now,

I. We have here the general reason why Christ taught in parables. The disciples were a little surprised at it, for hitherto, in his preaching, he had not much used them, and therefore they ask, *Why speakest thou to them in parables?* Because they were truly desirous that the people might hear with understanding. They do not say, *Why speakest thou to us?* (they knew how to get the parables explained) but to *them*. Note, We ought to be concerned for the edification of others, as well as for our own, by the word preached; and if ourselves be *strong*, yet to *bear the infirmities of the weak*.

To this question Christ answers largely, v. 11-17, where he tells them, that *therefore* he preached by parables, because thereby the things of God were made more plain and easy to them who were willingly ignorant; and thus the gospel would be *a savour of life* to some, and *of death* to others. A parable, like the pillar of cloud and fire, turns a dark side towards Egyptians, which confounds them, but a light side towards Israelites, which comforts them, and so answers a double intention. The same light directs the eyes of some, but dazzles the eyes of others. Now,

1. This reason is laid down (v. 11): *Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.* That is,

(1.) The disciples had knowledge, but the people had not. You know already something of these mysteries, and need not in this familiar way to be instructed; but the people are ignorant, are yet but babes, and must be taught as such by plain similitudes, being yet incapable of receiving instruction in any other way: for though they have eyes, they know not how to use them; so some. Or,

(2.) The disciples were well inclined to the knowledge of gospel mysteries, and would search into the parables, and by them would be led into a more intimate acquaintance with those mysteries; but the carnal hearers that rested in bare hearing, and would not be at the pains to look further, nor to ask the meaning of the parables, would be never the wiser, and so would justly suffer for their remissions. A parable is a shell that keeps good fruit *for* the diligent, but keeps it *from* the slothful. Note, There are mysteries in the kingdom of heaven, and *without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness*: Christ's incarnation, satisfaction, intercession, our justification and sanctification by union with Christ, and indeed the whole work of redemption, from first to last, are *mysteries*, which could never have been discovered but by divine revelation (~~415~~1 Corinthians 15:51), were at this time discovered but in part to the disciples, and will never be fully discovered till the veil shall be rent; but the mysteriousness of gospel truth should not discourage us from, but quicken us in, our enquiries after it and searches into it.

[1.] It is graciously given to the disciples of Christ to be acquainted with these mysteries. Knowledge is the first gift of God, and it is a distinguishing gift (~~416~~Proverbs 2:6); it was given to the apostles, because they were Christ's constant followers and attendants. Note, The nearer we draw to Christ, and the more we converse with him, the better acquainted we shall be with gospel mysteries.

[2.] It is given to all true believers, who have an experimental knowledge of the gospel mysteries, and that is without doubt the best knowledge: a principle of grace in the heart, is that which makes men of quick understanding in *the fear of the Lord*, and in the faith of Christ, and so in the meaning of parables; and for want of that, Nicodemus, a master in Israel, talked of the *new birth* as a blind man of colours.

[3.] There are those to *whom this knowledge is not given*, and a man can *receive nothing unless it be given him from above* (~~417~~John 3:27); and be it remembered that God is debtor to no man; his grace is his own; he gives or withholds it at pleasure (~~418~~Romans 11:35); the difference must be resolved into God's sovereignty, as before, ~~419~~Matthew 11:25, 26.

2. This reason is further illustrated by the rule God observes in dispensing his gifts; he bestows them on those who improve them, but takes them away from those who bury them. It is a rule among men, that they will rather entrust their money with those who have increased their estates by

their industry, than with those who have diminished them by their slothfulness.

(1.) Here is a promise to him that has, that has true grace, pursuant to the election of grace, that has, and uses what he has; he shall have more abundance: God's favours are earnest of further favours; where he lays the foundation, he will build upon it. Christ's disciples used the knowledge they now had, and they had more abundance at the pouring out of the Spirit, Acts 2. They who have the *truth* of grace, shall have the *increase* of grace, even to an abundance in glory, ³¹⁰¹⁸Proverbs 4:18. *Joseph — he will add,* ³¹⁰²¹Genesis 30:24.

(2.) Here is a threatening to him that has not, that has no desire of grace, that makes no right use of the gifts and graces he has: has not root, no solid principle; that has, but uses not what he has; from him shall be *taken away* that which he has or seems to have. His leaves shall wither, his gifts decay; the means of grace he has, and makes no use of, shall be taken from him; God will *call in* his talents out of their hands that are likely to become bankrupts quickly.

3. This reason is particularly explained, with reference to the two sorts of people Christ had to do with.

(1.) Some were willingly ignorant; and such were amused by the parables (v. 13); *because they seeing, see not*. They had shut their eyes against the clear light of Christ's plainer preaching, and therefore were now left in the dark. Seeing Christ's person, they see not his glory, see no difference between him and another man; seeing his miracles, and hearing his preaching, they see not, they hear not with any concern or application; they understand neither. Note,

[1.] There are many that see the gospel light, and hear the gospel sound, but it never reaches their hearts, nor has it any place in them.

[2.] It is just with God to take away the light from those who shut their eyes against it; that such as will be ignorant, may be so; and God's dealing thus with them magnifies his distinguishing grace to his disciples.

Now in this the scripture would be fulfilled, v. 14, 15. It is quoted from ²¹⁰⁶⁹Isaiah 6:9, 10. The evangelical prophet that spoke most plainly of gospel grace, foretold the contempt of it, and the consequences of that contempt. It is referred to no less than six times in the New Testament,

which intimates, that in gospel times spiritual judgments would be most common, which make least noise, but are most dreadful. That which was spoken of the sinners in Isaiah's time was fulfilled in those in Christ's time, and it is still fulfilling every day; for while the wicked heart of man keeps up the same sin, the righteous hand of God inflicts the same punishment. Here is,

First. A description of sinners' wilful blindness and hardness, which is their sin. *This people's heart is waxed gross; it is fattened,* so the word is; which denotes both sensuality and senselessness (~~1370~~ Psalm 119:70); secure under the word and rod of God, and scornful as Jeshurun, that *waxed fat and kicked,* ~~1325~~ Deuteronomy 32:15. And when the heart is thus heavy, no wonder that the ears are dull of hearing; the whispers of the Spirit they hear not at all; the loud calls of the word, though the word be nigh them, they regard not, nor are at all affected by them: *they stop their ears,* ~~1304~~ Psalm 58:4, 5. And because they are resolved to be ignorant, they shut both the learning senses; for their eyes also they have closed, resolved that they would not see light come into the world, when the Son of Righteousness arose, but they shut their windows, because they *loved darkness rather than light,* ~~1389~~ John 3:19; ~~1386~~ 2 Peter 3:5.

Secondly, A description of that judicial blindness, which is the just punishment of this. *“By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand;* what means of grace you have, shall be to no purpose to you; though, in mercy to others, they are continued, yet in judgment to you, the blessing upon them is denied.” The saddest condition a man can be in on this side hell, is to sit under the most lively ordinances with a dead, stupid, untouched heart. To hear God's word, and see his providences, and yet not to understand and perceive his will, either in the one or in the other, is the greatest sin and the greatest judgment that can be. Observe, It is God's work to *give an understanding heart,* and he often, in a way of righteous judgment, denies it to those to whom he has given the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, in vain. Thus does God choose sinners' delusions (~~2704~~ Isaiah 66:4),. and bind them over to the greatest ruin, by giving them up to their own hearts' lusts (~~1311~~ Psalm 81:11, 12); *let them alone* (~~2047~~ Hosea 4:17); *my Spirit shall not always strive,* ~~1068~~ Genesis 6:3.

Thirdly, The woeful effect and consequence of this; *Lest at any time they should see.* They will not see because they will not turn; and God says that

they shall not see, because they shall not turn: *lest they should be converted, and I should heal them.*

Note,

1. That seeing, hearing, and understanding, are necessary to conversion; for God, in working grace, deals with men as men, as rational agents; he draws with the cords of a man, changes the heart by opening the eyes, and turns *from the power of Satan unto God*, by turning first *from darkness to light*, (⁴⁰⁸⁵Acts 26:18).

2. All those who are truly converted to God, shall certainly be healed by him. “If they be converted I shall heal them, I shall save them:” so that if sinners perish, it is not to be imputed to God, but to themselves; they foolishly expected to be healed, without being converted.

