

THE SEED UPON STONY GROUND

NO. 1132

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14, 1873
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth,
 and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:
 but when the sun was up, it was scorched;
 and because it had no root, it withered away.”*
Mark 4:5-6

THE Gospel seed, according to the parable, falls upon all kinds of soil. Some of its precious grains drop upon the hard pathway, some upon the rock, some among the thorns, and only a portion, perhaps a smaller proportion than one in four, falls upon good ground, in which it finds a congenial abiding place.

The preacher, therefore, will not meet with unmixed success in all directions. He may look for a full recompense from his work as a whole, but he must not fondly suppose that everywhere the good Word will become effectual, for in many it will be a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life.

Even when Jesus preached but few received Him, and of Paul's ministry it is recorded that, "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." It is for the beginner in holy service to go forward with reasonable expectations, lest he should ere long weary of the work, and leave it because of his bitter disappointments.

Mark, with care that the sower in the parable is not blamed for having scattered his seed upon soil which proved to be unproductive. Not a word of censure is recorded against him on that account, from which it is fair to infer that he did no more and no less than his duty, and that the minister of Christ is to scatter the seed of the Gospel broadcast among all mankind. It is God's work to direct the saving Word into the chosen hearts which He has prepared to receive it.

But as for us, we are to preach the Gospel to every creature, and going out into the streets and lanes of the city, as many as we find we are to bid to the supper. Many are called but few are chosen. It was never intended that the external call should be as narrow as the election, yet there are some ministers whose preaching consists far more of an analysis of soils than of a sowing of seed.

Leaving the analyzing of the soil to God, I take my commission from His hands and desire to fulfill it. Stony-ground hearer, there is a handful of seed for you. You who are hard like the trodden road, there is a handful for you. And even among the thorns, which are plentiful enough in this age, shall the good seed fall like a heavenly shower.

And if God shall graciously direct it to His own chosen, and they, like the good ground, shall receive it, it will be His doing. It will never be accomplished by any skill of mine. It is mine to sow beside all waters, and His to give the increase. The best shot that was ever made with bow and arrow was taken at a venture, and Ahab the king was pierced between the joints of his harness. So also, while drawing my bow to preach the Gospel to every creature, my faith feels confident that the Lord will direct the arrow, and fulfill His purposes of grace.

I feel that I have very solemn work on hand. I have always pleasure in preaching upon encouraging topics, but this morning my themes are for sifting and testing. We have to deal with certain apparently good people, and to show that they are not what they seem. We have to put corn from the barn floor into the sieve, and it may be there will be much chaff to be blown away.

This is an operation not pleasant to the flesh, and one which needs much of the Spirit of God that we may perform it aright, lest the weak ones be sorely troubled, which is far enough from our desire.

Solemn discourse should have a solemn heart to utter it, and solemn hearts to hear it. May God grant it may be so at this time, that the sermon may be greatly profitable to every one of us, whether professors of the Gospel or not.

First, we shall *read the history of stony-ground hearers*. Secondly, we shall *mark the radical defect of their character*, and thirdly, we shall try to *learn a lesson* from the whole.

I. First, we have here A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CERTAIN PROFESSORS OF RELIGION.

Let us read it carefully. It is said of them, first, that *they heard the Word*. “These are they which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness.” They enjoyed the great privilege of hearing God’s Word. They heard the real Gospel—they did not attend upon ritualistic falsehoods or philosophic speculations. It was *the Word* of God which they heard.

The sower did not sow tares, but he sowed good corn. How happy are those who sit under a downright Gospel ministry! May God be pleased to multiply such ministries everywhere—and the lovers of them! How can we expect salvation to come to us if we do not hear the soul-saving Gospel? If we are listening merely to opinions and notions, and philosophies and superstitions, and not to the very Word of God, we cannot expect to find salvation. The Holy Ghost does not save men by means of lies, but if we hear the truth as it is in Jesus, we may hope that He will make it effectual to our conversion.

