

Bible Lessons



“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR 2ND QUARTER 2019

LESSONS FROM THE WHEAT FIELD

Our theme this quarter comes from Jesus' teachings concerning the Word of God and the effect it has upon the hearts of mankind. Using many examples from agriculture, He described four basic conditions of the heart by comparing them to different types of ground, compared the stages of growth in the life cycle of grain to spiritual growth, and likened the judgment day to the harvest of crops. There are other grain analogies in Scripture, such as the difference between wheat and chaff and the concept of resurrection illustrated by the process of germination.

Through the spiritual lessons which may be learned from God's creation and the many ways Jesus applied these concepts to daily life, we can gain much understanding of God and His Kingdom. May God deepen our comprehension of His ways as we study *Lessons from the Wheat Field*.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

APRIL 7, 2019

THE SEED—THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 13:3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow.

Luke 8:11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. (Also Mark 4:14.)

Psalms 126:5 They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

6 He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Isaiah 55:10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Mark 4:26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

I Peter 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

MEMORY VERSE: Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness. —II Corinthians 9:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures compare God's Word to an incorruptible and powerful seed, which germinates and grows inside the heart of man, producing the "new birth" and generating spiritual life which grows and develops into a mature plant, bearing fruit unto eternal life.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:3 "Parables": from *pará*, (close beside; with; near) and *bállō* (to cast or

put); a comparison of two objects for the purpose of teaching.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Matthew, Mark and Luke each record the parable of the sower which Jesus told while sitting in a ship pushed out a little way into the water as the multitude of people stood on the shore. Evidently, this was the first time He introduced this method of teaching, because the disciples questioned why he did this. His answer shows how effective it was since it revealed truth to the spiritually receptive mind while concealing the “mysteries” of the kingdom of heaven from those who had rejected Him. Later, when the disciples came to ask what the comparisons meant, he clearly told them what each part of the story represented.

In today’s lesson our focus is on the Word of God, which Jesus clearly stated was represented by the seed which the sower threw on the ground. We see that in the Psalms and Isaiah the analogy had also been used, pointing forward in prophecy to the spread of the kingdom of God in the earth by the publishing of God’s Word. In Isaiah the Word is also compared to rain from heaven which waters the earth causing germination of the seed and a bountiful harvest of food.

Another parable, which was given following the parable of the sower, also compares the seed to God’s Word. It describes the growth process of God’s kingdom, both in an individual or in whole groups of people who receive God’s Word into their lives.

Peter declares how it is the seed, the Word of God, which brings about the new birth.

In our memory verse Paul pronounces a threefold benediction upon those who labor by preaching the word of the gospel and ministering deeds of compassion to precious souls.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. In Jesus’ parables, the seed is the _____ of _____.
2. According to Psalm 126:5-6, successful reaping—a harvest of souls—happens when the sowing of the seed is accompanied by tears or weeping. What does this mean?

3. In the parable in Mark's gospel, what are the stages of growth described?
4. In Peter's epistle, what word is used to describe the spiritual seed, which is the word of God? Which verse describes the process of deterioration of physical seed or plants?
5. In Paul's epistle, God has promised both to _____ the seed to the sower and to _____ it. What else will He do, according to this verse?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God's gift to man from the beginning was seed-bearing plants and trees. The entire concept of *seed*—of plants, animals and humans, that great miracle of reproduction—was to introduce to man the majestic truth of how His Word germinates new and eternal life within that soul which receives it.

A germinating seed displays powerful force. A tiny bean sprout, shooting up out of the soil, can push up a rock or a penny weighing several times its weight. The truths of resurrection are presented here—Jesus' resurrection from the grave, spiritual resurrection from sin, and the coming physical resurrection at Jesus' second coming.

So God's word has tremendous, life-giving, life-changing power. By believing, receiving and obeying His Word, your soul will be saved from sin in a moment and the growing process begins, the end of which is a beautiful plant, bearing fruit, which will be gathered by the Lord of the Harvest into eternal life.

The point made by the Psalmist is significant: the sowing of the Word must be accompanied by a burden for lost souls which expresses itself in weeping and praying earnestly before the Lord. There will be no harvest of souls, no "bringing in the sheaves," no rejoicing, without it.

"How can they preach except they be sent?" was a question Paul asked the Romans. Our lesson reveals that *God* ministers the seed to the sower. When we sow the precious seed, let us make sure that it is God who is inspiring the Word that we share *and* that we are watering it with our tears and prayers. He waters too, as in Isaiah 55:10; the Word as both seed and water accomplishes that whereto God sends it in the hearts of men.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The mystery and miracle of life is encapsulated within the seed. It initiates, sustains and perpetuates all life. The reproduction of a single seed is enough to populate the world. A grain of corn is enough to feed the world; and the seed of the gospel is enough to save the world. Each must germinate and grow within the confines of its “tomb” before breaking forth into new life.

The power contained in the seed shows forth the power of the resurrected life. Christ likens his body to a grain of wheat; except it fall into the ground and die it abides alone but *if it dies it brings forth much fruit*. In this analogy he points to his death, burial and resurrection—the essence of the gospel message. His body represents the type of a seed that is planted, then multiplies to become the sustaining Bread of Life.

The seed is our symbol of hope. We plant it with the expectation that it will produce fruit. The Word of God is the most precious seed known to man. It produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. It is a seed compatible to every individual. It is designed to grow in every part of the world and will flourish under any circumstance or condition, as long as the heart is right.

We have all been commissioned to share the Word with the world—our world. We may not have the privilege of travelling abroad to spread the gospel, but we all have the privilege *and* obligation to spread it within the world around us. Every person we meet needs this gospel message and the results that it produces, whether they realize it or not. It is our duty to share it.

We are the sowers. The seed is the Word. The Word is Christ. Christ is Life.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

APRIL 14

THE WAYSIDE HEART

Matthew 13:4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.

Luke 8:5b And it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

Matthew 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.

Mark 4:15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

Luke 8:12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

II Corinthians 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

II Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

MEMORY VERSE: Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. —James 1:21b

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The hardened ground of a thoroughfare, over which many feet have pounded, is unlikely for germinating seed; so it is with a hardened human heart which is calloused by the many deeds, ideas and voices of sinful man and is blinded by satan, who catches away every bit of God's word before it can be understood, received, and believed; and accomplish the work of salvation.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:19 “Catcheth away”: seize, snatch; take by force or robbery. “Careless, trifling hearers, are an easy prey to Satan; who, as he is the great murderer of souls, so he is the great thief of sermons, and will be sure to rob us of the word, if we take not care to keep it” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*).

II Corinthians 4:4 “The god of this world”: called by Jesus the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) and “rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12). This refers to satan, who has dominion over the hearts of this evil world and is worshiped by them.

Hebrews 3:15 “To day if ye will hear his voice...”: a quote from Psalm 95:7-8.

James 1:21 “Engrafted”: implanted.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our last lesson we discovered how God’s Word is the seed which is sown in the heart. Today we compare what the three Gospel writers recorded about the effect the Word has on the hardened, calloused heart.

Through the three accounts, we learn that when the word is preached to hard hearts, immediately, before the person can understand or believe, satan *takes the word away*.

This condition of hardness is also described as being *blinded* by the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians (*blindness* in Ephesians 4:18), and describes the heathen nations who were under the dominion of idolatry and devil worship.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites, through unbelief, hardened their hearts to the point where, when it was time for them to walk into what God had promised them from the beginning, they refused, not believing that God could defeat the giant foes, break down the mighty city walls and eradicate the idol-worshipping nations. We as believers are warned about that kind of hardness in the book of Hebrews. So it is not only hardened sinners who are being described in our lesson as not being able to receive the Word being planted, but God’s own people who profess to know Him can also be blinded and hardened through “the deceitfulness of sin” so that they will not be partakers of Christ —His will, His way, and His inheritance —but will be cast away in the end.

We are entreated in the Thessalonian letter to pray that God's Word will have free course when it is preached. Since we know that satan is on hand when the gospel message is going forth, we as believers should have a constant prayer on our hearts that hearts will be softened to receive it and that satan would be rebuked and not able to accomplish his robbery.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Review what happens when the seed (Word of God) is received into the heart.
2. What does satan do to prevent this?
3. Satan snatches the Word before a person can _____ it and be saved.
4. What can we do to prevent this?
5. Share some ways by which we can work to soften the hearts of people before we ever invite them to hear God's Word.
6. Explain the importance of preaching the Word in such a way that it has "free course" and that people can clearly understand it.
7. What did the writer say we need to do as believers to keep hardness from developing in our hearts? What are ways to do this?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As powerful as God's Word is, it must have a receptive, softened heart in which to germinate, grow and bear fruit. Consider seed being cast along a busy roadway that has been pounded by many feet, vehicles, animals, or machinery. A plow or cultivator hasn't touched it in years. Torrential rain may at times turn it into goeey muck, which is then baked rock-hard by the hot sun.

The human heart today also has much traffic—everywhere you go you hear pounding music, flashing advertisements, non-stop radio and movies. There are constant voices—parents, teachers, professors, business associates and friends; the news media and social

media. People stay plugged into their headsets for hours a day. The television runs day and night in many homes. We are subject to its relentless spewing of worldly propaganda in places of business, restaurants where we eat, hospitals, and nursing homes. False prophets fill the air with deceptive doctrines and commandments of men.

This is the noise-polluted environment into which the precious seed, the Word of God, is sown. No wonder so many people rarely stop what they are listening to in order to comprehend God's message. They hear something being said, but do not understand. Again, there must be work done beforehand to soften the hearts of people. Personal kindness, friendship, a listening ear, an earnest prayer for healing of the body, an unselfish gift of time or food.

"Get down on your knees and talk to God about people; then go out and talk to people about God," someone once said. It is going to take a burden, fasting, tears and earnest prayer to soften the hardened heart so it can receive and understand God's Word.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Many times in scripture, the word *fowls* denotes evil spirits. We realize that satan uses evil spirits to accomplish his work. Although we cannot see spirits with human eyes, spirits have the ability to communicate (present thoughts) to human intelligence. The process is so subtle that many times we are totally unaware of the presence of evil spirits and think it is just our own thoughts or mind.