3. It is just with God to deny his grace to those who have long and often refused the proposals of it, and resisted the power of it. Pharaoh, for a good while, hardened his own heart (⁴⁰⁸⁵Exodus 8:15, 32), and afterwards God hardened it, (⁴⁰⁸²Exodus 9:12; 10:20. Let us therefore fear, lest by sinning against the divine grace, we sin it away.

(2.) Others were effectually called to be the disciples of Christ, and were truly desirous to be taught of him; and they were instructed, and made to improve greatly in knowledge, by these parables, especially when they were expounded; and by them the things of God were made more plain and easy, more intelligible and familiar, and more apt to be remembered (v. 16, 17). *Your eyes see, your ears hear.* They saw the glory of God in Christ's person; they heard the mind of God in Christ's doctrine; they saw much, and were desirous to see more, and thereby were prepared to receive further instruction; they had opportunity for it, by being constant attendants on Christ, and they should have it from day to day, and grace with it. Now this Christ speaks of,

[1.] As a blessing; “*Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; it is your happiness, and it is a happiness for which you are indebted to the peculiar favour and blessing of God.*” It is a promised blessing, that in the days of the Messiah *the eyes of them that see shall not be dim*, (²³¹⁸Isaiah 32:3. The eyes of the meanest believer that knows experimentally the grace of Christ, are more blessed than those of the greatest scholars, the greatest masters in experimental philosophy, that are

strangers to God; who, like the other gods they serve, *have eyes, and see not. Blessed are your eyes.* Note, True blessedness is entailed upon the right understanding and due improvement of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The hearing ear and the seeing eye are God's work in those who are sanctified; they are the work of his grace (^{281D}Proverbs 20:12), and they are a blessed work, which shall be fulfilled with power, when those who *now see through a glass darkly, shall see face to face.* It was to illustrate this blessedness that Christ said so much of the misery of those who are left in ignorance; *they have eyes and see not; but blessed are your eyes.* Note, The knowledge of Christ is a distinguishing favour to those who have it, and upon that account it lays under the greater obligations; see ^{281D}John 14:22. The apostles were to teach others, and therefore were themselves blessed with the clearest discoveries of divine truth. *The watchmen shall see eye to eye,* ^{281B}Isaiah 52:8.

[2.] As a transcendent blessing, desired by, but not granted to, many prophets and righteous men, v. 17. The Old-Testament saints, who had some glimpses, some glimmerings of gospel light, coveted earnestly further discoveries. They had the types, shadows, and prophecies, of those things but longed to see the Substance, that glorious end of those things which they could not steadfastly look unto; that glorious inside of those things which they could not look into. They desired to see the great Salvation, the Consolation of Israel, but did not see it, because the fulness of time was not yet come. Note, *First,* Those who know something of Christ, cannot but covet to know more. *Secondly,* The discoveries of divine grace are made, even to prophets and righteous men, but according to the dispensation they are under. Though they were the favourites of heaven, with whom God's secret was, yet they have not seen the things which they desired to see, because God had determined not to bring them to light yet; and his favours shall not anticipate his counsels. There was then, as there is still, a *glory to be revealed;* something in reserve, *that they without us should not be made perfect,* ^{281D}Hebrews 11:40. *Thirdly,* For the exciting of our thankfulness, and the quickening of our diligence, it is good for us to consider what means we enjoy, and what discoveries are made to us, now under the gospel, above what they had, and enjoyed, who lived under the Old-Testament dispensation, especially in the revelation of the atonement for sin; see what are the advantages of the New Testament above the Old (^{281D}2 Corinthians 3:7, etc. ^{281B}Hebrews

12:18); and see that our improvements be proportionable to our advantages.

II. We have, in these verses, one of the parables which our Saviour put forth; it is that of the *sower and the seed*; both the parable itself, and the explanation of it. Christ's parables are borrowed from common, ordinary things, not from any philosophical notions or speculations, or the unusual phenomena of nature, though applicable enough to the matter in hand, but from the most obvious things, that are of every day's observation, and come within the reach of the meanest capacity; many of them are fetched from the husbandman's calling, as this of the sower, and that of the tares. Christ chose to do thus,

1. That spiritual things might hereby be made more plain, and, by familiar similitudes, might be made the more easy to slide into our understandings.
2. That common actions might hereby be spiritualized, and we might take occasion from those things which fall so often under our view, to meditate with delight on the things of God; and thus, when our hands are busiest about the world, we may not only notwithstanding that, but even with the help of that, be led to have our hearts in heaven. Thus the word of God shall talk with us, talk familiarly with us, ^{<3062>}Proverbs 6:22.

The parable of the sower is plain enough, v. 3-9. The exposition of it we have from Christ himself, who knew best what was his own meaning. The disciples, when they asked, *Why speakest thou unto them in parables?* (v. 10), intimated a desire to have the parable explained for the sake of the people; nor was it any disparagement to their own knowledge to desire it for themselves. Our Lord Jesus kindly took the hint, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the parable, directing his discourse to the disciples, but in the hearing of the multitude, for we have not the account of his dismissing them till v. 36. "*Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower* (v. 18); you have heard it, but let us go over it again." Note, It is of good use, and would contribute much to our understanding the word and profiting by it, to hear over again what we have heard (^{<3101E>}Philippians 3:1); "You have heard it, but hear the interpretation of it." Note, *Then* only we hear the word aright, and to good purpose, when we understand what we hear; it is no hearing at all, if it be not with understanding, ^{<462E>}Nehemiah 8:2. It is God's grace indeed that gives the understanding, but it is our duty to give our minds to understand.

Let us therefore compare the parable and the exposition.

(1.) The seed sown is the word of God, here called *the word of the kingdom* (v. 19): the kingdom of heaven, that is the kingdom; the kingdoms of the world, compared with that, are not to be called kingdoms. The gospel comes *from* that kingdom, and conducts *to* that kingdom; the word of the gospel is the word of the kingdom; it is the word of the King, and where that is, *there is power*; it is a law, by which we must be ruled and governed. This word is the seed sown, which seems a dead, dry thing, but all the product is virtually in it. It is *incorruptible seed* (⁴⁰²1 Peter 1:23); it is the gospel that *brings forth fruit* in souls, ⁵⁰⁵Colossians 1:5, 6.

(2.) The sower that scatters the seed is our Lord Jesus Christ, either by himself, or by his ministers; see v. 37. The people are God's husbandry, his tillage, so the word is; and ministers are *labourers together with God*, ⁴⁸⁹1 Corinthians 3:9. Preaching to a multitude is sowing the corn; we know not where it must light; only see that it be good, that it be clean, and be sure to give it seed enough. The sowing of the word is the sowing of a people for God's field, the *corn of his floor*, ²⁹¹⁰Isaiah 21:10.

(3.) The ground in which this seed is sown is the hearts of the children of men, which are differently qualified and disposed, and accordingly the success of the word is different. Note, Man's heart is like soil, capable of improvement, of bearing good fruit; it is pity it should lie fallow, or be like the field of the slothful, ⁴⁸⁸Proverbs 24:30. The soul is the proper place for the word of God to dwell, and work, and rule in; its operation is upon conscience, it is to light that candle of the Lord. Now according as we are, so the word is to us: *Recipitur ad modum recipientis — The reception depends upon the receiver*. As it is with the earth; some sort of ground, take ever so much pains with it, and throw ever so good seed into it, yet it brings forth no fruit to any purpose; while the good soil brings forth plentifully: so it is with the hearts of men, whose different characters are here represented by four sorts of ground, of which *three* are bad, and but *one* good. Note, The number of fruitless hearers is very great, even of those who heard Christ himself. *Who has believed our report?* It is a melancholy prospect which this parable gives us of the congregations of those who hear the gospel preached, that scarcely one in four brings forth fruit to perfection. Many are called with the common call, but in few is the eternal choice evidenced by the efficacy of that call, ⁴²¹⁶Matthew 20:16.

Now observe the characters of these four sorts of ground.

[1.] The highway ground, v. 4-10. They had pathways through their corn-fields (^{401E}Matthew 12:1), and the seed that fell on them never entered, and so the birds picked it up. The place where Christ's hearers now stood represented the characters of most of them, the sand on the sea-shore, which was to the seed like the highway ground.