Remember, next, that hearing is not enough. “Hearers only” will not enter heaven—there must be a doing of the Word as well as a hearing of it. These people were good hearers, capital hearers, for they went further than hearing—they *received the Word*, not in the divine power or supernatural efficacy of it, but they nevertheless received it.

That is to say, they never caviled at it. They assented to it as they heard it, and recognized it as God’s truth. Receiving it, it produced an effect upon them. They were, in a measure, impressed by it. If the sermon spoke of the wrath of God on account of sin, they were alarmed. If it told them of the love of God in Christ Jesus, they were encouraged.

They did not always hear with dry eyes. They were not always like the seats they sat upon—unmoved and stolid. But they received the Word of God, it stirred their affections and their emotions. They felt its moving effects, and were thus led to many changes of life.

They went home and swept the chambers which had been full of filthiness. They cleansed, at any rate, the outside of their cups and platters, and took care that the sepulchre, if not cleansed of the dead men’s bones, should be decently whitewashed so as to shock no passer by. They were improved and reformed externally by what they heard, and so far they received it.

And there is this said about them, in the third place, that they *received it immediately*. In them it excited no questions, doubts, or conflicts. The preacher said, “This is the Word of God,” and they were content to believe him, though they knew not why. While other minds were asking for the authority of the message, and then, having recognized the authority, were battling hard with a thousand difficulties, these persons saved themselves a world of trouble by never thinking at all.

It was their father’s religion and their mother’s religion, therefore they believed it, they swallowed the pill with their eyes shut, caring nothing whether it was God’s truth or Satan’s lie. Anything like spiritual mastication of the doctrine they did not attempt, but they endorsed wholesale whatever they were taught. Priests themselves could not desire more plastic material.

These hearers had no hard strugglings to get at the Savior, no sense of sin to hold them back, no horrors of conscience to make them afraid, no alarms lest they should not be the Lord’s own people after all, no testings and siftings to see whether they possessed real repentance and acceptable faith.

They sprang into religion as a man may leap into a bath, head over heels at once. They said, “Surely this is the right thing, and we will have it.” And after a certain sort they did have it, not with any depth of consideration or weight of judgment, but immediately they received the Word.

It is added they received it with *gladness*. The immediate effect of receiving the Word was to make them very happy, and there are not a few who suppose that to be made very happy is a sure sign of being converted. Believe me, it is a very dubious sign indeed.

No doubt, one grand effect of the reception of the Gospel into the heart is to bring joy and peace through believing, but there are many kinds of joy and many sorts of peace. And there is a joy which is not the fruit of grace, but the growth of nature, and a peace which comes from delusion, and not from the Spirit of God.

We must take care we do not conclude that we are safe because we are “so happy.” The rich man who went to hell was happy when he fared sumptuously every day. The farmer, who said he would pull down his barns and build greater, was happy when he surveyed his stores. And so was the prodigal son happy while he was spending his living riotously—but theirs was a very different kind of joy from that which is the fruit of the Spirit.

The characters in our text looked at the happy side of religion exclusively. “There,” said the stony-ground hearer, “there is my mother. What a happy Christian she is. I have seen her in deep trial borne up by the Spirit of God. I have marked her when we have had deaths in the house, and seen how peaceful and quiet she has been. I will lay hold on Christ, for then I shall be as happy as she is.”

These stony-ground hearers think what a happy thing it must be to be forgiven, and so, indeed, it is, but they dwelt upon that alone. To be pardoned, to be a child of God, to be accepted in the Beloved, what precious things these must be!

And what a delightful thing to be numbered with God’s saints, to go to the communion table, and to be thought much of in the church! Are not all these ways of pleasantness? And to go to heaven at last, to die triumphantly, to be taken up to dwell where Jesus is amidst the glory—what joyful things! Who doubts it?

But these people dwelt only upon this view of the matter, and did not recollect that between this and heaven there are temptations to be combated and to be overcome, trials to be endured, stern trials, too, through which we can only be brought by divine help. Right arms must be cut off, and right eyes must be plucked out.