"The word was sown," also signifies communication—from the Lord to us. The Lord uses sowers to communicate divine intelligence, mind and will. However, when there is a heart that is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, love of the world or for one's own way (lack of honesty), then "satan cometh immediately" to steal the divine inspiration that was communicated to the heart. Satan, through evil spirits, lies and uses an "opposing intelligence" that when believed or pursued steals the potential and capability of divine intelligence, rendering it powerless. In this sense, the good seed is stolen or the hearer loses or misses the benefit that could have brought change and spiritual birth or growth.

Looking back over my life, I can clearly see many of satan's "counter intelligences."

"Not now—later."

"Look at what you have to give up."

"What will the people think of you?"

"The way is too hard!"

"You know you aren't going to make it—you might as well give up."

"You are not able."

"You are a loser"—and the list goes on and on. He will also try to direct your mind into different channels of cares, responsibilities, troubles or anything to distract your mind or attention away from what the Spirit has communicated.

—Bro. Bob Wilson

APRIL 21, 2019

THE STONY HEART

Matthew 13:5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Mark 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Luke 8:6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and

these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

Mark 10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

MEMORY VERSE: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.
—Ezekiel 36:26

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Those who harbor hard things beneath the surface—unforgiveness, covetousness, rebellion, fear—may have excited emotions when hearing the gospel message at first; later when the Word touches the deeper issues, there is not enough depth of desire nor thorough seeking to cause the experience to endure.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:6 “No root”: “spoken of one who has but a superficial experience of divine truth and has not permitted it to make its way into the inmost recesses of his soul” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

Matthew 13:20 “Anon”: straightway; immediately (*Strong’s Concordance*); quickly; immediately (*Webster’s*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The second type of ground Jesus described was that which had soft, shallow soil covering hard, stony places just beneath the surface. It reminds me of a house we built where the septic tank was buried under about three inches of topsoil. Every spring a bright green covering of lush grass grew vigorously over that concrete tank. Every July it turned into a pale brown mat of dead fibers. There just wasn't the depth of soil to keep the patch of grass alive when the sun blazed hot and rainfall wasn't as frequent.

This type of heart was characterized by: 1) immediate joyful reception, 2) no deepness of earth, 3) no root, 4) no moisture, 5) offense caused by affliction, persecution and tribulation, and 6) a falling away in time of temptation.

The rich man who came running to Jesus is a perfect illustration of this kind of heart. He was touched, intrigued and emotionally moved by his encounter with Jesus and His message. He had tried, from boyhood on into manhood, to "be good." There was something in his heart that cried for more, and now he realized what it was. But deep in his heart was something he loved more than anything. He loved the good life that wealth had given him. Perhaps there were more "stones" along with this one. Perhaps he had been very poor as a child. Maybe he had deep hurt and bitterness because of that, which gave him a strong drive to succeed financially. He had worked hard for that success, and there was no way he was going back to poverty.

Jesus looked at him and loved him, but he struck right at the stone in this rich man's heart. He knew the void in his life and how transforming that drive and struggle to succeed into a drive to be a channel of blessing to others would satisfy his soul. In order for the Word to grow, the stone had to go.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Name the characteristics of the shallow hearer.
2. What four things listed are tests for the soul?
3. What Bible character illustrates this parable for Jesus?

4. What was Jesus' immediate thought for this man?
5. What gives us a clue that he really wanted eternal life?
6. What five steps did Jesus ask him to make, and what promise was included?
7. How did the story end?
8. What prophetic promise was given for those who had stony hearts?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There have been precious souls who would, at times, be emotionally moved to seek salvation, but whose experiences could never last long. Not until they were willing to own up to the “stones” in their lives, gather them out of the way by confessing them, asking God to deliver them, and consecrating to go all the way with God did they find lasting victory for their souls.

For one person, a hard place was a lie of satan which she believed as a child. For years she thought that an altar of prayer was a bad place—a place where someone hurt you and you cried. Later in life she came to grips with this false idea, and God delivered her.

Another had been dealt with unwisely as a child and harbored ideas against “church people.” She wanted to love the Lord, but couldn't get past the confusion and hurt. When she finally realized that God was not harsh, but loving and gentle, she threw that stone out of her life and learned to walk with God and obey His voice.

Some people struggle with fear that God will call them to preach or go to the mission field. Some harbor a love for the baubles of this world and a resentment against “being different.” Others hide a secret vice until the addiction so controls them they have no courage to try to overcome it. These are all beneath-the-surface stony places that keep God's Word from ever growing long enough to produce fruit.

Are there hard places hindering your experience? Gather out the stones, break up your fallow ground and seek the Lord until He gives you a soft heart, that you may become fruitful with His graces and a blessing to everyone around you!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

One Sunday while you are speaking you notice a new person in the audience. He is listening intently and trying to find the scripture in the Bible someone just handed to him. When you invite people to come and pray, he is among those who come forward. He prays earnestly and arises from his knees with a shining face.

You get his address and visit him. He comes again to service, then again and again. You see in him a winning personality; maybe a talent for singing. He has the ability to quickly understand the scriptures. You see the potential for God to use this new babe. The new believer testifies of the great change in his life, of the sweet presence of Jesus in his heart—and then a few Sundays later he is missing.

When service is over and the family and visitors are taken care of, you hurry to his home. His wife answers the door. He's not feeling well, she tells you.

“May I come in and pray for him?”

You go in and find him drunk.

All the strength you have seems to drain out your toes. Your heart bleeds all through the night and the weeks that follow as you try day after day to convince him that God will forgive; that God will give him victory. But he constantly contends that living for Christ is too difficult. A stone in his heart keeps the Word from forming roots.

Be encouraged, because Jeremiah 23:29 says, “Is not my word as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh a rock into pieces.”

I can personally testify that God has broken many hard hearts. Some of these have been persons who accepted Christ quickly, then fell away but were later restored.

—Sis. Charlotte Huskey

APRIL 28, 2019

THE OFFENSE OF THE WORD

Mark 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when

they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Matthew 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

Matthew 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

Galatians 4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

MEMORY VERSE: And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. —
Matthew 11:6

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A person who with deep desire seeks after God will not become offended by the rejection, affliction or persecution which he or she as a follower of Christ will experience, but will endure with joy the shame and reproach of the cross; and instead of stumbling at obeying the Word, will count it as a delight, as Christ did.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 4:17 “Offended”: from *offend*: to put a snare in the way; to cause to stumble; to give offense.

I Peter 4:14 “Reproached”: to defame; rail at; chide; taunt; revile; upbraid.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our previous lesson Jesus told how the persecution, tribulation and affliction that could arise to the one who receives the Word of God often becomes a stumbling block for would-be disciples. There are many other places in Jesus’ ministry where he warned or comforted His disciples concerning this. In prophecy He was called the chief cornerstone which the builders (leaders of Israel) rejected; a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Romans 9:33). Those who followed Him could expect no easier road, He explained; even your own family members may reject or persecute you.

Paul, writing to the Galatians, explained that the reason for persecution was that the Christian was born “after the Spirit.” He or she obeys the Spirit, and not the flesh. This difference is apparent almost immediately after one is born again, and is the source of the world’s hatred for believers. Paul stated to the Philippians that it was a believer’s lot not only to believe, but to suffer for Jesus’ sake. Peter assured the saints that the fiery trials of tribulation weren’t at all strange to the child of God, but were evidence that the Spirit of glory “rested” upon them, and they were to rejoice and glorify God.

Our memory verse is from a touching scene from John the Baptist’s last days. He had been put into prison for preaching God’s Word concerning adultery to Herod and his adulterous wife, Herodias. Filtering into his lonely cell were reports of how Jesus was going about freely, preaching to great crowds who followed him. Was John troubled by second thoughts? In a moment of despair, did he need reassurance? He begged his visiting friends to communicate his questions right to Jesus. “Are you really The One?”

Jesus sent back: “John, it is just as the prophets have said. The deaf hear, the blind see, the lepers are cleansed, and the lame are walking. The gospel is being preached to the humble souls. Oh, John, you will be blessed if you won’t let this persecution make you stumble!” Surely His encouragement bolstered John’s faith, for soon afterward John was

beheaded at Herodias' awful request.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The shallow hearer who is offended at the Word is said to have “no root.” What is this “root”?
2. Give present-day examples of the animosity, rejection, discrimination, hatred, and persecution Christians may endure, from very slight to very intense.
3. Give the reason Paul offered to the Galatians for persecution. Explain why this makes a difference.
4. Peter calls persecution being a “part of Christ’s sufferings.” Are there other scriptures with this thought? How does this bring comfort?
5. John suffered imprisonment and death for preaching God’s Word. In a moment of discouragement, he questioned Jesus. Share an example of your own moment of doubt and how the Lord answered you.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

If we would be brutally honest with ourselves, we would admit that the majority of times we stumbled at the Word was because of deeply rooted selfishness. We just didn’t want to be put out in any way to be a Christian. Going to heaven and having peace and forgiveness and happiness sounded like a good deal, but when it came to suffering, then no deal. That’s the way the flesh responds to the disciplines of the Word of God. It was the preaching of the cross that was a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, and it is still an offense to the fleshly-minded man or woman today.

If we’re not willing to bear that difference between our new life of following the Spirit and the world around us that follows the flesh, whether it be a slight snub, unexplained discrimination, loss of employment, open animosity, or out-and-out persecution, make no mistake, the newly germinated seed stops growing right there and will die when it hits that rock of self-preservation.

How deep is your desire to know and please God? Are you so deeply convicted by His Word that you would rather die than deny Him? Can you endure being either ignored, passed over for a promotion, or taunted by people at school or work because of your high standards?

Accepting with joy the fact that there will be a vast difference from the worldly crowd in your appearance, language, recreation, family life, habits, and goals will bring about a deep peace as you embrace the cross of Christ with entire submission of your will, and crucify the flesh. With that hard place gone, God's Word has the potential now to grow and flourish in your life, producing enduring fruit unto God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

“Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free?”

No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me.”