Observe *First*, What kind of hearers are compared to *the highway ground*; such as *hear the word and understand it not*; and it is their own fault that they do not. They take no heed to it, take no hold of it; they do not come with any design to get good, as the highway was never intended to be sown. They *come before God as his people come, and sit before his as his people sit*; but it is merely for fashion-sake, to see and be seen; they mind not what is said, it comes in at one ear and goes out at the other, and makes no impression.

Secondly, How they come to be unprofitable hearers. The *wicked one*, that is, the devil, *cometh and catcheth away that which was sown*. — Such mindless, careless, trifling hearers are an easy prey to Satan; who, as he is the great murderer of souls, so he is the great thief of sermons, and will be sure to rob us of the word, if we take not care to keep it: as the birds pick up the seed that falls on the ground that is neither ploughed before nor harrowed after. If we break not up the fallow ground, by preparing our hearts for the word, and humbling them to it, and engaging our own attention; and if we cover not the seed afterwards, by meditation and prayer; if we give not a *more earnest heed to the things which we have heard*, we are as the highway ground. Note, The devil is a sworn enemy to our profiting by the word of God; and none do more befriend his design than heedless hearers, who are thinking of something else, when they should be thinking of the things that belong to their peace.

[2.] The *stony ground*. *Some fell upon stony places* (v. 5, 6), which represents the case of hearers that go further than the former, who receive some good impressions of the word, but they are not lasting, v. 20, 21. Note, It is possible we may be a great deal better than some others, and yet not be so good as we should be; may go beyond our neighbours, and yet come short of heaven. Now observe, concerning these hearers that are represented by the stony ground,

First, How far they went.

1. They *hear the word*; they turn neither their backs upon it, nor a deaf ear to it. Note, hearing the word, though ever so frequently, ever so gravely, if we rest in that, will never bring us to heaven.

2. They are *quick in hearing*, swift to hear, *he anon receiveth it, euthys*, he is ready to receive it, *forthwith it sprung up* (v. 5), it sooner appeared above ground than that which was sown in the good soil. Note, Hypocrites often get the start of true Christians in the shows of profession, and are often too hot to hold. He *receiveth it straightway*, without trying it; swallows it without chewing, and then there can never be a good digestion. Those are most likely to *hold fast that which is good, that prove all things*, ^{<315>}1 Thessalonians 5:21.

3. They receive it with joy. Note, There are many that are very glad to hear a good sermon, that yet do not profit by it; they may be pleased with the word, and yet not changed and ruled by it; the heart may melt under the word, and yet not be melted down by the word, much less into it, as into a mould. Many *taste the good word of God* (^{<315>}Hebrews 6:5), and say they find sweetness in it, but some beloved lust is *rolled under the tongue*, which it would not agree with, and so they spit it out again.

4. They *endure for awhile*, like a violent motion, which continues as long as the impression of the force remains, but ceases when that has spent itself. Note, Many endure for awhile, that do not endure to the end, and so come short of the happiness which is promised to them only that persevere (^{<312>}Matthew 10:22); they did run well, but something hindered them, ^{<317>}Galatians 5:7.

Secondly, How they fell away, so that no fruit was brought to perfection; no more than the corn, that having no depth of earth from which to draw moisture, is scorched and withered by the heat of the sun. And the reason is,

1. They have *no root in themselves*, no settled, fixed principles in their judgments, no firm resolution in their wills, nor any rooted habits in their affections: nothing firm that will be either the sap or the strength of their profession. Note,

(1.) It is possible there may be the green blade of a profession, where yet there is not the root of grace; hardness prevails in the heart, and

what there is of soil and softness is only in the surface; inwardly they are no more affected than a stone; they have no root, they are not by faith united to Christ who is our Root; they derive not from him, they depend not on him.

(2.) Where there is not a principle, though there be a profession, we cannot expect perseverance. Those who have no root will endure but awhile. A ship without ballast, though she may at first out-sail the laden vessel, yet will certainly fail in stress of weather, and never make her port.

2. Times of trial come, and then they come to nothing. *When tribulation and persecution arise because of the word, he is offended*; it is a stumbling-block in his way which he cannot get over, and so he flies off, and this is all his profession comes to. Note,

(1.) After a fair gale of opportunity usually follows a storm of persecution, to try who have received the word in sincerity, and who have not. When the word of Christ's kingdom comes to be the word of Christ's patience (^{<681>}Revelation 3:10), then is the trial, who keeps it, and who does not, ^{<600>}Revelation 1:9. It is wisdom to prepare for such a day.

(2.) When trying times come, those who have no root are soon offended; they first quarrel with their profession, and then quit it; first find fault with it, and then throw it off. Hence we read of *the offence of the cross*, ^{<681>}Galatians 5:11. Observe, Persecution is represented in the parable by *the scorching sun*, (v. 6); the same sun which warms and cherishes that which was well rooted, withers and burns up that which wanted root. As the word of Christ, so the cross of Christ, is to some *a savour of life unto life*, to others *a savour of death unto death*: the same tribulation which drives some to apostasy and ruin, works for others *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. Trials which shake some, confirm others, ^{<5012>}Philippians 1:12. Observe how soon they fall away, by and by; as soon rotten as they were ripe; a profession taken up without consideration is commonly let fall without it: "Lightly come, lightly go."

[3.] The thorny ground, *Some fell among thorns* (which are a good guard to the corn when they are in the hedge, but a bad inmate when they are in the field); *and the thorns sprung up*, which intimates that they did not

appear, or but little, when the corn was sown, but afterwards they proved choking to it, v. 7. This went further than the former, for it had root; and it represents the condition of those who do not quite cast off their profession, and yet come short of any saving benefit by it; the good they gain by the word, being insensibly overcome and overborne by the things of the world. Prosperity destroys the word in the heart, as much as persecution does; and more dangerously, because more silently: the stones spoiled the root, the thorns spoil the fruit.

Now what are these choking thorns?

First, The cares of this world. Care for another world would quicken the springing of this seed, but care for this world chokes it. Worldly cares are fitly compared to thorns, for they came in with sin, and are a fruit of the curse; they are good in their place to stop a gap, but a man must be well armed that deals much in them (⁴¹⁶⁶2 Samuel 23:6, 7); they are entangling, vexing, scratching, and *their end is to be burned*, ³⁰⁶⁸Hebrews 6:8. These thorns choke the good seed. Note, Worldly cares are great hindrances to our profiting by the word of God, and our proficiency in religion. They eat up that vigour of soul which should be spent in divine things; divert us from duty, distract us in duty, and do us most mischief of all afterwards; quenching the sparks of good affections, and bursting the cords of good resolutions; those who *are careful and cumbered about many things*, commonly neglect *the one thing needful*.

Secondly, The deceitfulness of riches. Those who, by their care and industry, have raised estates, and so the danger that arises from care seems to be over, and they *continue hearers of the word*, yet are still in a snare (²¹⁰⁴Jeremiah 5:4, 5); it is *hard for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven*: they are apt to promise themselves that in riches which is not in them; to rely upon them, and to take an inordinate complacency in them; and this chokes the word as much as care did. Observe, It is not so much riches, as *the deceitfulness of riches*, that does the mischief: now they cannot be said to be deceitful to us unless we put our confidence in them, and raise our expectations from them, and then it is that they choke the good seed.

[4.] The good ground (v. 18); *Others fell into good ground*, and it is pity but that good seed should always meet with good soil, and then there is no loss; such are *good hearers of the word*, v. 23. Note, Though there are many that *receive the grace of God*, and the word of his grace, *in vain*, yet

God has a remnant by whom it is received to good purpose; for God's word shall not return empty, ^{<250>}Isaiah 55:10, 11.

Now that which distinguished this good ground from the rest, was, in one word, fruitfulness. By *this* true Christians are distinguished from hypocrites, that they *bring forth the fruits of righteousness; so shall ye be my disciples*, ^{<418>}John 15:8. He does not say that this good ground has no stones in it, or no thorns; but there were none that prevailed to hinder its fruitfulness. Saints, in this world, are not perfectly free from the remains of sin; but happily freed from the reign of it.