There are costs to be counted, and reckonings to be made, as to whether the future will repay for the labors of the present. Young Hopefuls vow that they will have the brave country of Canaan, but they do not recollect the roughness of the road thither. Like Pliable, they set out for the Celestial City, but they have not reckoned upon the Slough of Despond, and therefore after the first mouthful of mud, they are ready to turn back, and let those have the brave country who care for it—as for them, if they can keep whole bones in their body, they will be well-content to let the future go as it may.

These people, then, immediately received the Word with joy. How hopeful all this must have looked to the sower! Do you not see how easily ministers may be deceived? When you have only to preach, and men are willing to hear. Only to preach, and men are willing to receive—to receive the Gospel at once, without causing you any difficulty in arguing with them.

When they receive it with gladness, and you have not the trouble to cheer them up, and to meet their doubts and anxieties with a thousand promises selected out of the Word of God—is not this splendid work, which will richly repay the sower? Alas, we must not reckon our fruit by the buds! All is not gold that glitters, and it is not every egg that will be hatched.

We read further that these characters *made rapid progress*—they sprang up because they had no depth of earth. Because of their shallow soil, they were very rapid in their growth. These people heard the Gospel one day, received it, and felt sure that they were saved. At once they were full of joy and transport, and hastened to make a profession. They did not require time to sit down and see whether they could bear out that profession, or seek grace that they might not run before they were called.

But away they went, just as if a spark had been dropped into so much powder. They made a profession, and the next week they were teaching in the Sunday school. They were so sure they were on the right road that they were very vexed with other pilgrims who did not travel so rapidly. When they heard of Christians being anxious as to their condition, they said, “What nonsense! What reason is there for it?”

If they saw a deep-taught Christian tremblingly examining himself, they said, “Oh, you must not look at all at yourself. Never consider what is going on within.” They had received a one-sided Gospel only, and that quite contented them. But as to anything like the work of the Spirit of God in the soul, and the holy jealousy which is one of the best fruits of vital godliness, these they quite dispensed with.

They were going to drag the church behind them, and drive the world before them—and very soon they would distance even the ministry which had been the means, as they said, of their conversion. They grew from hyssops on the wall to cedars of Lebanon in about a week. They were THE men, and wisdom would die with them. Grand work to have to deal with these men, is it not? We shall see by and by, and shall have to learn that not every stem that puts forth leaves is a fruit-bearing branch.

In due time, according to the parable, *came the trial*. The seed was up, and soon the sun was up too, and began to scorch it. None will get to heaven without being tried on the road. Ask concerning those who stand in their white robes before the throne of God, who are those, and whence came they? And the answer will be, “These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

There is not a fragment of gold in all God’s temple but what has passed through the fire. Untried faith is no faith, untried grace is no grace. God will try His people, and discern between the precious and the vile.

According to the Savior’s explanation of the text, the trial came in the form of persecution. Ah! how many there are who have received the Word with gladness, who, if there were a stake in Smithfield, would very soon drop the profession of Christianity, for it would be too hot for them. Or if there were a prison ready for them in which they must lie till the moss grew on their eyelids, they would soon forsake the truth and turn aside to error.

We need not be much afraid of the revival of such tests, but there are other forms of persecution which mere professors are equally unable to bear. A sneer in society, a remark against Christianity from a person whom you are accustomed to respect, a look from someone who is above you in wealth, as he despises you for professing to be a follower of Christ.

Unkind remarks from a father, opposition from a husband, the desertion of some young companion with whom you hoped your life would be linked. Such matters—nothing like the stake or the prison—are yet quite sufficient to overcome flimsy professors, so that they are offended, and turn their backs upon the religion which they once so quickly espoused.

In many instances, to follow principle would involve a great loss in business. They could not afford to incur such a loss. If Christ could be had at a cheaper rate, they would have Him, but to lose all the treasures in Egypt! No, they could not do that, and so they renounce again that Christ whom they once called their all in all.

