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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Acting Director of the Sunday School Course of the Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.)
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LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 17

JESUS TEACHING FIVE PARABLES—FOUR KINDS OF GROUND.

LESSON TEXT—Mark 4:1-20.
GOLDEN TEXT—Take heed therefore how ye hear.—Luke 8:18.
ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FOR TEACHERS—Matt. 13:1-30; 36-43.
PRIMARY TOPIC—Jesus telling a story about sowing seed.
PRIMARY MEMORY VERSE—Be ye doers of the word.—James 1:22.

Jesus tells us plainly why he taught so much by means of parables (Matt. 13:10-13). The truth had to be taught; hence the parable, that those to whom it was given to know the messages of the kingdom, those who sought it, might know and understand, and that to the others it might be hidden (Mark 4:11, 12). Like all his parables, Jesus draws his pictures from the common experiences of life—the field, the home, etc. Paul draws his illustrations chiefly from the city, the army, the market. In studying this lesson we must turn to the parallel account as given by Luke and Matthew to get the full and complete picture.

What is the seed? Luke says that Jesus told his disciples that the seed was the Word of God (Luke 8:11). We get the same thought in verse fourteen of the lesson. A great deal is being made today of seed selection. Some wonderful results have been obtained. How much more important for those of us who deal with immortal souls that we select the best seed, i. e., the Word of God.

The second consideration is the sower (v. 4). Notice he went forth not to "sow," not is it recorded that he was "sore" because the people did not all receive the seed alike. He did not have a grouse; he did not enter into his work that he might receive the adulation of men (Matt. 6:2). It is, however, the "soil" that seems to be most emphasized in both the direct teaching and also the explanation of the parable. There are four kinds of soil. The manner by which the seed came into contact with each kind of soil is significant. Some fell "by" the wayside; the path was well trodden; the ground was preoccupied; e. g., it was used for other purposes than to yield a harvest; it was hard to be broken, and hence it was an easy matter for the birds of the air (v. 15) to come and pluck it away. We need to remember that if men receive with meekness the implanted word, there will, of course, be no such opportunity for the evil one. The trouble in this case was that the Word was not implanted. Thus it is that one-fourth of the seed is lost. The result is a deplorable one as we see from Heb. 2:1-4. Is the soil of our life so hard that God must drive the plowshare clean through it ere there is a chance for the seed to take root? (Ps. 129:3).

The next fell "on" the rocky ground. The first is a picture of the hardened, and this is a picture of the superficial hearer. For a time they did run well. They even received the Word with gladness (v. 16), but they had no stability because they had no root. They were superficial. There was no chance for the seed to get a real grip on their lives. The earth yields its increase though we do not understand. So God will add his 95 per cent to our 5 per cent. The oak tree comes from small seed.

In the third place Jesus speaks of the seed that fell "among" the thorns. Here is the worldly soil. It is not so much the character of the soil, it is the character of that which already occupied the soil ere the sower sowed the seed. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and "other things" had so entered in that the good seed never had a chance in the soil of the human heart. It was choked and yielded no fruit. There was no real grip of the will, no whole-hearted surrender. The cares of life that keep the housewife or the business man; the deceitfulness of riches that snare men and choke the word which at one time gave such promise in their lives; the lusts and other things which the evil one knows so well how to use keep us from the Word, for Satan knows that by it we are to be saved (Luke 18:12). Are we impulsive? Do we make vows soon forgotten, ties that soon fade away or fall beneath the temptations for lack of root? May God blast and turn up the subsoil of our hearts by strong convictions of sin, and so occupy the soil that there is no opportunity for other things.

We have thus seen three-fourths of the seed lost. Of the remaining fourth, that which fell "into" (R. V.) the good soil, not all yielded the same return. It all brought forth (v. 7); it all yielded; it all sprang up, but not all in the same ratio.

There are three distinguishing features of this last kind of hearers: (1) They hear the Word. These are the ones who appreciate its value and give good heed to its precepts. (2) They accept it e. g. they understand its teachings. They take it into good and honest hearts. (3) They hold it fast (Luke 8:15 R. V.) These are the ones of which martyrs are made.

Jesus was a great open-air preacher (vv. 1, 2) and like all others he has various kinds of hearers the half-hearted hearer the shallow-hearted hearer. The way to reach the masses is to go where the masses are.

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"C'mon! C'mon!" said the elevator man in the chamber of commerce as he started to close the door.
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Mother was giving her young son a bath. She, of course, scoured him rather heavily and got soap in his eyes besides.
"Mother," he said between his shrieks.
"Yes, dear."
"When are we going to have it?"
"Have what?"
"Why, one of those here 'less' days. I want a soapless day."

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