The hearers represented by the good ground are,

First, Intelligent hearers; they *hear the word and understand it*; they understand not only the sense and meaning of the word, but their own concern in it; they understand it as a man of business understands his business. God in his word deals with men as men, in a rational way, and gains possession of the will and affections by opening the understanding: whereas Satan, who is *a thief and a robber, comes not in by that door, but climbeth up another way*.

Secondly, Fruitful hearers, which is an evidence of their good understanding: which *also beareth fruit*. Fruit is to every seed its own body, a substantial product in the heart and life, agreeable to the seed of the word received. We *then* bear fruit, when we practise according to the word; when the temper of our minds and the tenour of our lives are conformable to the gospel we have received, and we do as we are taught.

Thirdly, Not all alike fruitful; *some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty*. Note, Among fruitful Christians, some are more fruitful than others: where there is true grace, yet there are degrees of it; some are of greater attainments in knowledge and holiness than others; all Christ's scholars are not in the same form. We should aim at the highest degree, to bring *forth a hundred-fold*, as Isaac's ground did (^{<172>}Genesis 26:12), *abounding in the work of the Lord*, ^{<418>}John 15:8. But if the ground be good, and the fruit right, the heart honest, and the life of a piece with it, those who bring forth but thirty-fold shall be graciously accepted of God, and it will be fruit abounding to their account, for *we are under grace, and not under the law*.

Lastly, He closes the parable with a solemn call to attention (v. 9), *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear*. Note, The sense of hearing cannot be better employed than in hearing the word of God. Some are for hearing

sweet melody, their ears are only *the daughters of music* (^{<2124>}Ecclesiastes 12:4): there is no melody like that of the word of God: others are for hearing *new things*, (^{<4172>}Acts 17:21); no news like that.

^{<132>}MATTHEW 13:24-43

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES, ETC.

In these verses, we have,

I. Another reason given why Christ preached by parables, v. 34, 35. *All these things he spoke in parables*, because the time was not yet come for the more clear and plain discoveries of the mysteries of the kingdom. Christ, to keep the people attending and expecting, preached in *parables*, and without a parable spake he not unto them; namely, at this time and in this sermon. Note, Christ tries all ways and methods to do good to the souls of men, and to make impressions upon them; if men will not be instructed and influenced by plain preaching, he will try them with parables; and the reason here given is, *That the scripture might be fulfilled*. The passage here quoted for it, is part of the preface to that historical Psalm, 78:2, *I will open my mouth in a parable*. What the Psalmist David, or Asaph, says there of his narrative, is accommodated to Christ's sermons; and that great precedent would serve to vindicate this way of preaching from the offence which some took at it. Here is,

1. The matter of Christ's preaching; he preached *things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world*. The mystery of the gospel had been *hid in God*, in his councils and decrees, *from the beginning of the world*. (^{<4139>}Ephesians 3:9. Compare ^{<5625>}Romans 16:25; ^{<4117>}1 Corinthians 2:7; ^{<3125>}Colossians 1:26. If we delight in the records of ancient things, and in the revelation of secret things, how welcome should the gospel be to us, which has in it such antiquity and such mystery! It was *from the foundation of the world* wrapt up in types and shadows, which are *now done away*; and those secret things are now become such things revealed *as belong to us and to our children*, (^{<5329>}Deuteronomy 29:29.

2. The manner of Christ's preaching; he preached by parables; wise sayings, but figurative, and which help to engage attention and a diligent search. Solomon's sententious dictates, which are full of similitudes, are

called *proverbs*, or *parables*; it is the same word; but in this, as in other things, *Behold a greater than Solomon is here, in whom are hid treasures of wisdom.*

II. The parable of the *tares*, and the exposition of it; they must be taken together, for the exposition explains the parable and the parable illustrates the exposition.

Observe,

1. The disciples' request to their Master to have this parable expounded to them (v. 36); *Jesus sent the multitude away*; and it is to be feared many of them went away no wiser than they came; they had heard a sound of words, and that was all. It is sad to think how many go away from sermons with the word of grace in their hearts. Christ *went into the house*, not so much for his own repose, as for particular converse with his disciples, whose instruction he chiefly intended in all his preaching. He was ready to do good in all places; the disciples laid hold on the opportunity, and *they came to him*. Note, Those who would be wise for every thing else, must be wise to discern and improve their opportunities, especially of converse with Christ, of converse with him alone, in secret meditation and prayer. It is very good, when we return from the solemn assembly, to talk over what we have heard there, and by familiar discourse to help one another to understand and remember it, and to be affected with it; for we lose the benefit of many a sermon by vain and unprofitable discourse after it. See ^{<228>}Luke 24:32; ^{<116>}Deuteronomy 6:6, 7. It is especially good, if it may be, to ask of the ministers of the word the meaning of the word, for *their lips should keep knowledge*, ^{<317>}Malachi 2:7. Private conference would contribute much to our profiting by public preaching. Nathan's *Thou art the man*, was that which touched David to the heart.

The disciples' request to their Master was, *Declare unto us the parable of the tares*. This implied an acknowledgement of their ignorance, which they were not ashamed to make. It is probable they apprehended the general scope of the parable, but they desired to understand it more particularly, and to be assured that they took it right. Note, Those are rightly disposed for Christ's teaching, that are sensible of their ignorance, and sincerely desirous to be taught. He will *teach the humble* (^{<258>}Psalm 25:8, 9), but *will for this be enquired of. If any man lack instruction, let him ask it of God*. Christ had expounded the foregoing parable unasked,

but for the exposition of this they ask him. Note, The mercies we have received must be improved, both for direction what to pray for, and for our encouragement in prayer. The first light and the first grace are given in a preventing way, further degrees of both which must be daily prayed for.

2. The exposition Christ gave of the parable, in answer to their request; so ready is Christ to answer such desires of his disciples. Now the drift of the parable is, to represent to us the present and future state of the kingdom of heaven, the gospel church: Christ's care of it, the devil's enmity against it, the mixture that there is in it of good and bad in the other world. Note, The visible church is the kingdom of heaven; though there be many hypocrites in it, Christ rules in it as a King; and there is a remnant in it, that are the subjects and heirs of heaven, from whom, as the better part, it is denominated: the church is *the kingdom of heaven* upon earth.

Let us go over the particulars of the exposition of the parable.

(1.) *He that sows the good seed is the Son of man.* Jesus Christ is the Lord of the field, *the Lord of the harvest*, the Sower of good seed. When *he ascended on high, he gave gifts to the world*; not only good ministers, but other good men. Note, Whatever good seed there is in the world, it all comes from the hand of Christ, and is of his sowing: truths preached, graces planted, souls sanctified, are good seed, and all owing to Christ. Ministers are instruments in Christ's hand to sow good seed; are employed by him and under him, and the success of their labours depends purely upon his blessing; so that it may well be said, It is Christ, and no other, that sows the good seed; he *is the Son of man*, one of us, that his terror might not make us afraid; *the Son of man*, the Mediator, and that has authority.

(2.) *The field is the world*; the world of mankind, a large field, capable of bringing forth good fruit; the more is it to be lamented that it brings forth so much bad fruit: the world here is the visible church, scattered all the world over, not confined to one nation. Observe, In the parable it is called *his field*; *the world is Christ's field*, for *all things are delivered unto him of the Father*: whatever power and interest the devil has in the world, it is usurped and unjust; when Christ comes to take possession, he comes whose right it is; it is his field, and because it is his he took care to sow it with good seed.

(3.) *The good seed are the children of the kingdom*, true saints. They are,

[1.] The *children of the kingdom*; not in profession only, as the Jews were (~~482~~ Matthew 8:12), but in sincerity; Jews inwardly, Israelites indeed, incorporated in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ the great King of the church.

[2.] They are the good seed, precious as seed, ~~486~~ Psalm 126:6. The seed is the substance of the field; so the holy seed, ~~203~~ Isaiah 6:13. The seed is scattered, so are the saints; dispersed, here one and there another, though in some places thicker sown than in others. The seed is that from which fruit is expected; what fruit of honour and service God has from this world he has from the saints, whom he has *sown unto himself in the earth*, ~~203~~ Hosea 2:23.

(4.) *The tares are the children of the wicked one.* Here is the character of sinners, hypocrites, and all profane and wicked people.