Reproach has been very familiar to God's servants all along. Psalm 89:50-51 says, “Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.”

Matthew Henry said, “They were God's servants that were reproached, and the abuses done to them reflected upon their Master, especially since it was for serving Him that they were reproached.”

When Paul the Apostle was incarcerated in Rome, he mentioned only one person who came to see him—Onesiphorus in II Timothy 1:16-17. I'm sure that Onesiphorus felt reproached many times as he faced the guards asking for Paul in the different jails that he visited trying to find him. Paul said he “was not ashamed of my chain.” He bore with long lines of people, a lot of waiting, harsh language, rough treatment etc. Onesiphorus sought him out and refreshed him with food, clothes, and fellowship.

When we are not afraid of being offended or reproached, blessings await us from God who sees it all. Reproach and being buffeted for Christ's sake was the “norm” back then and it seemed to be accepted by the saints. Is it different today with political correctness everywhere? Everyone has to be careful of not offending in word or action. It's sad that we

are being silenced and the Word of God is losing its effect upon the hearts and lives of mankind. May God help us to be bold and courageous, and may we not be offended by the Word.

—Bro. James Bell

MAY 5, 2019

THE THORNY HEART

Matthew 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Mark 4:7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Luke 8:14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Luke 13:6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

Isaiah 5:1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he

looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

MEMORY VERSE: Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. —John 15:8

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In the parable of the seed sown in the field, the parable of the fig tree, the parable of the vineyard and the analogy of the vine, we see a common truth: God is looking for fruit. He has done everything necessary for the production of fruit; He is willing to work with us and bear long with us so we will bear fruit; and now it is up to us to rid our lives of the things which choke His Word and cause us to become unfruitful.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 13:7 “Cumber”: render sterile or barren.

Luke 13:8 “Dung”: cast fertilizer or manure. “They carry dung into their gardens to moisten the earth, and dig about the roots of the trees, and lay them bare, and cover them again, and prune them, and smoke them to kill the worms” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Whole Bible*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

As we begin the study into the third type of ground—that which produced thorns and weeds, choking the new plant into unfruitfulness, we are reminded of two other parables, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New, that bring out a similar scenario.

Luke records the parable of the fig tree, no doubt given by Jesus to warn Israel of the impending destruction and His willingness to have mercy and work with them. In a general

way, He also graciously bears with all souls who begin to grow in His grace.

The poetic imagery of prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier expresses God's desire for fruit from His chosen people then, and His touching cry, "What more could I have done?" again shows us His heart, broken by the wild, bitter produce He found after all His years of toil with these people.

In each of these stories, we see His heart's desire: He is looking for fruit. Fruit is the natural outcome of relationship, of union. It is right that He should expect it.

The parable of the sower reveals the four things that choke the Word and stifle all fruit-bearing. Notice that the Word germinated and "sprang up." They (the believers, or new plants) "went forth." They had come past the blade stage and were forming the ear. The thorns which choked the newly forming fruit were identified as, 1) cares of this world (Matthew and Mark) and cares of this life (Luke), 2) the deceitfulness of riches (Matthew and Mark) and riches of this life (Luke), 3) lusts of other things (Mark), and 4) pleasures of this life (Luke).

The emphasis in this lesson is the tender care, forbearance, patience, and toil that Christ is willing to invest in His crop. Surely our hearts should be moved to action and watchfulness in our own lives that we bear our Lord fruit, much fruit, that He may be glorified.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. How many years had the owner of the vineyard sought for fruit from the fig tree?
2. What was the dresser of the vineyard willing to do before the tree was cut down?
3. What Old Testament prophet told the story of God's vineyard?
4. Name the things God had done for His vineyard.
5. What disappointment did He receive, and what was His lament?
6. Share an experience in which God cultivated and fertilized about you so that you would bear fruit for Him.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Aren't you thankful for how the Lord works in your life, digging about you, pruning you, and amending the soil of your heart? He has ways of dealing with each of us to rid us of the weeds that so easily overtake us and choke the Word.

Ultimately it is up to us to respond to God's dealings and provisions with careful diligence, or our end will be like the word picture in Proverbs 24:31 of a vineyard—a life—all grown over with thorns and nettles and the stone wall broken down, the result of sleepy, indolent slothfulness and neglect.

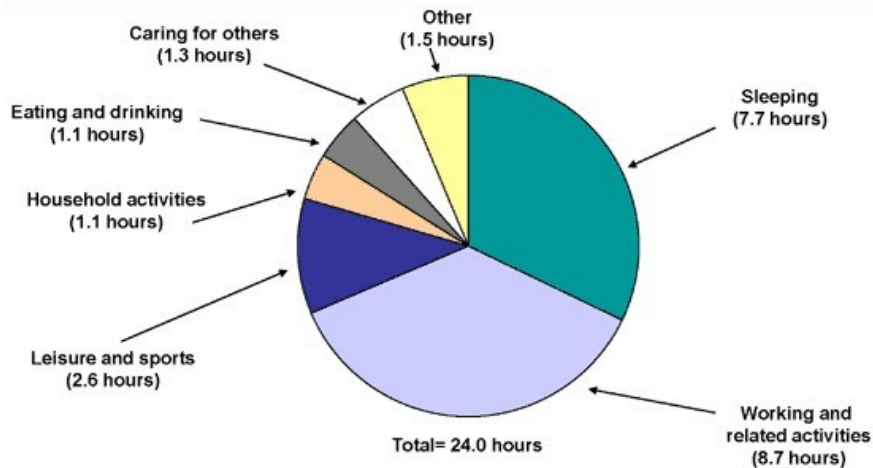
Thorns are not easy to deal with. When we built a new house, we gathered out many wheelbarrow loads of rocks, had topsoil brought in, carefully smoothed out the dirt, and eagerly sowed grass seed, anticipating pretty green grass as the weather warmed and the rain fell. But what was this? Thistles? The children and I spent many hours going about with a shovel and sharp hoe, hands covered with heavy gloves, to extract the prickly base heads of thistles and haul them to the burn pile. I can't even imagine the work involved in clearing land of goatheads!

I can, however, tell you that it is a daily task to keep the weeds out of my heart's garden. Just a little inattention, a little indulgence to the flesh, a little lack of prayer, and little sprouts of noxious weeds begin to crop up. Thank God for the Holy Spirit who daily checks me and prods me to action.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Time use on an average work day for employed persons ages 25 to 54 with children



NOTE: Data include employed persons on days they worked, ages 25 to 54, who lived in households with children under 18. Data include non-holiday weekdays and are annual averages for 2009.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics

This chart portrays the way a majority of people spend their days. Just a glance at it is proof of the many things that can get in the way of our walk with the Lord, just as thorns that choke the Word. When it comes right down to it, going to church, having devotions and helping others all takes time. There is not a section on this chart for any of those things; that means it is in our hands. Jesus was constantly pointing to things eternal, for He knew that all things pertaining to this life will one day disappear. May the Lord teach us how to manage our seconds, minutes and days. If we fail to rid our hearts of the choking thorns in this life then it is certain that we will live in eternal regret.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

MAY 12, 2019

THE CARE OF THIS WORLD

Matthew 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Luke 10:41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Luke 21:34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

I Corinthians 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;

31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

35 And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. —I Peter 5:7

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Worries, anxieties, and the pressures of care and concern for the things of this life—temporal needs of the family, such as food, clothing and housing—tend to divide the mind into many directions, distracting a person from full trust in, undivided love for, and full attention and service to God.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:22 “Care”: worry, anxiety, concern; from a word which means “to divide; to be drawn in different directions; to distract.” “Of this world”: of this present age. “The care which men cherish with regard to temporal objects and temporal affairs, as contrasted with the higher concern, the striving after the Messiah’s kingdom” (*Meyer’s New Testament Commentary*).

Luke 21:34 “Overcharged”: be made heavy; burdened, pressed or weighed down.

I Corinthians 7:31 “Abusing”: use to the full; abuse arising from over-much use. “As not using it to the full—not draining dry the cup of earthly advantages” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Philippians 4:6 “Be careful for nothing”: “Do not worry about anything” (*New Living Translation*). “Do not be anxious about anything” (*New International Version*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The first one of the “thorns” that Jesus mentioned is the care of this world. As Luke records in chapter 21, this type of distracting, heavy care causes the heart to be overcharged, or weighted down. Jesus described this kind of care as that which the Gentiles seek after, meaning the worry type of care; the doubtful-mind type of care, about temporal things—“What shall we eat? What shall we drink? How shall we be clothed?” (Matthew 6:31-32). He charged us to instead seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness *first*, above all else.

Luke also records the conversation Jesus had with Martha, who was “careful and troubled about many things.” As she was in the middle of fixing dinner, and perturbed that her sister was out of the kitchen listening to Jesus teach, we can gather that He was either telling her that by being more simple in her menu and just fixing one or two things, she could be free from so many kitchen duties and come in and hear the message herself; or, we can

apply the “many things” to Martha’s distracted frame of mind over many anxieties. Seeing Mary serene and unconcerned, she became more agitated. The gentle rebuke from Jesus can be taken as personal instruction for any of us, man or woman, who find ourselves “run ragged” and are forgetting the most important thing.

Paul explains to the Corinthians that married persons naturally have more concerns for temporal things than singles. I thought Matthew Henry gave some good comments about this passage: “Considering the distress of those times, the unmarried state was best. Notwithstanding, the apostle does not condemn marriage. He exhorts all Christians to holy indifference toward the world. As to afflictions; they must not indulge the sorrow of the world: even in sorrow the heart may be joyful. As to worldly enjoyments; here is not their rest. As to worldly employment; those that prosper in trade, and increase in wealth, should hold their possessions as though they held them not. As to all worldly concerns; they must keep the world out of their hearts, that they may not abuse it when they have it in their hands...And whatever cares press upon the mind, let time still be kept for the things of the Lord.”