With others it has not been such a trial as that, but providential affliction. I painfully remember a man and his wife, who were members of this church for some time. and it was certainly true, as they affirmed, that from the very hour they made profession of religion, they began to be in trouble. And therefore they renounced the consolation because of the affliction, for they drew the conclusion that surely they could not be the people of God, or else God would not have so tried them—a conclusion which is the reverse of the teachings of Scripture.

Many will have Christ if He will pat them on the cheek, but not if He flog them with the rod. They will follow the Lord while He is on the giving hand, but they cannot believe in a God who takes away. They can bless Him while He enriches them, but they know nothing of that Job-like faith which exclaims, “The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Or perhaps, it may be that when they first made a profession of religion they did not know much about the temptations of life, but now they have moved from home, they have obtained a situation where there are young men who tell them of haunts of pleasurable vice.

Or they have left the circle of godly people in which they once moved, and are cast among ungodly ones, and alas, their mouths are watering for the sweets of the world. The basilisk of sinful pleasure has

cast a spell over them, and now Christ may go for Belial, true religion for worldliness, and following God for the indulgence of the flesh. Ah, how often is this the case!

Or perhaps, another shining of the sun has come upon them. They thought they believed the Gospel, but they have fallen among debaters. They are surrounded by a skeptical circle, where they have heard arguments they never heard before, and never having weighed anything, or considered the reasons why they believed in God and in Christ, they are quite staggered.

They have no depth of earth, no root-hold of the truth by conviction and solemn judgment of it. And so as soon as they meet with an atheist or a deist, or a skeptic of any form, they are like thistledown before the wind. Having no ballast in their vessel, the first breeze oversets them, and they are lost.

What a grand thing it is to be established in the faith, rooted, grounded, settled. I remember reading of one who said, "When I read the arguments brought by infidels against the Gospel, I laugh them to scorn, because they are nothing like so deep, cunning, or hard to answer, as the arguments which my own heart has brought against the Lord in years gone by—which having answered and overcome, I feel myself more than a match for the puny oppositions of ungodly men."

It is a grand thing not to be moved in these skeptical times, but to know the Lord by secret communion with Him, to know His truth by inner consciousness, and by a devout reading of His Word with eyes opened from above. Alas, many hearers and receivers of the Word have been destroyed by carping infidels. They knew nothing thoroughly, and so were readily deceived.

It is said of the stony-ground people that *immediately they were offended*. They were just as soon out of love with the Gospel as they were in with it. "Immediately they were offended." They did not at first stop to inquire why they should be Christians, and now they do not stop to argue why they should renounce their profession.

They took their religion hot from the oven and dropped it before it was cool enough to feed on. Somebody said, "Believe, believe, believe!" and they were excited. And now another speaker says, "Do not believe. Do not believe!" and they are excited the other way. They went in with a crowd of others all on a sudden during a revival, and now they are going out with the crowd during a season of lukewarmness. The minister took them in at the front door, and now he has to let them out at the back door.

They have disappointed him, they have brought scandal upon the church, and double responsibility upon themselves, and now they are just as earnest to give up religion as they were to profess it. Unhappy souls, volatile in everything, frivolous about the solemnities of eternity, ready to be right if rightly led, and as ready to be wrong if wrongly driven.

Having no mind of their own, they are molluscous creatures—without a backbone, mere jellyfish—nothing solid or consistent can be found in them. Their sand-built houses are no sooner up, than they are washed down by the tide. They have no rocky foundations, no strong grips of truth, no principles. Their motive powers are submission to persuasion, admiration of eloquence, and desire of approbation.

Unhappy! Unhappy! Unhappy! God grant that we may not belong to such a class.

II. I shall show THEIR RADICAL DEFECT.

Their radical defect, in the first place, lay in *an unbroken heart*. The parable does not refer to ground with stones in it, such as we commonly call stony ground, for that will grow corn well enough, but to soil where there was a hard rock underneath, and only a very thin covering of earth. A hard pan of iron rock was at the bottom, and it was barely hidden by a little mold created by the lichens and mosses, enough to catch the seed and make it germinate, but not enough to feed its roots for any length of time.