[1.] They are the children of the devil, as a wicked one. Though they do not own his name, yet they bear his image, do his lusts, and from him they have their education; he rules over them, he works in them, ~~488~~ Ephesians 2:2; ~~484~~ John 8:44.

[2.] They are tares in the field of this world; they do no good, they do hurt; unprofitable in themselves, and hurtful to *the good seed*, both by temptation and persecution: they are weeds in the garden, have the same rain, and sunshine, and soil, with the good plants, but are good for nothing: *the tares are among the wheat*. Note, God has so ordered it, that good and bad should be mixed together in this world, that the good may be exercised, the bad left inexcusable, and a difference made between earth and heaven.

(5.) *The enemy that sowed the tares is the devil*; a sworn enemy to Christ and all that is good, to the glory of the good God, and the comfort and happiness of all good men. He is an enemy to the field of the world, which he endeavours to make his own, by sowing his tares in it. Ever since he became a wicked spirit himself, he has been industrious to promote wickedness, and has made it his business, aiming therein to counterwork Christ.

Now concerning the sowing of the tares, observe in the parable,

[1.] That they were sown *while men slept*. Magistrates slept, who by their power, ministers slept, who by their preaching, should have prevented this

mischief. Note, Satan watches all opportunities, and lays hold of all advantages, to propagate vice and profaneness. The prejudice he does to particular persons is when reason and conscience sleep, when they are off their guard; we have therefore need to *be sober, and vigilant*. It was in the night, for that is the sleeping time. Note, Satan rules in *the darkness of this world*; that gives him an opportunity to sow tares, ~~DAVID~~ Psalm 104:20. It was *while men slept*; and there is no remedy but men must have some sleeping time. Note, It is as impossible for us to prevent hypocrites being in the church, as it is for the husbandman, when he is asleep, to hinder an enemy from spoiling his field.

[2.] The enemy, when he had sown the tares, *went his way* (v. 25), that it might not be known who did it. Note, When Satan is doing the greatest mischief, he studies most to conceal himself; for his design is in danger of being spoiled if he be seen in it; and therefore, when he comes to sow tares, he *transforms himself into an angel of light*, ~~PAUL~~ 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14. He *went his way*, as if he had done no harm; *such is the way of the adulterous woman*, ~~DAVID~~ Proverbs 30:20. Observe, Such is the proneness of fallen man to sin, that if the enemy sow the tares, he may even go his way, they will spring up of themselves and do hurt; whereas, when good seed is sown, it must be tended, watered, and fenced, or it will come to nothing.

[3.] The tares appeared not till *the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit*, v. 26. There is a great deal of secret wickedness in the hearts of men, which is long hid under the cloak of a plausible profession, but breaks out at last. As the good seed, so the tares, lie a great while under the clods, and at first springing up, it is hard to distinguish them; but when a trying time comes, when fruit is to be brought forth, when good is to be done that has difficulty and hazard attending it, then you will return and discern between the sincere and the hypocrite: then you may say, This is wheat, and that is tares.

[4.] The servants, when they were aware of it, complained to their master (v. 27); *Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field?* No doubt he did; whatever is amiss in the church, we are sure it is not of Christ: considering the seed which Christ sows, we may well ask, with wonder, *Whence should these tares come?* Note, The rise of errors, the breaking out of scandals, and the growth of profaneness, are matter of great grief to all the servants of Christ; especially to his faithful ministers, who are directed to complain of it to him whose the field is. It is sad to see such tares, such

weeds, in the garden of the Lord; to see the good soil wasted, the good seed choked, and such a reflection cast on the name and honour of Christ, as if his field were no better than *the field of the slothful, all grown over with thorns.*

[5.] The Master was soon aware whence it was (v. 28); *An enemy has done this.* He does not lay the blame upon the servants; they could not help it, but had done what was in their power to prevent it. Note, The ministers of Christ, that are faithful and diligent, shall not be judged of Christ, and therefore should not be reproached by men, for the mixtures of bad with good, hypocrites with the sincere, in the field of the church. *It must needs be that such offences will come;* and they shall not be laid to our charge, if we do our duty, though it have not the desired success. Though they sleep, if they do not love sleep; though tares be sown, if they do not sow them nor water them, nor allow of them, the blame shall not lie at their door.

[6.] The servants were very forward to have these tares rooted up. “*Wilt thou that we go and do it presently?*” Note, The over-hasty and inconsiderate zeal of Christ's servants, before they have consulted with their Master, is sometimes ready, with the hazard of the church, to root out all that they presume to be tares: *Lord, wilt thou that we call for fire from heaven?*

[7.] The Master very wisely prevented this (v. 29); *Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.* Note, It is not possible for any man infallibly to distinguish between tares and wheat, but he may be mistaken; and therefore such is the wisdom and grace of Christ, that he will rather permit the tares, than any way endanger the wheat. It is certain, scandalous offenders are to be censured, and we are to withdraw from them; those who are openly *the children of the wicked one,* are not to be admitted to special ordinances; yet it is possible there may be a discipline, either so mistaken in its rules, or so over-nice in the application of them, as may prove vexatious to many that are truly godly and conscientious. Great caution and moderation must be used in inflicting and continuing church censures, lest the wheat be trodden down, if not plucked up. The *wisdom from above,* as it is *pure,* so it is *peaceable,* and those who oppose themselves must not be cut off, but instructed, and *with meekness,* ⁵¹²⁵2 Timothy 2:25. The tares, if continued under the means of grace, may become good corn; therefore have patience with them.

(6.) *The harvest is the end of the world*, v. 39. This world will have an end; though it continue long, it will not continue always; time will shortly be swallowed up in eternity. At the end of the world, there will be a great harvest-day, a day of judgment; at harvest all is ripe and ready to be cut down: both good and bad are ripe at the great-day, ^{<661>}Revelation 6:11. It is *the harvest of the earth*, ^{<645>}Revelation 14:15. At harvest the reapers cut down all before them; not a field, not a corner, is left behind; so at the great day all must be judged (^{<612>}Revelation 20:12, 13); God has *set a harvest* (^{<361>}Hosea 6:11), and it shall not fail, ^{<182>}Genesis 8:22. At harvest every man reaps as he sowed; every man's ground, and seed, and skill, and industry, will be manifested: see ^{<407>}Galatians 6:7, 8. Then they who *sowed precious seed, will come again with rejoicing* (^{<365>}Psalm 126:5, 6), with *the joy of harvest* (^{<293>}Isaiah 9:3); when *the sluggard, who would not plough by reason of cold, shall beg, and have nothing* (^{<104>}Proverbs 20:4); shall cry, *Lord, Lord*, but in vain; when the harvest of those who sowed to the flesh, shall *be a day of grief, and of desperate sorrow*, ^{<271>}Isaiah 17:11.

(7.) *The reapers are the angels*: they shall be employed, in the great day, in executing Christ's righteous sentences, both of approbation and condemnation, as ministers of his justice, ^{<151>}Matthew 25:31. The angels are skilful, strong, and swift, obedient servants to Christ, holy enemies to the wicked, and faithful friends to all the saints, and therefore fit to be thus employed. *He that reapeth receiveth wages*, and the angels will not be unpaid for their attendance; for *he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together* (^{<465>}John 4:36); that is *joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God*.

(8.) Hell-torments are the *fire*, into which the *tares* shall then be cast, and in which they shall be burned. At the great day a distinction will be made, and with it a vast difference; it will be a notable day indeed.

[1.] The tares will then be gathered out: *The reapers* (whose primary work it is to gather in the corn) shall be charged first to *gather out the tares*. Note, Though good and bad are together in this world undistinguished, yet at the great day they shall be parted; no tares shall then be among the wheat; no sinners among the saints: then you shall plainly discern *between the righteous and the wicked*, which here sometimes it is hard to do, ^{<108>}Malachi 3:18; 4:1. Christ will not bear always, ^{<151>}Psalm 50:1, etc. They shall *gather out of his kingdom all wicked things that offend, and all wicked persons that do iniquity: when he begins, he will make a full end*.

All those corrupt doctrines, worships, and practices, which have offended, have been scandals to the church, and stumbling-blocks to men's consciences, shall be condemned by the righteous Judge in that day, and consumed by *the brightness of his coming*; all *the wood, hay, and stubble* (⁴⁸²1 Corinthians 3:12); and then *woe to them that do iniquity, that make a trade of it*, and persist in it; not only those in the last age of Christ's kingdom upon earth, but those in every age. Perhaps here is an allusion to ³⁰³Zephaniah 1:3, *I will consume the stumbling-blocks with the wicked*.

