

Parables

Sabbath afternoon, July 20

For His own wise purpose the Lord veils spiritual truths in figures and symbols. Through the use of figures of speech the plainest and most telling rebuke was often given to His accusers and enemies, and they could find in His words no occasion to condemn Him. In parables and comparisons He found the best method of communicating divine truth. In simple language, using figures and illustrations drawn from the natural world, He opened spiritual truth to His hearers, and gave expression to precious principles that would have passed from their minds, and left scarcely a trace, had He not connected His words with stirring scenes of life, experience, or nature. In this way He called forth their interest, aroused inquiry, and when He had fully secured their attention, He decidedly impressed upon them the testimony of truth. In this way He was able to make sufficient impression upon the heart so that afterward His hearers could look upon the thing with which He connected His lesson, and recall the words of the divine Teacher.—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 236.

So wide was Christ's view of truth, so extended His teaching, that every phase of nature was employed in illustrating truth. The scenes upon which the eye daily rests were all connected with some spiritual truth, so that nature is clothed with the parables of the Master.

In the earlier part of His ministry, Christ had spoken to the people in words so plain that all His hearers might have grasped truths which would make them wise unto salvation. But in many hearts the truth had taken no root, and it had been quickly caught away. "Therefore speak I to them in parables," He said; "because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . . For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed." Matthew 13:13–15.—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 20.

Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. To minds that were open to the Holy Spirit, the significance of the Saviour's teaching unfolded more and more. Mysteries grew clear, and that which had been hard to grasp became evident.

Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. By using a variety of illustrations, He not only presented truth in its different phases, but appealed to the different hearers. Their interest was aroused by figures drawn from the surroundings of their daily life. None who listened to the Saviour could feel that they were neglected or forgotten. The humblest, the most sinful, heard in His teaching a voice that spoke to them in sympathy and tenderness.—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 21.

Sunday, July 21

The Parable of the Sower

Christ's mission was not understood by the people of His time. The manner of His coming was not in accordance with their expectations. The Lord Jesus was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. Its imposing services were of divine appointment. They were designed to teach the people that at the time appointed One would come to whom those ceremonies pointed. But the Jews had exalted the forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of their object. The traditions, maxims, and enactments of men hid from them the lessons which God intended to convey. These maxims and traditions became an obstacle to their understanding and practice of true religion. And when the Reality came, in the person of Christ, they did not recognize in Him the fulfillment of all their types, the substance of all their shadows. . . .

The gospel of Christ was a stumbling block to them because they demanded signs instead of a Saviour. They expected the Messiah to prove His claims by mighty deeds of conquest, to establish His empire on the ruins of earthly kingdoms. This expectation Christ answered in the parable of the sower. Not by force of arms, not by violent interpositions, was the kingdom of God to prevail, but by the implanting of a new principle in the hearts of men.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 34.

By the parable of the sower, Christ illustrates the things of the kingdom of heaven, and the work of the great Husbandman for His people. Like a sower in the field, He came to scatter the heavenly grain of truth. And His parable teaching itself was the seed with which the most precious truths of His grace were sown. Because of its simplicity the parable of the sower has not been valued as it should be. From the natural seed cast into the soil, Christ desires to lead our minds to the gospel seed, the sowing of which results in bringing man back to his loyalty to God. He who gave the parable of the tiny seed is the Sovereign of heaven, and the same laws that govern earthly seed sowing govern the sowing of the seeds of truth.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 33.

Next to the Bible, nature is to be our great lessonbook. . . . As we sow the seed and cultivate the plant, we are to remember that God created the seed, and He gives it to the earth. By His divine power He cares for that seed. It is by His appointment that the seed in dying gives its life to the blade and to the ear which contains in itself other seeds to be treasured and again put into the earth to yield their harvest. We may also study how the co-operation of man acts a part. The human agent has his part to act, his work to do. This is one of the lessons which nature teaches, and we shall see in it a solemn, a beautiful work.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 185.

Monday, July 22

Jesus' Interpretation

That with which the parable of the sower chiefly deals is the effect produced on the growth of the seed by the soil into which it is cast. By this parable Christ was virtually saying to His hearers, It is not safe for you to stand as critics of My work, or to indulge disappointment because it does not meet your ideas. The question of greatest importance to you is, How do you treat My message? Upon your reception or rejection of it your eternal destiny depends.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 43.