In these people their hearts have never been broken. "Is not my word like a hammer, saith the LORD?" They do not know, for it never hammered them. They got their joy and peace without a blow. What is to be done with a piece of ground which has the rock so close to the surface? Nothing can be done with it by man. The only thing that can be done is for God to come in—and when God, in His infinite mercy changes the rock into good soil, then the wheat will grow, but not till then.

“A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” There must be a work of the Holy Ghost by which the natural rock of nature shall be turned into the good soil of grace, or else all the sowing in the world will never produce a harvest.

These people skipped over that, and in fact, they did not like to hear of it. They liked preachers who always preached simple faith in the work of Jesus, but never mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit—lopsided preachers, messengers whose legs are not equal, who deliver half God’s message, and no more. And under such teaching they found peace without soul-trouble, and comfort without the new birth.

As for repentance, that old-fashioned grace, they despised it. Weeping before God on account of sin, terror under a sense of God’s wrath, or fear lest the sentence of His law should be executed, they never knew. They passed into the land of hope without going round by Weeping Cross, and every day I grow more and more suspicious of a man’s religion if he has not gone round by that road. A man who was healed before he was wounded, clothed before he was stripped, filled before he was empty, made alive before he was slain, has good reason to suspect whether sovereign grace has ever laid its hand upon him.

These people with the unbroken heart had gladsome hopes, and joyful confidences, but they all came to an end, as they will do in your case and mine if we are strangers to contrition. Ever be it remembered that, true as it is that whosoever believes in Jesus Christ shall be saved, it is equally true, “Ye must be born again.”

“Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.” And “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” It is only the birth of the spirit, the spiritual nature, that can enter into spiritual matters and become a possessor of truly spiritual joys. An unbroken heart is a fatal defect.

This led to a second fault, namely, *want of depth*. The stony-ground hearer was all surface. Everything about him was superficial. The rock, never having been broken, there was no depth of earth to plough. So in many men who profess to be converted, there has been no real estimate of sin. “Yes, we are sinners,” they say. “Oh yes, yes, of course we are all sinners.”

But to feel what it is to be a sinner is quite another thing. To be crushed down to the earth under a sense of having violated the thrice holy law of God—this many have never felt. And Jesus Christ—yes, He is a Savior, and they will say they take Him for a Savior, but what it is to be saved, what it was He suffered, why He needed to suffer, what was the tremendous guilt that compelled such a sacrifice, they have never considered. In fact, they have never thought at all, and they do not mean to think.

Bees descend into the flowers and suck out the honey, but butterflies alight on the lilies for a moment, and are away again—true emblems of flippant pretenders to grace. Many persons who profess to be Christians seem to have no acquaintance with the plague of their own hearts. They believe that there is something amiss within, but they do not know that their heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”

Consequently, though they admit they need divine grace, they do not know how much they need it. They would subscribe to the truth, “Without me ye can do nothing,” but they do not know it experientially. They are strangers to those failures and inward disappointments which lead a man to feel his nothingness. It is surface work—nothing is deep about them.

When they became professors of the religion of Christ, they never weighed the truth, or searched the Scriptures to see whether things are indeed so. They were Calvinists because the preacher was a Calvinist. They would have been Arminians quite as readily if the preacher had been Arminian. In fact, they would have been anything they were taught to be. They never judged, weighed, and considered for themselves.

In espousing the truth as it is in Jesus they never calculated the difficulties of a religious life. It did not strike them that they would have to fight with sin without and sin within. They never looked at that mighty trinity—the world, the flesh, and the devil, with which they would have to wage a life-long

combat. They took the sweets, and thought not of the bitter herbs. They were volatile, and are volatile still. They cannot think, neither can you persuade them to attempt it. This is a fault indeed.

And then there was a third defect—*the secret part of their religion was a failure*. The seed on the stony ground did not fail in the sprouting, nor in the blade which appeared above, but it had no root. If you were to trace some professors home, you would find no secret prayer. Let that word go through this congregation, if there are any of you living in the neglect of secret prayer. No secret prayer, no secret reading of the Word of God, no chewing of it to get the essence and the juice out of it, no vital contact with Christ in private, no communion of the soul in secret with the living God! This is a deadly sign!