To the Philippians Paul gives the secret to relieving our minds of the cares that weigh us down: giving thanks and praying about everything. Peter also gives us the admonition to “cast” our cares upon the Lord—a metaphor possibly taken from Psalm 37 where the psalmist says “Commit [roll] thy way upon the Lord,” as a camel kneels down, makes a shift with his shoulders and rolls his load off onto the ground. “Because,” Peter comforts, “He careth for you.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain why cares, especially business and household cares, anxieties or worries could be thorns which choke God’s Word.
2. Share what you consider to be a “balance” in the matters of the domestic cares described in I Corinthians 7.
3. What is Paul’s prescribed antidote for worry, and what does it bring to the heart?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The scriptures in our lesson take in so many areas of life it would be difficult to make every application in our limited amount of class time. We can all think of places in our lives which we can be more fully cast upon the Lord; where we can be more free from the things of this world; where our focus on the most needful thing can be less divided.

The admonition Paul gives about married people was not to make the young mother with the care of crying babies, cooking and cleaning; nor the young father, working hard to put food on the table, feel chastised and guilty; rather, we can soberly remind ourselves that it is possible *in our present state* to use the things of this world in a way to further godliness and not allow them to bring us into bondage. We can enjoy the fruits of our labor with contentment and keep industriously employed, all the while keeping our hearts in tune with God's whispers of peace and His leadings to be about the business of the kingdom in our daily lives.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

It seems that our society has a penchant for caring about that which is unimportant while neglecting that which is. Our displaced care has become a deadly distraction. For instance, texting while driving takes place in almost epidemic proportions and with grave consequences. And because of our ready access to television, cell phones and social media, we've learned to electronically distract ourselves and our children rather than face the hard task of raising them. Their minds, as well as ours, are divided and we are being conditioned to embrace distraction as the norm. There are many obligations that constantly demand our attention. All of this affects us in various ways, spiritually and otherwise.

We prioritize and organize our lives from what is most important, to what is least important; and for far too many, the spiritual things tend to settle toward the bottom. Work becomes more important than worship. Down-time becomes more important than devotion.

There are legitimate excuses: the bills are due; the body is tired. There are immediate rewards: a bigger paycheck, a bit more energy, etc. None of this is wrong per se, but these cares distract us from our eternal priority, and nothing is more important than caring for the

matters of our souls—nothing!

The benefits of prioritizing spiritual things may not be immediately evident, but it will always produce a far better and eternal reward. Not doing so may initially seem inconsequential but a closer examination reveals otherwise. The waning interest in spiritual matters, a gradual loss in power and the subtle disregard of scriptural principles are all symptoms of neglect.

Yes, life must be lived. And there are things that we must take care of and things we must care for, yet we must always have a keen focus on that which truly matters. We must remember that this life is temporary, but our ultimate destination is eternal. Our actions reveal which one we deem most important.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

MAY 19, 2019

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

Matthew 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Luke 8:14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Deuteronomy 8:11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

12 Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

13 And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

17 And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

18 But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Psalm 49:6 They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches;

7 None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.

Psalm 62:10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Proverbs 23:4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Matthew 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

I Timothy 6:9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

MEMORY VERSE: Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. —I Timothy 6:17-19

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Wealth can be deceitful and choke spiritual fruitfulness, keeping souls out of heaven; therefore, God's Word warns against forgetting God in times of wealth, trusting in wealth and setting one's heart on it, laboring and striving for wealth, and loving wealth and the gain of it.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:22 “Deceitfulness”: from a root word which means to seduce; lure; beguile.

Luke 8:14 “Perfection”: completion; maturity.

Proverbs 23:4 “Labour”: to be exhausted; toil; labor; be weary; wear oneself out.

I Timothy 6:9 “They that will be rich”: “The words are emphatic, and refer to persons who are determined to get riches; who make this their object and aim in life; who live to get money; who get all they can, save all they can, and keep all they get; and yet are apprehensive of no danger, because they seek to be rich by honest means; for it is likely that the apostle does not refer to those who wish to get riches by robbery, plunder, extortion, etc.” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “A snare”: “of the devil” is added by many of the church fathers. “Destruction”: wreck and ruin of the body. “Perdition”: ruin of the eternal soul.

I Timothy 6:18: “Ready to distribute, willing to communicate”: “In distinguishing between these words, which are nearly synonymous, the first points rather to the hand which generously gives, and the second to the heart which lovingly sympathizes” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The second type of dangerous thorn mentioned is the deceitfulness of riches (both Matthew and Mark use this term), or riches of this life, as it is implied in Luke 8:14. Both terms give the joint meaning of temporal; worldly riches that do not have any eternal value, but rather seduce the developing Christian away from following Christ, robbing the soul of its heavenly goal.

Very important to this discussion is the warning God gave the children of Israel just before they entered Canaan. In Moses’ last message to his people, he pleaded with them not to forget the One who gave them the power to become wealthy, and become lifted up and boastful. He reminded them of the spiritual and financial bondage they came from and the purpose for which they had accumulated flocks and herds. In this passage we see the beginning elements and the progression of the deceptiveness of wealth: 1) Fullness makes you forget, and when you forget the truth, you create another story, a lie, that you tell

yourself. 2) It's a lie you not only believe yourself, but you are emboldened to boast to others. 3) You have forgotten the folly and danger of boasting. 4) You have forgotten the source of your riches, therefore you dangerously depend upon yourself. 5) You have forgotten that God, Who is the true source, because He loves you, can also give you poverty to humble you and cause you to remember.

The writer in Psalm 49 makes the point that riches cannot redeem from destruction nor ransom the soul. Possibly Paul alludes to this when he warns Timothy in I Timothy 6:9 about destruction and perdition.

The Proverbs writer reminds of the folly of wearing one's self out to accumulate wealth, illustrating the uncertainty and volatility of riches by comparing fortune to an eagle which suddenly takes flight, climbing until it is completely out of view.

Jesus' statement was given after the rich, young ruler walked away from His offer of discipleship, sadly hanging his head because he could not bear to lose what he had worked so hard to gain. I also believe the sadness which descended upon him came from the nagging realization that he had just turned down the opportunity for lasting joy for which he had run toward Jesus a few moments before! Jesus compared a wealthy person entering into the kingdom to a camel going through the eye of a needle, which has been interpreted several ways: either it is simply an impossibility, if interpreted in a very literal sense; or it spoke to an entrance into a city that was only accessible to a traveler on a camel if the camel got on its knees, rolled off all of the baggage piled on its back, crawled through, and the rider crawled through after it. In that comparison, the rich person would need to do just as Jesus had asked—get rid of the load of wealth that weighed him down and become very small in his own estimation.

Paul's warning about the love of money and the drive to become wealthy includes an admonition for those who are already wealthy: be willing to share with others and strive to excel at the gift of liberality. Seek to use your money to gain eternal "friends" (a reference to Luke 16:9) and lay up spiritual treasures in heaven.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What effect has wealth upon Christian fruit-bearing?
2. Explain how riches are deceitful.
3. List the warnings given in the Scripture concerning wealth.
4. List the positive admonitions for those who are wealthy.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There are several deceptive lies embedded in the pursuit of wealth that are so dangerous it is no wonder that Jesus and the apostles warned about them!

One is the false feeling of security—for both body and soul—one feels when there is a comfortable stash, income is flowing and the financial plan seems stable for years to come. A few things can wipe it out: death, natural disaster, sickness, a sudden shift on Wall Street, theft or job loss (modern terms for words Jesus once used—moth, rust, thieves).

A second lie is that riches are a sign of God's favor. Not always so! Especially not so when one has labored to acquire wealth and has set his or her heart or affections on it. This lie is, unbelievably, being hawked even by "Christian" preachers and teachers.

One may never admit believing it, but a third lie some take in is that eternal life can be purchased if one has enough money. Ridiculously, this one has also been promoted by some religious beliefs.

Sadly, a fourth deception believed by most people is that if you just had more money, you would be happier. We do not have the room to tell the stories of all the people who proved that one to be false.

Riches "kiss and betray, they smile and smite into hell. They put out the eyes, harden the heart, steal away all the life of God, fill the soul with pride, anger, and love to the world, and make men enemies to self-denial and the whole cross of Christ" (*John Wesley*).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I would like to share a precious memory that lives on in my heart although it occurred in my early married life. I was working at Faith Publishing at the time and the Lord was meeting our needs, though our finances were low. I had been working some evenings for Phillip and Dan Gellenbeck in Edmond to earn a little on the side. They had me hanging doors, casing, doing window stools, base and closets. One day they took me to a show home in Nichols Hills which was an elite area. The tall ceilings, fireplace, gorgeous crown moulding, the beautiful staircase and kitchen were overwhelming to me. I remember the master closet looking bigger than the living room where we were living.

On my drive home I was comparing this mansion with where I was living and it made our place seem like a little matchbox in comparison, like nothingness. I began questioning what my life was amounting to. Was I missing it somehow? I was feeling discouraged and disheartened as I drove toward home.

Out of the blue, amidst my disheartenment, the words of a song about heaven came to my mind. I began to sing it out loud to myself and all of a sudden the glory of heaven was revealed and opened to my spirit. God was there, Jesus was there, holy angels were there and it was all so real that I was greatly comforted. I wasn't missing it after all. *I had it all*. The vision I experienced made that earthly mansion I had just seen look so trivial and minute in comparison. By the time I got home, I was so full of joy and peace and welcomed the sight of our little home and my precious wife. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

—Bro. Bob Wilson

MAY 26, 2019

PLEASURES OF THIS LIFE

Luke 8:14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Proverbs 21:17 He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

Ecclesiastes 2:1 I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

I Timothy 5:6 But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

II Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

MEMORY VERSE: Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. —I John 2:15-16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Closely related to earthly cares and deceptive riches are worldly pleasures which captivate the affections and desires and choke the love for the Lord right out of the heart.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 21:17 “Pleasure”: foolish joy, gaiety, mirth. “Wine”: that which intoxicates. “Oil”: figuratively, richness or luxury. “Wine’ and ‘oil’ are put for high living, luxurious feasts, costly entertainments; which being so, and continually made, will not suffer a man to be rich” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

I Timothy 5:6 “She that liveth in pleasure”: gives herself to pleasure; to be wanton; live luxuriously, voluptuously. “Is dead while she liveth”: dead to God; dead in trespasses and sins; no longer a living member of the church of God. This was in reference to young women in the congregations who were being troublemakers and leaving their homes and children to pursue idle gossip and sensual pleasures (I Timothy 5:11-15; II Timothy 3:6-7).

