

I. THE WAYSIDE. 4. Out of every city—the numerous towns of Galilee. The popularity of Jesus had reached a climax, but there were not wanting signs of a reaction. A sifting process was necessary, so our Saviour changes his method of instruction. This parable is the first of the new series of teachings. He no longer delivers lengthened discourses, but, presenting the truth in a popular form, and one familiar from the methods of the rabbis, he at the same time veils its deeper significance from the spiritually obtuse. These stories would remain long in the memory, would be frequently suggested to the mind by the objects out of which they were constructed, and might be long pondered over, rewarding the serious meditations of earnest minds with deeper and deeper meanings. They were parting legacies of truth from one who saw the close of his earthly ministry approaching.

9. His disciples asked him—when they were alone (Mark 4: 10). Matthew tells us that their first question was, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" (13: 10). They are struck with the change in his method of communicating truth, and are specially puzzled to understand this parable. Both questions are answered in our lesson.

10. The mysteries—the secret things of Christ's kingdom. Those deeper truths which the uninstructed and dull-hearted could not understand. "A mystery," in the Bible meaning of the word, is not something that cannot be understood, but a truth once hidden and now revealed. (Col 1: 26; 1 Tim. 3: 16; Matt. 11: 25, 26; Rev. 17: 5; Rom. 16: 25; 11: 25; Eph. 3: 3, 4, 9.) Seeing they might not see—Read carefully Matt. 13: 12-17. It would contradict all we know of Christ's gracious design in proclaiming the gospel to say that his primary object in adopting the parabolic method was to perplex and exasperate the unreceptive, and prevent them from understanding that which would save them. His primary aim was to clothe the truth in a new form, that it might serve the purpose of captivating the fancy, stimulating thought and drawing closer around him those who were prepared to receive his doctrine. But blessings misused become curses. If the gospel is not "a savor of life unto life," it must be "a savor of death unto death." Unwillingness to see results in incapacity to see. The natural punishment of spiritual perversity is spiritual blindness. (Lindsay.) This is expressed in Matt. 13: 12.

5. The sower (R V).—i. e. the sower of my parable. He represents Christ himself in the first place, then the apostles and all who try to win an entrance for the truth into human hearts. His seed—vs. 11, "the Word of God." Compare Col 1: 5, 6; 1 Cor.

3: 6; Jas. 1: 21; 1 Pet. 1: 23. "There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water's edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seeds from falling here and there on either side of it, or upon it; itself hard with constant tramp of horse, mule and human feet. There was the "good" rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighborhood from the bare hills; elsewhere descending into the lake, and which, where there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the cornfields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were the large bushes of thorn, the 'nabk,' that kind of which tradition says that the crown of thorns was woven, springing up, like the fruit trees of the more inland parts, in the very midst of the waving wheat." (Stanley.) The wayside—(verse 12). The wayside hearers are "they that hear," and Matthew adds "but understand it not" (13: 19), "do not take it in." Their minds and affections are pre-engaged. "The heavy baggage wagons of commerce, the light cars of pleasure, merry dancers and sad funeral processions, have all used that way, and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little firmer." (McLaren.) The fowls of the air—(vs. 12) "the devil;" Matt. "the wicked man;" Mark, "Satan cometh immediately" "His agents are those light-winged thoughts that flutter around the hearer as soon as the sermon or the lesson is over. Talk of the weather, criticism of the congregation, or of the sower's attitude as he flung the seed, or politics or business, drives away even the remembrance of the text, before many of our hearers are out of sight of the church" (McLaren.)

II. THE ROCKY GROUND. 6. A rock—covered with a thin layer of earth. The rock would become warmed during the day and hasten the sprouting of the grain while the rainy season lasted, but when the dry weather came its moisture would soon evaporate.

13. Receive the word with joy—Their imagination and their emotional nature are aroused, but intellect and conscience have not been reached. "Quick-sprouting things are soon-dying things. Readily stirred emotion is transient. Brushwood catches fire easily, and burns itself out quickly. The persons meant are those of excitable temperament, whose feelings lie on the surface, and can be got at without first passing through the understanding or the conscience." (McLaren.) Joy is the ultimate result of the reception of the gospel, but not its first result. There should