They were at the public meeting. They were fussy enough upon committees. They could be first and foremost if there were any singing to be done, or if there were any preaching required. But oh, the secret prayer, the secret living with God, the soul-searching, the trying of the reins to see whether they were right or wrong—they had given this all up.

Taking it for granted that they must be right because they have a sort of faith, they look upon every question as to their safety as so much unbelief, and the work of Satan, and so they wrap themselves up in their delusions. They think they must be the people of God because they profess themselves to be such, but they have never looked for the fruit which must be borne by every branch of the true vine.

And so, fourthly, there was another thing which I do not think you will find in Mark, but you will see it in one of the other evangelists—*they lacked moisture*. Now, a plant must have moisture. Dew, rain, or some sort of watering must come to it. On that little soil with a hard rock at the bottom, there was plenty of heat when the sun shone, and so the little moisture it had made the seed sprout at once. But it had no further moisture, and therefore became parched.

So certain hearers get a little moisture, as it were, by contact with an earnest preacher. They come under that Word which drops as the dew and distils as the rain, but they have not the vitalizing Holy Ghost at their root to be the perpetual source of life. They have their lamps, but they have no oil in their vessels to keep them trimmed. They lack the moisture of the Holy Ghost. He it is that comes to His own people secretly, at the roots of their life, so that from Him they suck up the life of God, and so they live.

But the mere stony-ground convert has not the Holy Ghost. And oh, permit me to say most solemnly to every one here, if we have no more than nature gave us under its best conceivable circumstances, we have no more than the Pharisees—and that landed them in hell. We must have the Spirit of God, and from first to last the religion of our hearts must be worked of the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit, and if it be not, the sooner we are rid of such a religion, the better, for it will only deceive us.

I feel the necessity of preaching such a sermon as this, because I perceive church members going aside into open sin, and others turning aside to one or another of the new delusions of the present age, and there seems to be a new one every month. Some foolish people stand with their mouths open ready for any novelty to fly down their throats. They are as dry straw, only wanting for some impostor to apply the spark to them—and yet they call themselves Christians.

There are so many nowadays who do not know what they believe, and so become the prey of Romanists, Ritualists, Atheists, or some other deceivers. There is a little plant in the garden, and a thief comes along and takes it away, root and all. He will not do so with a well-rooted oak, I warrant you. And if we were well-rooted like the oak, we should believe what we do believe, and know what we do know, and should have principle to keep us steady.

The old Nonconformists might have been dragged to prison or to the stake without difficulty, but to get them to yield their nonconformity, or put aside their principles, was not possible. Alas for the degenerate sons of such sturdy fathers. If what you believe be not true, fling it away. But if it be true, let your faces be like flints, and your natures like iron against all the temptations of this wicked, ever-changing age, which flies this way and that, but always away from its God.

Oh, when shall it be that those who know the Lord shall stand fast, and having done all, shall still stand!

III. Thirdly, I must close by trying to teach THE LESSON OF THE TEXT.

That lesson is four-fold. It says to each one of us, *be deeply in earnest*. Do not play at religion. Do not think of a religious profession as a garb which you can put on and take off. Pray God to make sure work in your soul, sure work for eternity. You have to die, you have to face the judgment seat—have a religion that will bear those ordeals.

Pray to have such a work of the Spirit in your soul that neither death nor judgment can alarm you. Cry to God that repentance may be cut deep into you, making lasting marks in you, that your faith may be no sham faith, but a giving up of your soul entirely into the hands of Christ, that your love to Christ may be no rhapsody, but a matter of real heart-affection, that your religious walk may not be for other people to see, but be a walk before God, that all your actions may be the result of principle, and that you may not be swayed by company, but rather may sway company, and may have a vital force within yourself of God's implanting, that will bear you on in the straight road, whichever way others may take.

I say again, be awfully in earnest about everything that concerns religion, and pray God to forgive you if in any measure you have been flippant concerning it.