II Timothy 3:1 “Perilous”: terrible; dangerous; furious; difficult; reducing the strength.

II Timothy 3:2 “Lovers of their own selves”: “Self-loving, selfish. From *philos* and *autos*; fond of self” (*Strong’s Concordance*). “Covetous”: money-loving, avaricious, covetous. From *philos* and *arguros*; fond of silver” (*Strong’s Concordance*). “Boasters”: one who gives one’s self airs in a loud and flaunting way; braggart” (*Strong’s Concordance*). “Proud”: “Proud, arrogant, disdainful. From *huper* and *phaino*; appearing above others, i.e. haughty” (*Strong’s Concordance*). “They who contemptuously look down on others beneath them, either in social position or wealth, or perhaps in natural gifts” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). “Blasphemers”: railers; insolent and abusive in thought and word toward God. This refers to evil speaking against God and holy things; or generally, evil speaking. “Disobedient to parents”: unbelieving; disobedient; those who will not be persuaded. “Unthankful”: ungrateful for good received from both God and man. “Unholy”: profane; wicked because of an impure heart.

II Timothy 3:3 “Without natural affection”: hard-hearted toward kindred; careless and regardless of the welfare of those connected with them by ties of blood. “Trucebreakers”: not bound by truce. “One who violates a truce, covenant or engagement” (*Webster’s*). It is also interpreted as *implacable*; not appeasable; one who will make no truce or treaty with his enemy. “False accusers”: slanderer; from a word that means *satan, the arch-accuser*. “Incontinent”: literally, no power; without self-control; no control over the passions; intemperate in the pursuit or use of anything—money, pleasure, the tongue, the appetite. “Fierce”: brutal; not tame; savage; merciless. “Despisers of those that are good”: no lovers of good; hostile to virtue and every good thought or work.

II Timothy 3:4 “Traitors”: betrayers; to surrender into the enemy’s hands. “Heady”: from a word meaning *falling forward*; reckless; impulsive; rash. “Highminded”: inflated by self-conceit; blinded by pride. “Lovers of pleasures”: fond of pleasure.

Titus 3:3 “Divers”: various; diverse; different; of all sorts.

I John 2:16 “The lust of the flesh”: “Sensual and impure desires which seek their gratification in women, strong drink, delicious viands [food], and the like” (*Clarke’s*

Commentary). “The lust of the eyes”: “Inordinate desires after finery of every kind, gaudy dress, splendid houses, superb furniture, expensive equipage, trappings, and decorations of all sorts” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “The pride of life”: “Hunting after honors, titles, and pedigrees; boasting of ancestry, family connections, great offices, honorable acquaintance, and the like” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “A vain man craves the grandeur and pomp of a vain-glorious life; this includes thirst after honour and applause” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The words of Solomon from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes show us the folly of a life spent in pursuit of physical pleasure. “Vanity,” he sighed, implicating the short-term gratification which ends in emptiness of soul, frustration of mind, and nothing to show of any eternal or lasting value. Solomon actually acquired the pleasures whereof he spoke: wives and exotic, foreign, female companions; beautiful zoological and botanical gardens, vineyards and forests with state-of-the-art irrigation systems, the finest orchestras and choirs, entertainment to make him laugh, and luxurious, palatial estates. He dealt in cattle, silver, gold and rare royal treasures from all over the world. He had many servants to do his bidding. Yet he “hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:17). How telling!

Paul wrote two epistles to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus. We have shared in a previous lesson series about this wealthy center of education and culture. Paul gave many warnings of its powerful influence against godliness. His message of the danger of the “last days” have applied to every generation since then—have you noticed? The saints in that time thought it would just be a few years until Jesus would return. God began to give warnings to them of the scoffers who would arise when He failed to appear. He gave prophecies of the different heresies which would arise—the anti-christ doctrines; the gnostics, the antinomians; the great falling away; the apostasy. This entire period, from Jesus’ ascension until His second coming, then, is called “the last days.”

Paul instructed Titus, who was a Greek Christian, probably a convert of Paul (Titus 1:4), to be very gentle in dealing with souls because, he said, before Christ’s kindness and love to us appeared, we also served various lusts and pleasures. The epistle to Titus was most likely written at the same time he wrote the first epistle to Timothy, around A. D. 65-67. They are very similar in warnings and instructions about establishing the congregations, and use the same salutations and phrases. Titus is not named in the book of Acts, although he is most

certainly the unnamed “certain other” disciple mentioned in Acts 15:2. In the same event described in Galatians 2, Paul refused to have Titus circumcised and the disciples decided upon what particular stand was to be taken concerning the Gentile Christians. A companion on several of Paul’s journeys, Titus was sent to Corinth to see about the troubling affairs for which Paul had written the first epistle to the Corinthians, and to oversee the collection that church was gathering to send to the poor saints in Judea. His ministry there was successful, and he later brought Paul comforting, positive reports about the Corinthian congregation. Paul sent him back with two other companions to share the second epistle and complete the mission of sending funds to Judea (II Corinthians 8). Some time later, after Paul left Titus in Crete to establish the work there, he sent him the epistle. Titus possibly joined Apostle Paul in his final imprisonment in Rome, but there is no further history of Titus recorded in Scripture after Paul spoke in II Timothy 4 of Titus being in Dalmatia. According to tradition, he was the pastor in Crete until his death.

John warned about the different sects that would arise, including the anti-christ spirit and the Nicolaitanes who felt that sensual pleasures were an indifferent matter and did not affect the spirit, much like the “grace” heresy propagated today. John clearly established that a love for the world and love for the Father do not coexist.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. List three “thorns” mentioned in the lessons so far.
2. List the three pursuits mentioned in Proverbs that bring physical, moral and spiritual poverty.
3. What was the result of Solomon’s pursuit of pleasure and mirth?
4. Who was Paul describing when he wrote of “She who liveth in pleasure?”
5. What is the meaning of the “last days”?
6. “Serving...lusts and pleasures” implies bondage. Describe how earthly pleasures produce that.
7. Describe the three pleasures mentioned by the Apostle John. How do they affect the spiritual life?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Make no mistake: the scriptures do not teach that living for God means living without pleasure. Rather, God created many pleasures for mankind to enjoy! The pure pleasure He placed within the bounds of holy matrimony, the pleasure of childhood, the social pleasures of having family and friends, wholesome pleasures of seeing the beauties of His creation, the pleasures of good food, work, relaxation, humor, exercise, discovery, excitement—all of these are His gifts to us, along with the many responsibilities of life. How grateful we should be and how joyously we are permitted to partake of these pleasures without guilt or regret!

It is when pleasure, or the pursuit of it, becomes the most important thing in our lives, overtaking obedience to God's Word, dutiful service to family, or responsibilities as a friend, employee or community member, that it becomes selfish and sinful.

It is important to note that our memory verse warns against the pleasures of this world: the lusts or desires of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. These things were what drew Eve's desire away from obeying God. Remember? The tree was "pleasant" to the eyes, looked like good eating, and promised a heightened sense of being "wise." Satan also tempted Jesus with these three things. He preyed upon Jesus' forty days' worth of hunger, tempted Him with the baubles and glories of earthly kingdoms, and promised Him a glorious rescue by angels, as proof to the world that He was the Son of God, if he would jump off the temple pinnacle. Jesus triumphed because He cut through all of Satan's lies with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

We are fighting some real battles against the pleasures of food and drink, because that is the craze of popular culture. How soon the flesh becomes addicted and consumed by this pleasure—so much so that it can become an idol! Glamour and fashion have choked out real spiritual life in both younger and older women, and porn is wiping out thousands of soldiers of the cross. Brother and sister! Wake up and fight for your precious soul!

Either we chop away the deadly shoots of worldly pleasures with the Word of God, or we allow pleasure to choke the powerful Word of God out of our lives like kudzu in the hills of Tennessee—it's our choice.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Mankind has been enthralled with the prospect of pursuing pleasure instead of prioritizing obedience to God ever since Eve first rationalized that the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was pleasant to the eyes and partook of it. Since then, the excesses of man have been evident. The Caesars and societal elites of ancient Rome revealed their hedonistic tendencies through gluttony and illicit sensual perversions. The decadence of the French Monarchy was on full display via the ostentatious construction of the royal palace at Versailles, with its more than 700 rooms and 1,200 fireplaces, helping lead to the bankruptcy of the country and the resulting French Revolution.

History is full of other examples as well, and we often tend to look at these cases as outliers, clearly in the extreme. Yet, in our own modern society we can see the profligacy to which many are turning. The phrase “He who dies with the most toys wins,” which I first saw on a bumper sticker, has been attributed to multi-millionaire Malcolm S. Forbes Sr., the one-time publisher of *Forbes* magazine, who certainly pursued all the “toys” he could accumulate. Another phrase, “work hard, play hard,” derived from a quote by Teddy Roosevelt, has often been used to justify long hours in pursuit of the American Dream and all the partying and carousing one can handle when a break is needed. Finally, a 21st century acronym, YOLO, for “you only live once,” often seems to give license to pursue whatever one wants selfishly without regard for the consequences or risks involved.

Ultimately, to quote a phrase from a song my father wrote, many have come to realize, like Solomon, that “this earth’s fleeting pleasures gave me no lasting treasure.” We must be sure to pursue God and His Will as our most important endeavor, and in obeying Him, the things He puts in our lives to enjoy will supersede any pleasures the world can offer.

—Bro. Fari Matthews

JUNE 2, 2019

DESIRES FOR THE FORBIDDEN

Mark 4:18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Colossians 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

James 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

James 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

MEMORY VERSE: Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

—I Peter 2:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: It is important to crucify the desires of the flesh, especially those longings for what is forbidden by God, because such longings will soon overtake the soul, choke out spiritual life and turn developing fruit into rottenness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 4:19 “Lusts of other things”: a passionate longing, especially for what is forbidden. Same word as *concupiscence* in Colossians 3:5 and I Thessalonians 4:5 and *lust* in Titus 2:12, James 1:14 and I Peter 2:11.