[2.] They will then be *bound in bundles*, v. 30. Sinners of the same sort will be bundled together in the great day: a bundle of atheists, a bundle of epicures, a bundle of persecutors, and a great bundle of hypocrites. Those who have been associates in sin, will be so in shame and sorrow; and it will be an aggravation of their misery, as the society of glorified saints will add to their bliss. Let us pray, as David, *Lord, gather not my soul with sinners* (⁴⁸⁹Psalm 26:9), but let it be bound in *the bundle of life, with the Lord our God*, (⁴⁹³1 Samuel 25:29).

[3.] They will be *cast into a furnace of fire*; such will be the end of wicked, mischievous people, that are in the church as *tares in the field*; they are fit for nothing but fire; to it they shall go, it is the fittest place for them. Note, Hell is a furnace of fire, kindled by the wrath of God, and kept burning by the bundles of tares cast into it, who will be ever in the consuming, but never consumed. But he slides out of the metaphor into a description of those torments that are designed to be set forth by it: *There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth*; comfortless sorrow, and an incurable indignation at God, themselves, and one another, will be the endless torture of damned souls. Let us therefore, *knowing these terrors of the Lord*, be persuaded not to do iniquity.

(9.) Heaven is the *barn* into which all God's wheat shall be gathered in that harvest-day. *But gather the wheat into my barn*: so it is in the parable, v. 30. Note,

[1.] In the field of this world good people are the wheat, the most precious grain, and the valuable part of the field.

[2.] This wheat shall shortly be gathered, gathered from among the tares and weeds: all *gathered together in a general assembly*, all the Old-Testament saints, all the New-Testament saints, not one missing. *Gather my saints together unto me*, (⁴⁸⁵Psalm 50:5).

[3.] All God's wheat shall be lodged together in God's barn: particular souls are housed at death as a shock of corn (^{<RB>}Job 5:26), but the general in-gathering will be at the end of time: God's wheat will then be put together, and no longer scattered; there will be sheaves of corn, as well as bundles of tares: they will then be secured, and no longer exposed to wind and weather, sin and sorrow: no longer afar off, and at a great distance, in the field, but near, in the barn. Nay, heaven is a *garner* (^{<RB>}Matthew 3:12), in which the wheat will not only be separated from the tares of ill companions, but sifted from the chaff of their own corruptions.

In the explanation of the parable, this is gloriously represented (v. 43); *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. First*, It is their present honour, that God is their Father. *Now are we the sons of God* (^{<RB>}1 John 3:2); *our Father in heaven* is King there. Christ, when he went to heaven, went to his *Father, and our Father*, ^{<RB>}John 20:17. It is our *Father's house*, nay, it is *our Father's* palace, his throne, ^{<RB>}Revelation 3:21. *Secondly*, The honour in reserve for them is, that they *shall shine forth as the sun in that kingdom*. Here they are obscure and hidden (^{<RB>}Colossians 3:3), their beauty is eclipsed by their poverty, and the meanness of their outward condition; their own weaknesses and infirmities, and the reproach and disgrace cast upon them, cloud them; but then they shall shine forth as the sun from behind a dark cloud; at death they shall shine forth to themselves; at the great day they will shine forth publicly before all the world, *their bodies will be made like Christ's glorious body*: they shall shine by reflection, with a light borrowed from the Fountain of light; their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification published; God will own them for his children, and will produce the record of all their services and sufferings for his name: they shall shine as the sun, the most glorious of all visible beings. The glory of the saints is in the Old Testament compared to that of the firmament and the stars, but here to that of the sun; *for life and immortality are brought to a much clearer light by the gospel*, than under the law. Those who shine as lights in this world, that God may be glorified, shall shine as the sun in the other world, that *they* may be glorified. Our Saviour concludes, as before, with a demand of attention; *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear*. These are things which it is our happiness to hear of, and our duty to hearken to.

III. Here is the parable of the *grain of mustard-seed*, v. 31, 32. The scope of this parable is to show, that the beginnings of the gospel *would be*

small, but that its latter end would greatly increase. In this way the gospel church, *the kingdom of God among us*, would be *set up in the world*; in this way the work of grace in the heart, *the kingdom of God within us*, would be carried on in particular persons.

Now concerning the work of the gospel, observe,

1. That it is commonly very weak and small at first, *like a grain of mustard-seed, which is one of the least of all seeds.* The kingdom of the Messiah, which was now in the setting up, made but a small figure; Christ and the apostles, compared with the grandees of the world, appeared *like a grain of mustard-seed, the weak things of the world.* In particular places, the first breaking out of the gospel light is but as *the dawning of the day*; and in particular souls, it is at first *the day of small things*, like a bruised reed. Young converts are like *lambs* that must be *carried in his arms*, ^{<301>}Isaiah 40:11. There is a little faith, but there is much lacking in it (^{<310>}1 Thessalonians 3:10), and the *groanings* such as *cannot be uttered*, they are so small; a principle of spiritual life, and some motion, but scarcely discernible.

2. That yet it is growing and coming on. Christ's kingdom strangely got ground; great accessions were made to it; nations were born at once, in spite of all the oppositions it met with from hell and earth. In the soul where grace is true it will grow really, though perhaps insensibly. *A grain of mustard-seed* is small, but however it is seed, and has in it a disposition to grow. Grace will be getting ground, shining more and more, ^{<308>}Proverbs 4:18. Gracious habits confirmed, actings quickened, and knowledge more clear, faith more confirmed, love more inflamed; here is the seed growing.

3. That it will at last come to a great degree of strength and usefulness; *when it is grown to some maturity, it becomes a tree*, much larger in those countries than in ours. The church, like *the vine brought out of Egypt*, has taken root, and *filled the earth*, ^{<309>}Psalms 80:9-11. The church is like a great tree, in which the fowls of the air do lodge; God's people have recourse to it for food and rest, shade and shelter. In particular persons, the principle of grace, if true, will persevere and be perfected at last: growing grace will be strong grace, and will bring much to pass. Grown Christians must covet to be useful to others, as the mustard-seed when grown is to the birds; that those who dwell near or under their shadow may be the better for them, ^{<347>}Hosea 14:7.

IV. Here is the parable of the *leaven*, v. 33. The scope of this is much the same with that of the foregoing parable, to show that the gospel should prevail and be successful by degrees, but silently and insensibly; the preaching of the gospel is like leaven, and works like leaven in the hearts of those who receive it.

- 1.** *A woman took this leaven; it was her work.* Ministers are employed in leavening places, in leavening souls, with the gospel. *The woman is the weaker vessel*, and we have this treasure in such vessels.
- 2.** The leaven was *hid in three measures of meal*. The heart is, as the meal, soft and pliable; it is the tender heart that is likely to profit by the word: leaven among corn unground does not work, nor does the gospel in souls unhumbled and unbroken for sin: the law grinds the heart, and then the gospel leavens it. It is *three measures of meal*, a great quantity, for *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*. The meal must be kneaded, before it receive the leaven; our hearts, as they must be broken, so they must be moistened, and pains taken with them to prepare them for the word, that they may receive the impressions of it. The leaven must be *hid in the heart* (^{<434>}Psalm 119:11), not so much for secrecy (for it will show itself) as for safety; our inward thought must be upon it, we must lay it up, as Mary laid up the sayings of Christ, ^{<405>}Luke 2:51. When the woman hides the leaven in the meal, it is with an intention that it should communicate its taste and relish to it; so we must treasure up the word in our souls, that we may be sanctified by it, ^{<477>}John 17:17.
- 3.** The leaven thus hid in the dough, works there, it ferments; *the word is quick and powerful*, ^{<3912>}Hebrews 4:12. The leaven works speedily, so does the word, and yet gradually. What a sudden change did Elijah's mantle make upon Elisha! ^{<4180>}1 Kings 19:20. It works silently and insensibly (^{<406>}Mark 4:26), yet strongly and irresistibly: it does its work without noise, for so is *the way of the Spirit*, but does it without fail. Hide but the leaven in the dough, and all the world cannot hinder it from communicating its taste and relish to it, and yet none sees how it is done, but by degrees *the whole is leavened*.

