

**The Parable of the Sower**  
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Behold, a sower went out to sow. *Matthew* 13:3

Among the many parables told by the Lord one of the best known and understood is the parable of the sower. It is one that the Lord Himself told the disciples something of the internal sense or inner meaning of its images and progression of ideas.

The parable is about the fruitfulness that our lives can have and also the obstacles to that fruitfulness. When understood it presents what we have to do if we desire a heavenly harvest. This harvest is a wonderful bounty of caring, patience, strength, commitment, hope, and trust. It is also a nourishing richness of wise and useful ideas about what to do and not do, what to say and not say, a powerful insight into what is most important in any situation. Finally, the harvest that the Lord intends for us is a cornucopia of words and actions that a person can do to express their caring and understanding.

There are times when a person can sense his or her life is like a beautifully growing garden or field of grain. In these states a person can reflect with gratitude on the good things with which he or she has been blessed. There are also times when a person can reflect on life and see mostly a dismal wilderness and wasteland, devoid of lush green growing things.

There are two important things we need to do if we want our minds to reflect more of a bountiful garden or field of grain. In the parable of the sower, two things needed to come together for there to be a crop, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (*Matthew* 13:8) There needs to be the seed and there needs to be the healthy ground to receive that seed.

The Lord explained to His disciples that He was the sower. In a very important way, the Lord is working to sow seeds of wisdom in every single human’s mind throughout the world. But the Lord also teaches us that He cannot suddenly introduce entirely new ideas into our thoughts and understanding apart from the framework of what we already know. All ideas in our minds must have some basis or background related to experience in this world. Fully-formed new ideas cannot suddenly jump into a person’s head. For example, a woman who has never used or even known about a microwave oven will not suddenly stop in the middle of her kitchen and say, “I know what I need, I need a microwave oven.” Life would be rather spooky if we did have this kind of thought jump into our consciousness. We would know that it wasn’t our own thought and would feel directed by some external force. The Lord wants each of us to act in freedom according to our own best understanding.

If the Lord is going to be able to sow the seeds of truth in our minds, we need to turn to Him in His Word and turn to Him in prayer. Without instruction from the Word the Lord is far more limited in what He can do to guide a person’s life. If we make time to read and reflect on what we read the Lord has an opportunity to sow the seeds of infinite wisdom in our minds. He can bring to us ideas that we will first understand in only a rudimentary way but will be able to understand better and better to eternity. The teachings for the New Church repeatedly assert the

power and importance of what can be gained from reading the Word. For example, the following passage:

The reason why the Word is living and therefore confers life is that in its highest sense the subject is the Lord, while in the inmost sense it is His kingdom in which the Lord is everything. And this being so it is life itself which the Word contains, and which flows into the minds of those who read the Word devoutly. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3424)

So, the first thing we must do for the Lord to have our minds fruitful is learn from His Word. But we also can do our part to prepare the ground to receive the seeds. We all by our natural hereditary inclinations to evil have qualities that prevent the seeds of truth that we can receive from bearing fruit. For example, the Lord has told us that a person can read the Word and get little out of it for various reasons. Consider the contrasting states presented in the following passage from the *Apocalypse Explained*.

People who read the Word solely to have a reputation of being learned, or to acquire recognition so that they may be honored or enriched, never see and perceive truths, but false ideas instead; and the truths that stand out before the eyes in the Word they either pass by as if not seen or they twist their meaning until they are no longer true . . . But people who read the Word from the spiritual affection of truth, which affection is a love of knowing truth because it is truth, see truths in the Word, and rejoice in heart when they see them; and this because they are in enlightenment from the Lord. (*Apocalypse Explained* 177:2-3)

Because of the differences that people can bring to their reading of the Word and consequently what they get out of this reading the Lord has promised that it is hard to know in this world who will be wise in the next life and who won't. We are told:

Those who love knowledge alone and do not lead a life in accordance with it are usually led to boast of what they know; to themselves they seem to be wiser than everyone else. Thus, they love themselves and despise others, especially people who are governed by good, whom they look upon as being simple and untaught. But an inversion of positions awaits them in the next life. Those who seemed to themselves to be wise become the stupid there, while the simple become the wise. (*Arcana Caelestia* 7749)

The parable of the sower describes three states or types of ground that prevent a person from receiving the truth and bearing fruit.

