

BECOMING GOOD GROUND

by Rev. Frederick M. Chapin

Reading: Matthew 13:18-23

This parable tells of a sower who went out into his field to plant seeds. It describes four locations in which the seeds fell and what happened to them.

First, the seeds fell on the wayside, where they were devoured by the birds. Later, the Lord told His disciples that this represented people who hear truths, but immediately reject them. Secondly, some seeds fell among rocks where they immediately sprang up, but, because they had no roots, the sun scorched them and they withered and died. This location represents people who immediately receive the truth, but only for the sake of themselves. When troubles or hardships come, or when the truths no longer serve their self-interest, they immediately cast it away.

Some seeds also fell among thorns, which eventually choked the seeds. This gives a picture of those who reject the truths because of their love for things in the natural world. Finally, some seeds fell into good ground which produced an abundance of fruit. This illustrates those who sincerely receive the truth and use it to perform genuine uses. Through this parable, the disciples were able to understand that to make a genuine commitment to follow the Lord, they must renounce the world and be willing to go through hardships as a result of their commitment.

Today, we have an opportunity to go even deeper into the meaning of this parable. In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church the Lord has revealed truths through which we can further understand what this parable can mean to us. More insight is now given as to what the “good ground” is, and how we can become like fertile soil for the seeds of truth that are planted by the Lord.

First, we must examine ourselves before we are able to receive the Lord’s truth into our minds. A farmer examines the soil before he plants his seeds. He will look for things in the ground that could hinder the growth of the crops. We must also examine our personal ground. We do this when we examine our intentions, thoughts, and especially our actions. And, just as a farmer will look for things that will impede the ground’s usefulness, so we must examine ourselves and look for the particular evils that will impede our ability to manifest the Lord’s life. If a farmer just planted seeds into a ground which he had not examined, the yield of his crops would be greatly diminished. If we do not examine ourselves and search out evil habits and delights, we will not be effective in living a life in which the Lord can accomplish great things.

When we do see the evils that are a part of us, we must take steps to remove them. The farmer, when he sees the obstacles in his field, will certainly take action to remove them. If he does not, then the soil will not produce the maximum crop. The same is also true regarding our spiritual reception of the Lord. When we examine our life, and recognize the disorders that are attached to us, we should take the necessary actions to remove them. They are removed when we force ourselves not to indulge in delights that we know are opposite to what the Word teaches. This is shunning evils as sins against the Lord. Therefore, before we can be “good ground,” we must remove all the obstacles that hinder our reception of the Lord.

However, we are only able to shun what is evil by learning what is true. A farmer can only remove the obstacles in the soil when he *learns* what the obstacles are. The farmer needs knowledge about farming in order to know what things are harmful to the soil and how to remove them. He also needs to know how to work the ground so that it will be prepared to receive the seeds. Finally, he needs to know how to take care of the ground once the seeds are planted and start to grow. Just as a farmer needs to know about farming in order to have the proper soil, so we need truths to be receptive of the Lord. It is only through the truths in the Word that we can recognize our evils which must be removed. Truth also teaches us what is good and how we can attain it in our own personal lives. It shows us what we should love and find delightful. When we compel ourselves not to do evil and instead to obey the Lord's Word, then we are preparing our spiritual ground to receive enlightenment directly from the Lord.

But the farmer's job is not done once he plants the seeds. He must make sure the ground gets enough water and sunlight, and he must constantly look after the plants to make sure they are growing properly. So, too, with our spiritual lives. We must constantly be aware of our loves and delights and make sure they are consistent with the teachings from the Word. We must constantly insure that we are living according to the order established by the Lord Himself. Just making a commitment to obey the Lord will not produce a life of genuine usefulness in itself. It is certainly a start. But genuine uses are not actually done unless we continually seek ways to improve our relationship with the Lord.

As we strive to perfect our reception of the Lord, we must always acknowledge that our ability to do so is solely from Him. The appearance is that we do all the work in receiving the Lord. But really it is the Lord who does all the work of salvation. We are incapable of doing good from ourselves. Certainly, a farmer who sincerely believes in the Lord will confess that the crops produced in his field came only from the Lord, even though he put a great deal of work into them. We must make the same acknowledgement regarding our spiritual lives.

We must strive to be the good ground as it is described in the parable of the Sower. When we make the effort to have the things of this world *not* be our primary focus, we are becoming receptive to the Lord's guidance and peace. If we constantly strive to become more receptive of the life that proceeds from the Lord, then we will become more effective in performing uses, and we will enjoy a greater delight in them. When the Lord is actively operating in our lives, we have the power to produce fruits—fruits that will benefit all those with whom we are associated and will help to establish the Lord's kingdom on this earth.

Amen.