(1.) Thus it was in the world. The apostles, by their preaching, hid a handful of leaven in the great mass of mankind, and it had a strange effect; it put the world into a ferment, and in a sense turned it *upside down* (^{<476>}Acts 17:6), and by degrees made a wonderful change in the taste and

relish of it: the savour of the gospel was *manifested in every place*, ^{<4704>}2 Corinthians 2:14; ^{<659>}Romans 15:19. It was thus effectual, not by outward force, and therefore not by any such force resistible and conquerable, but *by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, who works, and none can hinder*.

(2.) Thus it is in the heart. When the gospel comes into the soul,

[1.] It works a change, not in the substance; the dough is the same, but in the quality; it makes us to savour otherwise than we have done, and other things to savour with us otherwise than they used to do, ^{<485>}Romans 8:5.

[2.] It works a universal change; it diffuses itself into all the powers and faculties of the soul, and alters the property even of the members of the body, ^{<483>}Romans 6:13.

[3.] This change is such as makes the soul to partake of the nature of the word, as the dough does of the leaven. We are delivered into it as into a mould (^{<487>}Romans 6:17), changed into the same image (^{<488>}2 Corinthians 3:18), like the impression of the seal upon the wax. The gospel savours of God, and Christ, and free grace, and another world, and these things now relish with the soul. It is a word of faith and repentance, holiness and love, and these are wrought in the soul by it. This savour is communicated insensibly, for *our life is hid*; but inseparably, for *grace is a good part that shall never be taken away* from those who have it. When the dough is leavened, then to the oven with it; trials and afflictions commonly attend this change; but thus saints are fitted to be bread for our Master's table.

^{<434>}MATTHEW 13:44-52

VARIOUS PARABLES

We have four short parables in these verses.

I. That of the *treasure hid in the field*. Hitherto he had compared the *kingdom of heaven* to small things, because its beginning was small; but, lest any should thence take occasion to think meanly of it, in this parable and the next he represents it as of great value in itself, and of great advantage to those who embrace it, and are willing to come up to its terms; it is here likened *to a treasure hid in the field*, which, if we will, we may make our own.

1. Jesus Christ is the true Treasure; in him there is an abundance of all that which is rich and useful, and will be a portion for us: *all fulness* (<sup><SUB></sup>Colossians 1:19; <sup><SUB></sup>John 1:16): *treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (<sup><SUB></sup>Colossians 2:3), of righteousness, grace, and peace; these are laid up for us in Christ; and, if we have an interest in him, it is all our own.

2. The gospel is the field in which this treasure is hid: it is hid in the word of the gospel, both the Old-Testament and the New-Testament gospel. In gospel ordinances it is hid as the milk in the breast, the marrow in the bone, the manna in the dew, the water in the well (<sup><SUB></sup>Isaiah 12:3), *the honey in the honey-comb*. It is hid, not *in a garden enclosed, or a spring shut up, but in a field*, an open field; *whoever will, let him come, and search the scriptures*; let him dig in *this field* (<sup><SUB></sup>Proverbs 2:4); and whatever royal mines we find, they are all our own, if we take the right course.

3. It is a great thing to discover the treasure hid in this field, and the unspeakable value of it. The reason why so many slight the gospel, and will not be at the expense, and run the hazard, of entertaining it, is because they look only upon the surface of the field, and judge by that, and so see no excellency in the Christian institutes above those of the philosophers; nay, the richest mines are often in grounds that appear most barren; and therefore they will not so much as bid for the field, much less come up to the price. *What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* What is the Bible more than other good books? The gospel of Christ more than Plato's philosophy, or Confucius's morals: but those who have *searched the scriptures*, so as in them to find Christ and *eternal life* (<sup><SUB></sup>John 5:39), have discovered such a treasure in this field as makes it infinitely more valuable.

4. Those who discern this treasure in the field, and value it aright, will never be easy till they have made it their own upon any terms. He that has found this treasure, hides it, which denotes a holy jealousy, *lest we come short* (<sup><SUB></sup>Hebrews 4:1), *looking diligently* (<sup><SUB></sup>Hebrews 12:15), lest Satan come between us and it. He rejoices in it, though as yet the bargain be not made; he is glad there is such a bargain to be had, and that he is in a fair way to have an interest in Christ; that the matter is in treaty: their *hearts may rejoice*, who are yet *but seeking the Lord*, (<sup><SUB></sup>Psalms 105:3). He resolves to *buy this field*: they who embrace gospel offers, upon gospel terms, buy this field; they make it their own, for the sake of the unseen

treasure in it. It is Christ in the gospel that we are to have an eye to; we need not go up to heaven, but Christ in the word is nigh us. And so intent he is upon it, *that he sells all to buy this field*: they who would have saving benefit by Christ, must be willing to part with all, that they may make it sure to themselves; must *count every thing but loss, that they may win Christ, and be found in him*.

II. That of *the pearl of price* (v. 45, 46), which is to the same purport with the former, of the treasure. *The dream is thus doubled, for the thing is certain*.

Note,

1. All the children of men are busy, *seeking goodly pearls*: one would be rich, another would be honourable, another would be learned; but the most are imposed upon, and take up with counterfeits for pearls.

2. Jesus Christ is a *Pearl of great price*, a Jewel of inestimable value, which will make those who have it rich, truly rich, rich toward God; in having him, we have enough to make us happy here and for ever.

3. A true Christian is a spiritual *merchant*, that seeks and finds this pearl of price; that does not take up with any thing short of an interest in Christ, and, as one that is resolved to be spiritually rich, trades high: *He went and bought that pearl*; did not only bid for it, but purchased it. What will it avail us to know Christ, if we do not know him as ours, *made to us wisdom?* ^{}1 Corinthians 1:30.

4. Those who would have a saving interest in Christ, must be willing to part with all for him, leave all to follow him. Whatever stands in opposition to Christ, or in competition with him for our love and service, we must cheerfully quit it, though ever so dear to us. A man may buy gold too dear, but not this pearl of price.

III. That of *the net cast into the sea*, v. 47-49.

1. Here is the parable itself. Where note,

(1.) The world is a vast sea, and the children of men *are things creeping innumerable, both small and great*, in that sea, ^{}Psalm 104:25. Men in their natural state are *like the fishes of the sea* that have no ruler over them, ^{}Habakkuk 1:14.

(2.) The preaching of the gospel is the casting of a net into this sea, to catch something out of it, for his glory who has the sovereignty of the sea. Ministers are *fishers of men*, employed in casting and drawing this net; and *then* they speed, when at Christ's word they let down the net; otherwise, they *toil and catch nothing*.

(3.) This net gathers of every kind, as large dragnets do. In the visible church there is a deal of trash and rubbish, dirt and weeds and vermin, as well as fish.

(4.) There is a time coming when this net will be full, and drawn to the shore; a set time when the gospel shall have fulfilled that for which it was sent, and we are sure it shall not return void, ²⁵⁵⁰Isaiah 55:10, 11. The net is now filling; sometimes it fills faster than at other times, but still it fills, and will be drawn to shore, when the *mystery of God shall be finished*.

(5.) When the net is full and drawn to the shore, there shall be a separation between the good and bad that were gathered in it. Hypocrites and true Christians shall then be parted; the good shall be gathered into vessels, as valuable, and therefore to be carefully kept, but the bad shall be cast away, as vile and unprofitable; and miserable is the condition of those who are cast away in that day. While the net is in the sea, it is not known what is in it, the fishermen themselves cannot distinguish; but they carefully draw it, and all that is in it, to the shore, for the sake of the good that is in it. Such is God's care for the visible church, and such should ministers' concern be for those under their charge, though they are mixed.

2. Here is the explanation of the latter part of the parable, the former is obvious and plain enough: we see gathered in the visible church, *some of every kind*: but the latter part refers to that which is yet to come, and is therefore more particularly explained, v. 49, 50. *So shall it be at the end of the world*; then, and not till then, will the dividing, discovering day be. We must not look for the net full of all good fish; the vessels will be so, but in the net they are mixed. See here,

(1.) The distinguishing of the wicked from the righteous. The angels of heaven shall come forth to do that which the angels of the churches could never do; they shall *sever the wicked from among the just*; and we need not ask how they will distinguish them when they have both their commission and their instructions from him that knows all men, and

particularly knows them that are *his*, and them that are *not*, and we may be sure there shall be no mistake or blunder either way.