Colossians 3:2 “Set your affection”: direct the mind to; seek for; care for. From a Greek root which means “the midriff or diaphragm; the parts around the heart.”

Colossians 3:5 “Inordinate affection”: “a suffering.” Strong feelings or emotions that are not guided by God; burning passion; consuming lust. “Covetousness”: desire for advantage; lusting for a greater number of temporal things that go beyond what God determines is eternally best. From a combination of Greek words which means “have numerically more” (*HELPS Word Studies*). “Inordinate desire—evil concupiscence: [Inordinate desire is] implying a passive receptiveness of impression from without; the other [evil concupiscence] the positive energy of desire to seek gratification” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

James 4:3 “Amiss”: badly; improperly; wrongly; with wrong motives.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We can think of several Old Testament people who ruined their lives by passionately longing for what was forbidden to them. In Genesis 3, Eve was tempted by the pleasurable beauty of the tree, the anticipation of something new and tasty to eat, and the appeal made to her human curiosity to know more and be considered wise. She influenced Adam, who by

his transgression passed the nature of sin to all his descendants. They lost their beautiful home, their innocence, and their fellowship with God.

Lot's wife perished when she, in disobedience to God's command, turned back to look at the home she loved so dearly (Genesis 19:26).

Achan lost his life, family and belongings because he coveted and stole forbidden treasures from Jericho (Joshua 7).

David brought trouble and sorrow upon his family for the rest of his life when he lusted after Bathsheba and deceitfully killed her husband in order to marry her (II Samuel 12:10).

Ahab so desired Naboth's piece of property he threw a tantrum and consorted with his evil wife to kill to get it (I Kings 21).

Gehazi coveted Naaman's gifts to Elisha and paid for it the rest of his life—with leprosy (II Kings 5:27).

In the New Testament there was Judas, who lost his soul for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 27).

Herod Antipas wanted his brother's wife, Herodias, married her, and had John the Baptist beheaded for her (Mark 6). At her urging, he went to Rome to gain the title of king, but was sorely defeated and banished, accompanied by Herodias, for the rest of his life (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*).

Ananias and his wife Sapphira conspired to sell their land and made it appear they were giving all the proceeds to the disciples; however, they pocketed part of the profit and lied about it (Acts 5). Both fell dead, being found out and condemned by the Lord.

Did you notice that in many of these examples, after they gained what they lusted for, they lost both the object of lust and, in most cases, their lives? How tragic!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. In the verses from Colossians, three definite instructions are given to the person who has been "risen with Christ." What are they?
2. What are the two things that *grace* teaches us (Titus 2:11-12)?

3. According to James, what things come from lusts or wrong desires?
4. James identifies what kind of prayers are not answered. Explain this.
5. What names did James give to people who are friends with the world?
6. What is the meaning of the term “lusts of other things”?
7. Name individuals from Bible history who illustrate this lesson.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

I would like to speak quite plainly to the church today concerning these deadly thorns. We see fruitless professors all around us, and sadly, multitudes more *who know better* are allowing little roots of anxiety, cares of business and social life, and cares brought on them by the affluent way many of them live, to choke their love, their zeal, and their ability to give time and service to the Lord. The evil spirits let loose in worldly media and fashion and the pursuit of wealth are wreaking havoc on marriages. Worldly entertainment is choking out the family altar.

We have been given the heritage of a godly, plain and simple way of living. We can trace this teaching clear from the disciples and the early church, down through the martyrs of the middle ages, Anabaptists, protestors and radical reformers, on into the early holiness movements and in the beginning Church of God reformation throughout the world.

However, following every time of reformation, it wouldn't be long until formality and worldliness, appearing innocent and harmless, would spread alarmingly throughout congregations, bringing division and confusion and stifling the ardent zeal for the spread of the pure gospel. Sadly, many efforts to weed out worldliness resulted in honest souls swinging too far the opposite way, with harshness, glaring inconsistencies and in-fighting causing bitterness and disillusion.

We stand in grave danger today more than ever before. The thorns Jesus mentioned are consuming all spiritual life from many, and we must take action.

Consider this from Matthew Henry: “It is our duty to mortify our members which incline to the things of the world. Mortify them, kill them, suppress them, as weeds or vermin which spread and destroy all about them. Continual opposition must be made to all corrupt workings, and no provision made for carnal indulgences. Occasions of sin must be avoided:

the lusts of the flesh, and the love of the world; and covetousness, which is idolatry.

“It is necessary to mortify sins, because if we do not kill them, they will kill us.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Sin has a strong pull to it. Samson started with the power of God in his life, but the desire for the forbidden ended him up powerless in the lap of Delilah.

As children, my two older brothers and I loved to go outside after a big rain to play in the water. We lived close to a park, and after a big summer downpour it would be covered with water. We were so excited as we got close to this huge lake of water. But what was most exciting was a very large whirlpool in the deepest part of the park. This thing was like a monster going round and round, gobbling up trash and limbs and disappearing down a hole.

Being curious and adventurous boys, we decided to get closer to it so we could watch it better. We waded out to our waists and then a little bit deeper. We could feel the current around us and hear the noise as everything was pulled down the hole. In just a minute my older brother lost his footing and started being carried toward the center.

Isn't that like sin? What business do we have desiring the forbidden? The Internet is much like this; if you watch something filthy for just a minute, that's too close and it will pull you in, robbing your innocence and taking your time. The love of other things will choke out the Word and take you farther away from God.

In the Evening Light song #299, the first verse mentions "my struggle within, between the good spirit and indwelling sin," and "a foe in the temple not subject to God." That's where these desires for the forbidden are coming from. We have to have all foes in the temple under the power of the blood;. In Zechariah 4:6 it says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” It's only by His power that we can overcome these desires.

And back to my story, my oldest brother grabbed my brother and pulled him away from the hole and he was saved. My mom never knew how close we were to death.

God help us to stay away from the forbidden.

—Bro. James Bell

JUNE 9, 2019

THE GOOD GROUND

Matthew 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Luke 8:15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

Receiving the Word is Vital

Acts 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Understanding is Necessary

Nehemiah 8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Proverbs 2:1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;

2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;

5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Keeping the Word is Important

Psalms 119:2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Luke 11:28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

John 14:22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my

Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Patience and Perseverance are Imperative

Romans 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:

Galatians 6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Fruit-bearing Receives the Blessing

Hebrews 6:7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:

8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

John 15:8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

MEMORY VERSE: Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. —James 5:7b-8

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Those who hear, seek to understand, nobly and readily receive, keep and obey God's Word, and with patience and perseverance bring fruit to maturity, will receive the eternal blessing of the Lord.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:23 "Some an hundred-fold...": All people are not alike. There are different circumstances and different abilities. Although the quantity may differ, the quality will be the same.

Luke 8:15 "Honest and good heart": "The Greek for 'honest' has a somewhat higher meaning than that which now attaches to the English, and may be better expressed by *noble* or *honourable*" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*). "Patience": a patient enduring; a

remaining behind. “The characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

Acts 17:11 “Noble”: ingenuous (Defined by *Webster* as: open; frank; fair; candid; free from reserve, disguise, equivocation or dissimulation). “It is always proof of a noble, liberal, and ingenuous disposition to be willing to examine into the truth of any doctrine presented” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*). “Searched”: to scrutinize; investigate; interrogate; determine.

Nehemiah 8:8 “Gave the sense”: offered insight, wisdom, understanding, and prudence.

Proverbs 2:2 “Incline”: sharpen or prick up the ears; hearken. “Apply”: “To turn the heart with the whole scope of its powers, in the spirit of humility and eagerness, to understanding” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Psalm 119:2 “Keep”: watch or guard.

Luke 11:28 “Keep”: guard; watch; preserve.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have thoroughly studied the three types of ground which do not end up bringing forth mature fruit. Today we look at the characteristics of “good ground.” Here is a question: Can any of the other “not so good” types ever become “good ground”? I believe that through seeking the grace of God, certainly an individual may change, as long as he or she is willing for God to plow, cultivate, gather out the stones, and root out the thorns, which He, and only He, can do if we entreat Him.

After Pentecost, thousands of souls received the preached Word, believed and were baptized—a “nation born in one day”—establishing the Church of God. Receiving the Word with meekness saves the soul, James said. So anyone who readily receives and hears God’s Word with the heart and not just with the intellect can be born again, a child of God. The Jews at Berea demonstrated this receptivity with an added depth: they searched and examined what was being preached to see if it rang true with the Old Testament teachings.

Upon returning to Jerusalem after their seventy-year captivity, the Jews in Ezra and Nehemiah’s time gathered to hear God’s Word. Ezra, the priest and scribe, from a wooden

pulpit built up so he could be seen by all the people, opened the scroll. Immediately the people stood up, responding with “Amen, Amen,” and uplifted hands. Then they bowed and worshiped with their faces to the ground. Rising to their feet, they listened while the Levites not only read the words of the law, but said each word distinctly, translated it into the common vernacular of the people, and expounded or explained as they read. The people initially responded by weeping when they heard and understood the law, but Nehemiah, along with Ezra and the Levite readers, encouraged them to not weep but rejoice, prepare a feast and send food and gifts to those who were needy. In this we see a positive example, both for those of us who give God’s Word to the people, and for all of us when we hear God’s Word. How important it is that we take the time to help the people understand! We must make the meaning so plain even little children can grasp it.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain the connection between “an honest and good heart” and the Jews in Berea who were “noble.”
2. Explain the importance of understanding in the germination/growth/fruit-bearing process.
3. What promise is given by Jesus for those who will keep and obey His Word?
4. What promises are given for those who patiently continue and do not faint?
5. Describe the different end-consequences for the good ground which bears fruit and the ground which bears thorns.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Understanding what is read or preached is what makes the difference in how the Word transforms our lives. Remember that satan takes the Word away from the hardened heart before there is time for understanding, because he knows that when the understanding is enlightened a miracle takes place! The passage in Proverbs lets us know that we can cry to God for the wisdom and understanding of Him that we lack.