In the parable, the first type of ground is the hardened dirt of the pathway next to the cultivated field. The seeds that land on this hard surface remain on the surface where they are easily spotted and picked up by birds. The hard ground of the pathway represents a tendency to discount the validity of what the Lord teaches. The birds are ideas that explain away any implications that would require a person to change. Take the simple example of the person who lives by the motto, "You've got to look after yourself first." Any idea that might qualify this principle of behavior such as the Lord's call for us to love our neighbors as our selves can easily be resisted in a person's mind. It is almost instantly overwhelmed or consumed by the confirmed belief that one's own welfare is the highest concern. We all go through states in which parts of our mind are like

hardened ground. The Lord calls us to watch the broad patterns of our daily life and decisions and, if we want to, He will help us see the inclinations to evil motivations and false principles that are deadly foes of the truth. The person who perhaps has spent years consciously or unconsciously thinking, “You’ve got to look after yourself first,” can come to see the horror of its effect on himself, his relationships, and his usefulness. He can then work to daily fight its influence and consciously ask the Lord to give him a different principle to guide his every thought.

The second type of ground is rocky. Although there is a thin layer of dirt allowing the seeds to germinate, there isn’t deep moist earth to sustain them in the hot sun. In this case a person may feel moved or excited by hearing what is true. As the Lord said of the plants from these seeds, they instantly sprang up. But they never bear fruit. The evil spirits of hell really want us to keep our minds focused on what is immediately in front of us. If they succeed in doing this then a person can powerfully affirm a truth that hellish anger is destructive on a Sunday morning and make initial efforts to restrain his or her temper. Soon however, the resolution to change fades and the person returns to the pattern of reacting with destructive anger when something goes wrong. Because such truth isn’t being lived it is a fact that withers in the person’s memory. Much that we learn from the Lord starts out like these barren facts. They can stay that way through out a person’s life and if so, will be taken from the person in the next life. But if we have the daily prayer, “Lord, what do You want me to do? Guide me that I may know.” then the Lord will help us to see every more clearly how to apply the truth that we learned to living a better life. This process will be like removing the stones from the ground so that it is deep and fertile.

The third type of ground is filled with choking thorns or weeds. We can accept the truth of an idea. We can try to live according to it, but when it comes into increasing conflict with some other priority that we have it gets overwhelmed. For example, a person can have a point in her life in which she strongly believes in the importance of being a good friend. She lives according to it. But then she gets to a point that she actually has more money and time than she perhaps had earlier and becomes more and more involved in work, her own recreation, perhaps has contact with a more exclusive and socially desirable set of people, and eventually finds herself almost completely turning her back on the friendships of her earlier adult life. Charles Dickens’s description of Ebenezer Scrooge’s early loving relationship with his fiancée, Belle, and then the gradually hardening of his heart in pursuit of money is a good example of the choking thorns the Lord describes. Or a person can have a peer group whose social pressure overrides a good intention, such as man who has committed to be a better father, but whose friends keep drawing him back to behaviors that keep him from being present with his family.

We all have inclinations from our natural heredity that keep parts of our minds from being receptive to the truth that the Lord would bring to us. But this isn’t just a fixed state. We are capable of seeking the Lord’s help to cultivate these areas of our thoughts and motivations. We can seek the seed of truth by devoutly reading the Word and we can cultivate the ground through shunning evils and seeking to do what is good. As we do this work with the Lord’s help the miracle of growth will occur within us. There will be a fruitfulness of what we’ve learned from the Lord that will be a blessing in our own lives and for everyone with whom our lives have contact. May we daily cooperate with the Lord that this fruitfulness may take place. AMEN.

Lessons: Matthew 13:1-11,18-23, *Arcana Caelestia* 3310:1-2

### **Matthew 13: 1-9, 10-11,18-23**

<sup>1</sup> On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. <sup>2</sup> And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" <sup>10</sup> And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. <sup>18</sup> "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. <sup>20</sup> But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. <sup>22</sup> Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

### ***Arcana Caelestia* 3310:1-2**

The Church is not the Church by virtue of matters of doctrine except to the extent that these have the good of life as the end in view, or what amounts to the same, unless matters of doctrine are joined to the good of life, 'the field' therefore means primarily the good of life. But in order that such good may be that of the Church, matters of doctrine from the Word which have been implanted within that good must be present. In the absence of matters of doctrine the good of life does indeed exist, but it is not as yet that of the Church, and so not as yet truly spiritual, except in the sense that it has the potentiality to become so, like the good of life as this exists with gentiles who do not possess the Word and therefore do not know the Lord.

That 'the field' is the good of life in which the things of faith, that is, spiritual truths existing with the Church, are implanted, becomes quite clear from the Lord's parable about the sower in Matthew . . . .

This describes four types of land or ground within the field, that is, within the Church. The fact that here 'the seed' is the Lord's Word, and so the truth which is called the truth of faith, and that 'the good soil' is the good which is called the good of charity is evident to anyone, for it is the good in man that receives the Word. 'The pathway' is falsity, 'rocky ground' is truth which is not rooted in good, 'thorns' are evils.