(2.) The doom of the wicked when they are thus severed. They shall be *cast into the furnace*, Note, Everlasting misery and sorrow will certainly be the portion of those who live among sanctified ones, but themselves die unsanctified. This is the same with what we had before, v. 42. Note, Christ himself preached often of hell-torments, as the everlasting punishment of hypocrites; and it is good for us to be often reminded of this awakening, quickening truth.

IV. Here is the parable of the *good householder*, which is intended to rivet all the rest.

1. The occasion of it was the good proficiency which the disciples had made in learning, and their profiting by this sermon in particular.

(1.) He asked them, *Have ye understood all these things?* Intimating, that if they had not, he was ready to explain what they did not understand. Note, It is the will of Christ, that all those who read and hear the word should understand it; for otherwise how should they get good by it? It is therefore good for us, when we have read or heard the word, to examine ourselves, or to be examined, whether we have understood it or not. It is no disparagement to the disciples of Christ to be catechised. Christ invites us to seek to him for instruction, and ministers should proffer their service to those who have any good question to ask concerning what they have heard.

(2.) They answered him, *Yea, Lord:* and we have reason to believe they said true, because, when they did not understand, they asked for an explication, v. 36. And the exposition of that parable was a key to the rest. Note, The right understanding of one good sermon, will very much help us to understand another; for good truths mutually explain and illustrate one another; and *knowledge is easy to him that understandeth*.

2. The scope of the parable itself was to give his approbation and commendation of their proficiency. Note, Christ is ready to encourage willing learners in his school, though they are but weak; and to say, *Well done, well said*.

(1.) He commends them as *scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*. They were now learning that they might teach, and the teachers among the

Jews were the scribes. Ezra, who *prepared his heart to teach in Israel*, is called a *ready scribe*, ^{<4106>}Ezra 7:6, 10. Now a skilful, faithful minister of the gospel is a scribe too; but for distinction, he is called a scribe *instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, well versed in the things of the gospel, and well able to teach those things. Note,

[1.] Those who are to instruct others, have need to be well instructed themselves. If the priest's lips must keep knowledge, his head must first have knowledge.

[2.] The instruction of a gospel minister must be in the *kingdom of heaven*, that is it about which his business lies. A man may be a great philosopher and politician, and yet if not instructed to the kingdom of heaven, he will make but a bad minister.

(2.) He compares them to a good householder, who *brings forth out of his treasure things new and old*; fruits of last year's growth and this year's gathering, abundance and variety, for the entertainment of his friends, ^{<2173>}Song of Solomon 7:13. See here,

[1.] What should be a minister's furniture, *a treasure of things new and old*. Those who have so many and various occasions, have need to stock themselves well in their gathering days with truths new and old, out of the Old Testament and out of the new; with ancient and modern improvements, *that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished*, ^{<5186>}2 Timothy 3:16, 17. Old experiences, and new observations, all have their use; and we must not content ourselves with old discoveries, but must be adding new. Live and learn.

[2.] What use he should make of this furniture; he should *bring forth*: laying up is in order to laying out, for the benefit of others. *Sic vox non vobis* — *You are to lay up, but not for yourselves*. Many are full, but they have no vent (^{<4829>}Job 32:19); have a talent, but they bury it; such are unprofitable servants; Christ himself received that he might give; so must we, and we shall have more. In bringing forth, things new and old do best together; old truths, but new methods and expressions, especially new affections.

JESUS'S OWN COUNTRYMEN ASTONISHED

We have here Christ in his own country. He went about doing good, yet left not any place till he had finished his testimony there at that time. His own countrymen had rejected him once, yet he came to them again. Note, Christ does not take refusers at their first word, but repeats his offers to those who have often repulsed them. In this, as in other things, Christ was like his brethren; he had a natural affection to his own country; *Patriam quisque amat, non quia pulchram, sed quia suam* — *Every one loves his country, not because it is beautiful, but because it is his own.* Seneca. His treatment this time was much the same as before, scornful and spiteful. Observe,

I. How they expressed their contempt of him. When he *taught them in their synagogue, they were astonished*; not that they were taken with his preaching, or admired his doctrine in itself, but only that it should be his; looking upon him as unlikely to be such a teacher. Two things they upbraided him with.

1. His want of academical education. They owned that he had wisdom, and did mighty works; but the question was, Whence he had them: for they knew that he was not brought up at the feet of the rabbin: he had never been at the university, nor taken his degree, nor was called of men, *Rabbi, Rabbi*. Note, Mean and prejudiced spirits are apt to judge of men by their education, and to enquire more into their rise than into their reasons. “*Whence has this man these mighty works? Did he come honestly by them? Has he not been studying the black art?*” Thus they turned that against him which was really for him; for if they had not been wilfully blind, they must have concluded him to be divinely assisted and commissioned, who without the help of education gave such proofs of extraordinary wisdom and power.

2. The meanness and poverty of his relations, v. 55, 56.

(1.) They upbraid him with his father. *Is not this the carpenter's son?* Yes, it is true he was reputed so: and what harm in that? No disparagement to him to be the son of an honest tradesman. They remember not (though they might have known it) that this carpenter was *of the house of David*

(^{<107>}Luke 1:27), *a son of David* (ch. 1:20); though a carpenter, yet a person of honour. Those who are willing to pick quarrels will overlook that which is worthy and deserving, and fasten upon that only which seems mean. Some sordid spirits regard no branch, no not the Branch from the stem of Jesse (^{<211>}Isaiah 11:1), if it be not the top branch.

(2.) They upbraid him with his mother; and what quarrel have they with her? Why, truly, *his mother is called Mary*, and that was a very common name, and they all knew her, and knew her to be an ordinary person; she *was called Mary*, not *Queen Mary*, nor *Lady Mary*, nor so much as *Mistress Mary*, but plain *Mary*; and this is turned to his reproach, as if men had nothing to be valued by but foreign extraction, noble birth, or splendid titles; poor things to measure worth by.

(3.) They upbraid him with his brethren, whose names they knew, and had them ready enough to serve this turn; James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, good men but poor men, and therefore despised; and Christ for their sakes. These brethren, it is probable, were Joseph's children by a former wife; or whatever their relation was to him, they seem to have been brought up with him in the same family. And therefore of the calling of three of these, who were of the twelve, to that honour (James, Simon, and Jude, the same with Thaddeus), we read not particularly, because they needed not such an express call into acquaintance with Christ who had been the companions of his youth.

(4.) His sisters too are all with us; they should therefore have loved him and respected him the more, because he was one of themselves, but therefore they despised him. They were *offended in him*: they stumbled at these stumbling-stones, for he was set for *a sign that should be spoken against*, (^{<103>}Luke 2:34; ^{<214>}Isaiah 8:14.

II. See how he resented this contempt, v. 57, 58.

1. It did not trouble his heart. It appears he was not much concerned at it; he *despised the shame*, (^{<510>}Hebrews 12:2. Instead of aggravating the affront, or expressing an offence at it, or returning such an answer to their foolish suggestions as they deserved, he mildly imputes it to the common humour of the children of men, to undervalue excellences that are cheap, and common, and home-bred. It is usually so. *A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country.* Note,

(1.) Prophets should have honour paid them, and commonly have; men of God are great men, and men of honour, and challenge respect. It is strange indeed if prophets have not honour.

(2.) Notwithstanding this, they are commonly least regarded and revered in their own country, nay, and sometimes are most envied. Familiarity breeds contempt.

2. It did for the present (to speak with reverence), in effect, tie his hands: *He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.* Note, Unbelief is the great obstruction to Christ's favours. *All things are in general possible to God* (^{<4125}Matthew 19:26), but then it is *to him that believes* as to the particulars, ^{<4125}Mark 9:23. The gospel is *the power of God unto salvation*, but then it is *to every one that believes*, ^{<4116}Romans 1:16. So that if mighty works be not wrought in us, it is not for want of power or grace in Christ, but for want of faith in us. *By grace ye are saved*, and that is a mighty work, but it is *through faith*, ^{<4118}Ephesians 2:8.