Throughout the parable of the sower, Christ represents the different results of the sowing as depending upon the soil. In every case the sower and the seed are the same. Thus He teaches that if the word of God fails of accomplishing its work in our hearts and lives, the reason is to be found in ourselves. But the result is not beyond our control. True, we cannot change ourselves; but the power of choice is ours, and it rests with us to determine what we will become. The wayside, the stony-ground, the thorny-ground hearers need not remain such. The Spirit of God is ever seeking to break the spell of infatuation that holds men absorbed in worldly things, and to awaken a desire for the imperishable treasure. It is by resisting the Spirit that men become inattentive to or neglectful of God's word. They are themselves responsible for the hardness of heart that prevents the good seed from taking root, and for the evil growths that check its development.

The garden of the heart must be cultivated. The soil must be broken up by deep repentance for sin. Poisonous, Satanic plants must be uprooted. The soil once overgrown by thorns can be reclaimed only by diligent labor. So the evil tendencies of the natural heart can be overcome only by earnest effort in the name and strength of Jesus. . . . This work He desires to accomplish for us, and He asks us to co-operate with Him.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 56.

We are not to allow the things of this world so to absorb the attention that mind and body are completely engrossed. Thus those around us are robbed of the kindly words and deeds that would help them in the upward way. The channel of light is clogged with worldly matters. The grace that Christ is longing to impart, He cannot bestow. Many are coming to have less and less strength to impart to others, because they do not receive power from the Source of all power. God calls upon them to separate from the things which corrode the mind and spoil the religious experience.

All are pressed with urgent cares, burdens, and duties; but the greater the pressure upon you, the heavier the burdens you have to bear, the greater your need of divine aid. Jesus will be your helper. You need constantly the light of life to lighten your pathway, and then its divine rays will reflect upon others.—Our High Calling, p. 280.

Tuesday, July 23

The Reason for the Parables

Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart. Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. No more effective method of instruction could He have employed. If His hearers had desired a knowledge of divine things, they might have understood His words; for He was always willing to explain them to the honest inquirer.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 20.

Christ gave His disciples to understand that He preached in parables and hid the great truths He presented under similitudes that persons who have not the truth or the love of it, whose hearts are misled by their own tempers and gratified inclinations, could not know of His doctrines. . . .

The unfruitful hearers are specified by our Lord as the skeptical, the superficial, or the secular. These cannot discern the moral glory of the truth or its practical personal application to their own hearts. They lack that faith which overcomes the world, and as the sure consequence the world overcomes them.—This Day With God, p. 361.

[Jesus] had another reason for teaching in parables. Among the multitudes that gathered about Him, there were priests and rabbis, scribes and elders, Herodians and rulers, world-loving, bigoted, ambitious men, who desired above all things to find some accusation against Him. Their spies followed His steps day after day, to catch from His lips something that would cause His condemnation, and forever silence the One who seemed to draw the world after Him. The Saviour understood the character of these men, and He pre-sented truth in such a way that they could find nothing by which to bring His case before the Sanhedrin. In parables He rebuked the hypocrisy and wicked works of those who occupied high positions, and in figurative language clothed truth of so cutting a character that had it been spoken in direct denunciation, they would not have listened to His words, and would speedily have put an end to His ministry. But while He evaded the spies, He made truth so clear that error was manifested, and the honest in heart were profited by His lessons. Divine wisdom, infinite grace, were made plain by the things of God's creation. Through nature and the experiences of life, men were taught of God. "The invisible things of Him since the creation of the world," were "perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity." Romans 1:20, R. V.

In the Saviour's parable teaching is an indication of what constitutes the true "higher education." . . . In all His teaching, Christ brought the mind of man in contact with the Infinite Mind. He did not direct the people to study men's theories about God, His word, or His works. He taught them to behold Him as manifested in His works, in His word, and by His providences.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 22.