Secondly, *watch the effect of your own daily trials*. See how they affect you. If a boat is ready to sink in the Thames, it ought never to be trusted at sea. If your religion already begins to fail you, what will it do by and by? You were laughed at, and you were half inclined to give it all up. What would you do if you were more sternly persecuted?

You have already been willing to go back, your heart has faltered—what will you do if fiercer temptations assail you? You have already been terribly put to it by the arguments of a fool—what would you do if some of the deep thinkers were to argue with you? “If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horsemen? And if, in the land of peace wherein thou hast trusted, they have wearied thee, what wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?”

I do not object to your growing slowly if you grow surely. If my house takes a long time in building, I would rather give the builder his time, than tell him to run it up in a week or two, and make it so frail that the first wind would blow it away like cardboard. You have to live in this house eternally, pray God to build it surely. As to building fast, that little matters.

O you that can hardly go a step towards heaven without question and dispute, I do not so much tremble concerning you, as about some who never have any question or doubt, because they have never any thought at all, but pass it all by with a heedless carelessness, taking things for granted. See, then, how you stand in your present trials.

You have grown richer—do you love the Lord as much as you did? You transact more business—can you still keep the world out of your heart? You have received more praise of late—can you still cling to Christ as you used to do when you had but few friends? You have been in health lately—have you lived as near to God as when you were ill?

Or you have come down in the world and are numbered with the poor. Do you love the Lord as much as you did when He enriched you? You have lately heard the remarks of a cunning hater of the Gospel—were you able to feel that, though you could not answer him in words, yet your heart answered him, and threw off his falsehood as the roof throws off the rain? If not, look to it. If your vessel is ready to go down in smooth water, what will she do in a storm? If you cannot keep the water out of her now, what will you do when the hurricane overtakes her? It will be all over with you then, I fear.

Another lesson is, *constantly examine yourself*. A great many persons get into the Bankruptcy Court, but as far as I recollect never one came there through too much attendance to his business. I never heard of a farmer losing his crop through being too diligent in husbandry. And of all the souls that are lost, not one has perished through being too much in earnest as to self-examination.

Dear brethren, choose a faithful, testing ministry. Do not look after a smooth-tongued preacher who will always cry, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.” You want comfort, and should have it, but you want searching as well, and you must have it. Pray that you may be faithfully dealt with, that there may be no glazing over matters, no filming of wounds, but that there may be honest dealings between you and the minister, and between you and your God.

God grant that we may be willing to be searched, for when we are unwilling to be searched, we may reckon it quite certain that there is something amiss with us. When we cry, “I am afraid I am a hypocrite,” there is very little fear of it—but presumption is fatal.

Now, lastly, let all this show us *how necessary it is that we cast all the stress and burden of our salvation entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ*, because whenever a man does that, there is honest and good ground in his soul, and the seed has sprung up aright. Whenever a man can truly say,

*“I rest alone in Jesus;
Nothing in my hand I bring:
Simply to Thy cross I cling,”*

that is the great secret of a true hope. Jesus lived and died for us—and if we do entirely and alone depend upon Him, it is well with our souls.

It is well to live continually at the foot of the cross, looking up to Jesus, finding all our hope in Him, and none in ourselves. Beloved, it is the work of the Spirit of God to bring us there and keep us there. If we search ourselves in the light of the cross, we shall be willing to judge ourselves that we be not judged.

In the presence of those dear wounds from whence distils the atoning blood, we shall cry, “Try my reins and my heart.” But if any man say, “I believe in Jesus, therefore I will not search. I trust in Jesus, therefore I will live as I like,” that man’s religion is vain. He has profaned the cross by his reckless reasoning, and let him take heed how God shall judge him, for of all judgments, surely that will be the heaviest which shall come upon the man who dared to take the doctrine of the cross as a reason for careless living, and made the mercy and the cleansing power of the Redeemer Himself an apology for walking heedlessly before God, and continuing in vain presumption.

God grant us grace to receive the seed into good ground, for Jesus’ sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 4:1-34

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—42 (Version I.), 15, 645

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.