After we receive and understand God's Word, it is imperative that we guard it, hold on to it and allow it to work its changes in our lives. Both the Psalmist and Christ Himself declared the blessedness of those who keep His Word and obey it.

Patient continuance of obedience and cheerful endurance of all tribulation and persecution which arises because we are obeying God's Word will surely bring forth much fruit to maturity.

Aren't you glad that our final yield, whether little or much in comparison to one another, is justly weighed by the Heavenly Husbandman, who takes into consideration our hearts, which He knows and loves so well, our circumstances, and our abilities? He has long patience with us, as He cultivates, fertilizes and mulches His crop to perfection. He sends the early and latter rains, He tenderly watches night and day, and He will safely bring home His harvest with rejoicing.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

A couple we were acquainted with bought a cute home on a country road. The house's charm was not limited to the flower beds, which were filled with mulch. The wife could not wait to fill them with her plants. Her eagerness turned to shock when she found that the beautiful, lush mulch was covering a layer of plastic hiding rock-solid soil; hence, the reason the flower beds were empty. She and her husband spent a lot of time, labor and money redoing those flower beds. They had to completely remove the hard, inadequate ground and replace it with a rich loamy soil. In time, those empty flower beds turned into a beautiful landscape of many types of flowers, plants and bushes; a profusion of color and blossoms.

Good, rich soil does not just happen. We must be willing to have a heart that is tilled and plowed into softness. It may be necessary to add fertilizer to create a harmonious balance in the soil content. It will take a concentrated effort in order to have a heart that is ready to receive the seed of the Word of God. Once the seed has been planted, then we can expect to enjoy the exponential reaping of a life filled with happiness, joy and contentment. What a privilege to have the good ground in our life. It is worth every trial, tear and effort!

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

JUNE 16, 2019

WHEAT AND TARES

Matthew 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

MEMORY VERSE: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

—II Corinthians 5:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As pseudo-wheat is sown by an enemy among the crop of true grain, so hypocrites, false Christs, and false prophets abound in and around true Christians in the world. In the judgment, all shall be judged by their fruits and a separation will be made between the righteous and the unrighteous for all eternity.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:25 “Tares”: “The bearded darnel. It is the *Lolium temulentum*, a species of rye-grass, the seeds of which are a strong soporific [sleep-inducing] poison. It bears the closest resemblance to wheat till the ear appears, and only then the difference is discovered. It grows plentifully in Syria and Palestine” (*Easton’s Bible Dictionary*).

Matthew 13:41 “Offend”: the bait stick of a trap; snare; means of stumbling. “Iniquity”: lawlessness; utter contempt and disregard for God’s law.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Immediately following the parable of the sower, Matthew records the second parable Jesus told about sowing grain. Later when Jesus sent the multitudes away and retired into a house, His disciples came and inquired of the meaning of the parable. Jesus clearly identified each part of the parable with its spiritual application. The focus of the story seems to be the

assurance that although evil people are allowed to exist in the world alongside the children of God, there will be no mistake made in the judgment, which will be according to fruits of the heart and not appearance. The righteous will “shine forth” or “stand” (as in Psalm 1), and the wicked will be cast into eternal fire.

In the explanation given by Christ, the good seed are the “children of the kingdom” and the tares are the “children of the wicked one.” We can find references to these terms in other places in Scripture. In Genesis, the world before the flood was divided between the few sons “of God” and the many sons or daughters “of men,” referring to those who believed in and called upon the Lord God in contrast to those whose hearts were violent, corrupt, imagined only evil continually and were mighty men of renown.

Jesus spoke to those who served sin in John 8:38-44. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, speaks of how we all walked according to the spirit that “now worketh in the children of disobedience” and were dead in trespasses and sins.

In I John 3:10 we read, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

The difference between corrupt trees or plants and good trees is also explained by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”

A passage in Isaiah 61 refers to those to whom the gospel would be preached, those who would be liberated by the good tidings, as “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.” In contrast, Jesus, speaking of the Pharisees, said, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13).

Clearly, Scripture teaches there are only two kinds of people: the righteous and the unrighteous. It is not always easy to tell between the two, because those who appear righteous may not have pure hearts. How comforting is this promise: “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Timothy 2:19).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The field is the _____.
2. The enemy is the _____.
3. The good seed are the _____ of the _____.
4. The tares are the _____ of the _____.
5. The reapers are the _____.
6. The harvest is the _____ of the _____.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We have the opportunity before that final judgment to examine ourselves and determine: am I the true wheat of God's planting, or am I really a child of disobedience, a degenerate weed masquerading as true grain? We can know by putting ourselves under the scrutiny of God's eternal Word and passing under His judgment now, while we have life and breath. The gospel message is one of condemnation and judgment upon all sin; of finding out just where we stand and just how we measure. But the gospel message is also one of repentance, and that brings hope.

We asked the question in an earlier lesson: Is it possible for someone who is hard, or shallow, or thorn-choked to ever change and become good ground? And I ask the question now: Is it possible to bow under the assessment of God's Word and acknowledge, "I am a child of satan. I stand in danger of hell fire," and allow God, in a spiritual sense, to weed you out right now and then plant you as a righteous seed into His kingdom? Why not, and why not today, as you hear His voice? Surely God's waiting in this parable signifies His mercy and tenderness toward you!

Our lesson also shows God's tenderness toward those true plants who might be damaged by pick and hoe if the workers went in and attacked that weedy mess, snatching up the tares and pitching them into the fire. God, give us wisdom and prudent discernment of both the time and the method of dealing with souls around us!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian displays the fruit of one. The Bible is very clear in its identification of the true people of God. *Ye shall know them by their fruit.* In nature we identify each plant by sight. We can determine whether it is an orange or an apple tree simply by examining the fruit that it produces. It would be foolish to insist that the tree is different from the fruit that plainly identifies it.

Yet, when it comes to Christianity, this is done daily. Too often we suspend the identification process and embrace the claim even though the fruit doesn't match. Is it wheat or is it a tare? They may resemble each other but each is true to its character and is clearly identifiable by what it produces.

God expects us to be different and for that difference to be clearly and easily discerned. It is not merely by an outward display but by an inward work of the heart. It is when a person is changed from the inside out. It is a hidden work that consistently reveals the same fruit in all circumstances and under all conditions.

We are all producing fruit that identifies our true nature and our true status before God. It is not for us to redefine the description of a Christian. It is for us to critically examine our lives to verify that we meet the criteria plainly defined in the Word of God.

If we neglect to do so there are eternal consequences. Many people identify themselves as Christians but are Christians in name only. God's final separation will not be by the name we identify with, but by the fruit that identifies us.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

JUNE 23, 2019

WHEAT AND CHAFF

Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Psalm 1:4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Isaiah 5:24 Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Jeremiah 23:28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

MEMORY VERSE: Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. —II Timothy 3:5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A spiritual lesson is learned by studying the difference between the wheat, the true substance and the chaff, which is but a husk, an empty form.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 3:2 “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”: “The royal majesty of the heavens approaches!” (*Bro. Clifford Wilson*). “The purity of the Divine worship, and the blessedness which a righteous man feels when employed in it. The dispensation of the glorious Gospel was now about to be fully opened, and the Jews were to have the first offers of salvation. This kingdom is also at hand to us; and wherever Christ crucified is preached, there is salvation to be found” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Matthew 3:8 “Fruits meet for repentance”: fruit worthy of, suitable for, equal weight to, or congruent to, repentance. “Meet” means, properly, *drawing down the scale*, referring to the idea of putting weight on one side of the set of scales equal to the other side. The Greek word, *aksios*, is the origin of the English word *axis*, also referring to a balance scale operating by off-setting weights. “The assessment in keeping with how something “weighs in” on God’s balance-scale of truth” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

Matthew 3:12 “Whose fan is in his hand”: “The scene brought before us is that of the large hardened surface which was the “threshing-floor” of the East, the sheaves [of grain] thrown over it, the oxen treading on them, the large winnowing fans driving on them the full force of the strong current of air, [a pitchfork or shovel was used to throw the wheat and chaff into the air] leaving the wheat in the middle, while the chaff is driven to the outskirts of the field to be afterwards swept up and burnt” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). “Thoroughly”: cleanse perfectly.

Psalms 1:5 “Ungodly”: “Rasha (Psalms 1), ‘wicked’; beliya`al (II Samuel 22:5), ‘worthless’; indicating that the persons so called are both irreverent and impious: Trench says that the idea of active opposition to religion is involved in the word, that it is a deliberate withholding from God of His dues of prayer and of service; a standing, so to speak, in battle array against God and His claims to respect, reverence and obedience. Those whose sins are particularly aggravating and deserving of God’s wrath are the ‘ungodly.’ And yet it is for such that Jesus Christ died” (*Williams Evans, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). “Stand”: arise; maintain oneself.

Jeremiah 23:28 “Chaff”: the stalks of grain chopped and used for fodder; straw; stubble; refuse.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The threshing-floor scene was a familiar one to the Israelites. John the Baptist, preaching in the deserts of Judea, made the powerful analogy between the stern judgment of Almighty God against the sin and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the wind generated by the winnowing fans (made from palm leaves or woven from reeds and waved by the servants) which blew the straw and chaff away. Repentance, demonstrated by worthy acts of humility, contrition and a purposeful about-face from unrighteousness to godliness, was the clarion call of John's ministry as he—the voice in the wilderness prophesied by Isaiah—cried, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" John was the forerunner of Jesus, Who in turn sent the burning, purging Holy Spirit to accomplish His work.

The Psalmist also used the illustration when he compared the godly man, who delights in and meditates upon the law of the Lord, to the ungodly man. The godly, as the true substance of the kernel of grain, would withstand the judgment wrath, but the ungodly, who had a form of religion but was empty, like the outer husk, or chaff, would be unable to hold his head up in the judgment.

Isaiah explained the true cause of the judgment flame which consumed the chaff: casting away the law of the Lord and despising His Word.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day kept promoting a dangerous, false peace among the Israelites. Like an elusive dream, their message of security and prosperity, when in reality clouds of destruction and doom swirled black over their heads, was described by Jeremiah as mere chaff or stubble, when compared to the true wheat of the Word of God.