Wednesday, July 24

Lamp and Measuring Basket

As Jesus taught the people, He made His lessons interesting and held the attention of His hearers by frequent illustrations from the scenes of nature about them. . . . The Saviour looked upon the company before Him, and then to the rising sun, and said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." As the sun goes forth on its errand of love, dispelling the shades of night and awakening the world to life, so the followers of Christ are to go forth on their mission, diffusing the light of heaven upon those who are in the darkness of error and sin.

In the brilliant light of the morning, the towns and villages upon the surrounding hills stood forth clearly, making an attractive feature of the scene. Pointing to them, Jesus said, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid." And He added, "Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house." R.V. Most of those who listened to the words of Jesus were peasants and fishermen whose lowly dwellings contained but one room, in which the single lamp on its stand shone to all in the house. Even so, said Jesus, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 38, 39.

God has given you light, not to hide under a bushel, but to set on a candlestick that all in the house may be benefited. Your light should shine to others to enlighten souls for whom Christ died. The grace of God ruling in your heart, and bringing your mind and thoughts into subjection to Jesus, would make you [powerful] on the side of Christ and the truth. . . .

To save souls should be the lifework of everyone who professes Christ. We are debtors to the world for the grace given us of God, for the light which has shone upon us, and for the discovered beauty and power of the truth.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 52, 53.

In all business transactions, we are to let the light shine de-cidedly. There is to be no sharp practice. Everything is to be done with the strictest integrity. Better consent to lose something financially than to gain a few shillings by sharp practice. We shall lose nothing in the end by fair dealing. We are to live the law of God in our world, and perfect a character after the divine similitude. All business, with those in the faith and those not in the faith, is to be transacted on square, righteous principles. Everything is to be seen in the light of God's law, everything done without fraud, without duplicity, without one tinge of guile. . . .

"A false balance is abomination to the Lord."—Ellen G. White Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1158.

Thursday, July 25

Parables of Growing Seed

Jesus taught by illustrations and parables drawn from nature and from the familiar events of everyday life. In this way He associated natural things with spiritual, linking the things of nature and the life experience of His hearers with the sublime truths of the written word. And whenever afterward their eyes rested on the objects with which He has associated eternal truth, His lessons were repeated.

One of Christ's most beautiful and impressive parables is that of the sower and the seed. "So is the kingdom of God," He said, "as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:26–28. . . . He who gave this parable, Himself created the tiny seed, gave it its vital properties, and ordained the laws that should govern its growth; and He made it a living illustration of truth in both the natural and the spiritual world.—Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 140.

As Jesus spoke this parable, the mustard plant could be seen far and near, lifting itself above the grass and grain, and waving its branches lightly in the air. Birds flitted from twig to twig, and sang amid the leafy foliage. Yet the seed from which sprang this giant plant was among the least of all seeds. At first it sent up a tender shoot, but it was of strong vitality, and grew and flourished until it reached its present great size. So the kingdom of Christ in its beginning seemed humble and insignificant. Compared with earthly kingdoms it appeared to be the least of all. By the rulers of this world Christ's claim to be a king was ridiculed. Yet in the mighty truths committed to His followers the kingdom of the gospel possessed a divine life. And how rapid was its growth, how widespread its in-fluence! When Christ spoke this parable, there were only a few Galilean peasants to represent the new kingdom. Their poverty, the fewness of their numbers, were urged over and over again as a reason why men should not connect themselves with these simple-minded fishermen who followed Jesus. But the mustard seed was to grow and spread forth its branches throughout the world. When the earthly kingdoms whose glory then filled the hearts of men should perish, the kingdom of Christ would remain, a mighty and far-reaching power.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 77.

[The] kingdom of Christ is like no earthly government. It is a representation of the characters of those who compose the kingdom. "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God?" Christ asked, "or with what comparison shall we liken it?" He could find nothing on earth that would serve as a perfect comparison. His court is one where holy love presides, and whose offices and appointments are graced by the exercise of charity. He charges His servants to bring pity and loving-kindness, His own attributes, into all their office work, and to find their happiness and satisfaction in reflecting the love and tender compassion of the divine nature on all with whom they associate.—The Review and Herald, March 19, 1908.

Friday, July 26

For Further Reading

The Upward Look, "To Every Man His Work," p. 273;
God's Amazing Grace, "Unlike Earthly Kingdoms," p. 14.