In each of these illustrations and in our memory verse, we see a strong, steady theme: there is a form of religion, a false righteousness, an outward pretense of godliness that is as empty and worthless as the grass stems, leaves and lightweight husks around the kernel of grain. There is a true worshiper, like the real grain, whose life has substance; there is a true gospel and a pure and enduring doctrine.

As in the harvest the sheaves were threshed and winnowed, the precious grain was gathered up to use for food, and the refuse was blown away to be burnt; in the end of the world the godly will be gathered into God's eternal presence and the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Matthew 3 records the preaching of _____ .
2. Which two verses mention fruit?
3. What are the elements of the grain analogy he used?
4. The righteous are compared to _____.
5. The ungodly are compared to _____.
6. Describe how the righteous and the ungodly fare in the judgment.
7. How does our memory verse connect to the rest of the verses in the lesson?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

What a jolt it must have been to the pious-acting, super-religious Pharisees as they heard John the Baptist call them a generation of vipers and compare them to the chaff of the threshing floor! This image of worthless refuse, to men who were blindly puffed up by self-importance and self-assured in their rigid adherence to the law, should have been a wake-up call. John also called their next move—their boast that they were the elite of the earth, the children of Abraham.

As in previous lessons, we see that God was looking for fruit. The empty chaff of high profession wasn't going to do. It is the same today. Chaff is the shell. The form of godliness. A claim to know God, but shameless denial of Him in everyday life. Piety that is actually irreverence; worship that is really opposition and rebellion. Paul said, "Turn away." We are called to bring fruit to God that fully equals the requirements of true repentance.

Our lesson also speaks to false preaching that passes for truth: it is also called chaff. The empty dreams and smooth speeches of false religion today are worthless compared to the weighty preaching of the gospel accompanied by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, may the truth of this lesson sink down into our hearts! Do we want just a shell of religion or the true kernel of salvation which produces godliness? Are we content with chaffy preaching that makes the flesh feel good, or that which strengthens and nourishes the soul?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Wrath was hanging over the Jewish nation for its wickedness, rejecting and shedding of Jesus' blood. The people cried, "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children." Wrath was foretold by the prophet Daniel and Jesus foretold the same many times in His teachings. On the way to Calvary, he told some women, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children (Luke 23:28)."

In Matthew 24:31, He said, "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." This was accomplished through the preaching of the gospel. Those who believed the gospel and repented, believed Jesus' teaching about the wrath to come.

Josephus relates that when the Roman armies encompassed the city, many people had fled to Jerusalem for protection, it being the capitol and having seemingly impregnable walls. But there was a flank out of position through which the just people escaped the city, besides the earlier Christians who had fled because of persecution. Once the gap was filled by the Roman armies, it was too late. Josephus relates that the number of those reckoned who perished in the war was 1,357,660. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38).

There is another day of wrath out in front of us. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness" (II Peter 3:10-11).

—Bro. Bob Wilson

JUNE 30, 2019

EXCEPT IT DIE, IT ABIDETH ALONE

John 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

II Corinthians 4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

I Corinthians 15:35 But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

36 Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:

38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

MEMORY VERSE: So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. —I Corinthians 15:54

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A dual analogy from the scriptures is in our lesson: we must be crucified with Christ in order to spiritually live and bear fruit; and, just as in the spiritual resurrection to life in Christ, so our bodies when we die, as seed, lie dead in the ground, until they are quickened into incorruptible bodies in the literal resurrection.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 12:25 “Hateth”: from the verb “I hate,” meaning “to detest (on a comparative basis); hence, denounce; to love someone or something less than someone (something) else, i.e., to renounce one choice in favor of another” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus had just come triumphantly into Jerusalem riding upon a colt, while people spread their garments on the path and waved palm branches, singing and shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord!” Later, visitors from Greece who had come to worship at the Passover feast came looking for Jesus. Jesus chose this time to speak about what death he was soon to suffer. Contained in this little message was the object lesson about grain. He likened Himself to a kernel of wheat that would remain intact, but dry and alone if it was spared from falling into the ground. However, if it was planted, the individual kernel would indeed swell, rot, and fall apart, never to be “itself” again, but a wonderful miracle would take place. Out of the death of the lone seed would come a beautiful plant, bearing many fruits with multiple seeds. Jesus had spoken about the paradox before, declaring the truth that a man must “lose his life” in order to find it. If a man sought to “spare” his life, he most assuredly would lose his soul for eternity.

The Apostle Paul picked up on this theme in both his second letter to the Corinthians, in which he explained and defended the many sufferings he was enduring for the sake of Christ; and in the epistle to the Galatians. Suffering in the flesh and dying to self is the way we “bear about in the body” the dying of the Lord Jesus, he wrote. It is the only way we can clearly show His life to the world.

Paul, in his first writing to the Corinthians—probably to combat the no-resurrection heresies infiltrating the groups of believers—revealed how the resurrection was illustrated by

a seed planted in the ground and a new plant bursting forth from it in glory and honor. He mentioned twice in I Corinthians 15 about Jesus being the “firstfruits,” a reference to the Jewish Feast of Firstfruits, which came right after the Passover. Jesus was crucified on Passover, fulfilling the type of the sacrificial lamb. He rose on the first day after the Sabbath, which was the first Sabbath after the Passover, thus fulfilling the type of the firstfruits of grain which were given to God on that day, the Feast of First-fruits, as a token of thanksgiving at the beginning of harvest; fifty days before the Feast of Pentecost at the end of the harvest.

Our memory verse contains the truth of both analogies: death is swallowed up in victory. Jesus’ death brought eternal life for all of us who were dead in trespasses and sins. Truly, gain comes out of loss, the crown comes out of the cross, and out of death comes everlasting life!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. In your own words, how does the planting of grain symbolize Jesus’ death and resurrection?
2. How does it describe the spiritual resurrection which takes place in our hearts?
3. Explain the meaning of “it abideth alone.” Apply it to Christ; apply it to the Christian.
4. Explain how the planting of grain symbolizes the final resurrection.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

This is a most sublime concept! One year as we commemorated Jesus’ death and resurrection, I was inspired to make loaves of wheat bread to give to friends and neighbors, along with a card explaining the miracle of the grain and how it revealed the truth about resurrection. It was such a joy to share the story that grows more dear and wonderful “each time I tell it”!

But there is a very serious side to this lesson as well. The idea of “it abideth alone” nearly brings a shudder to my spirit. An awful “what if” comes to my mind. What if Jesus chose to “abide alone”? How could you or I have been redeemed? He was our only hope for

salvation! What if you or I choose to “abide alone”? This is what many are choosing today! What are the implications?

Alone means no fruit. No peace, no joy, no gentleness. No faith, no self-control. And no one influenced to be saved because of our witness. No souls won by our lives, and nothing accomplished in the kingdom of God through us as vessels.

Alone means I choose to live selfishly. I avoid the cross; I do everything I can do to avoid any personal sacrifice, suffering or giving up of my desires, preferences or dreams so that God’s will may be done in my life. *Alone* means an absence of God’s presence and blessing in my life. There may be plenty of activity, busy-ness “in His name,” noise, crowds, entertainment. My flesh may rest easy. But I *abide alone* spiritually.

Alone means shut out from the presence of God for eternity. There will be no triumphant shout as I leave the ground, forever to be with the Lord. Only—the resurrection of damnation, however dark and full of terror that may be (John 5:29).

Oh, take heed to the lessons from the wheat field! In this issue we have shared several, but not all that there are in the scriptures. Can you think of more? Use this study as a springboard to more discoveries of the truths presented by God’s creation of a SEED. May God bless this series of lessons to many hearts is my earnest prayer.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I enjoy road trips, and one of my greatest desires since childhood has been to see the “amber waves of grain” to which the author Katherine Lee Bates refers in the wonderful, patriotic hymn “America the Beautiful.” During my teenage years, I had hoped a family trip through Kansas, one of the top producing wheat states in the U.S., would give me the opportunity to fulfill my wish, but alas, the day we drove through the state it was dark! However, I expect that one day I will be able to realize this personal dream of mine.

Naturally, the golden beauty of fully mature wheat is only temporary, as eventually the grain must be harvested and used for the purpose in which it was grown: as flour for baking, as seed for growing more wheat, or as livestock feed, for which most of the wheat in my home state of California is grown. Wheat isn’t grown to look good, but to eventually be crushed, broken, planted; expended and sacrificed for a greater, more productive purpose.

In much the same way, each of the institutions established by our Heavenly Father require sacrifice and death. The sacrifice and death of His Son was required to establish His church. In the family, the sacrifice of parents is needed to bring about the maturity and well-being of their children. Teachers must sacrifice for their students, whether in time or money, or both. A pastor sacrifices for his or her congregation with thousands of prayers and often a lack of sleep. Good neighbors sacrifice, sometimes even their rights, for the sake of the community in which they live. Yes, we may choose to live selfishly to ourselves, but the fruit that is yielded from our dying, whether figuratively or literally, brings about an abundance of life so much greater!

“Broken and spilled out just for love of you, Jesus.

My own precious treasure lavished on Thee.

Broken and spilled out and poured at Your feet.

In sweet abandon let me be spilled out and used up for Thee.”

(By Gloria Gaither)

—Bro. Fari Matthews

Note of Clarification

In the previous issue (January/February/March 2019, Volume 51, No. 1), in Word Definitions, on page 34, for the word “Holy” in Leviticus 20:7-8, it reads, “Separate from human infirmity...”

I was not comfortable with this definition, which neither I nor the proofreaders caught before printing, and I could not find the source from which I may have copied it.

I did not intend to teach that being “holy” meant you were separate from the weakness and infirmities of humanity. That characteristic obviously belongs only to God. Although He imparts His holiness to us (I Corinthians 1:30), it is a moral separateness from sin, and does not remove us from being human. I apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

Also, on page 51, I made a mistake and used the term “Jehovah El Roi” twice, once in the Discussion and once in Comments and Application. The correct term is “Jehovah Rohi.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

