

the wheat a seed good for food; and the sole difference is in the internal life of the two seeds. So two friends may walk in cheerful converse along the highway, the one possessing the divine life which will produce the fruits of the Spirit, and eventually gain the heavenly inheritance; the other without God and without hope in the world, destitute of that faith which is the passport to Christian character, holy endeavor and celestial reward. God will show the difference.

3. One unaided by the parable, from its very nature, fails to teach us the capability of self-action, or the power of resistance on the part of the field—the heart of humanity. The fatalism which teaches that the soil of the human heart must receive and generate whatever seed is thrown into it is unscriptural and nonsensical. Unlike the field, the human heart has the power of selection and rejection. It chooses its own seed, it shapes its own destiny.

HOW TO BANISH BAD SEED.

The most effective way, if it can be done, is to pull the noxious plants up by the root before it goes to seed. This entails, of course, a great amount of labor—going from one plant to another with interminable patience, and making each weed of sufficient importance to give it individual attention. But when it is done, and repeated in successive seasons when other weeds appear, the nuisance will disappear, the field will be clear, and improved crops will reward the toil. Another way of getting rid of weeds, farmers say, is to till the land well, so abundance of good seed, raise heavy crops, and choke the life of the bad seeds by the luxurious harvests from the good seed—a very excellent plan indeed. But see the moral application! How shall we remove bad seed from the heart? Use both methods.

THE PARABLE STEP BY STEP.

1. *The Sowers*—(a) Jesus the Saviour, descended into our world to procure and to preach salvation—with his hands to sow in the furrows that repentance had made, the seeds of eternal life. Christ so loved us that he came himself with the good news; he appeared, and with his own hand he sowed the good seed. (b) The sower of the bad seed is the evil one, whose germs of evil we are to resist and reject as strongly as we receive and appropriate the heavenly seed from the divine sower.

2. *The Seed*—This is a most striking figure. (a) There is life in seed. So there is in all truth, but especially gospel truth. There is life in bad seed, too—the seed which the evil one sows, and that there is what makes it fatal. Beware of it! (b) There is force in seed. It pushes aside the earth, and forces its way upward. Divine seed has force; it breaks hard hearts, and bears gracious fruits. Bad seed also has force. The tares press their way through soil and sod to sad perfection.

3. *The Soil*—The product of each season sown again, in a number of years cover the whole land surface of the globe, under favorable conditions. The divine seed has power of propagation. There is not a land, or island, or continent where man is found, but shall we have a glorious spiritual harvest. But bad seed has the same quality. Weeds multiply apace. What's to be done? Kill them! By the power of God, kill them, or they will kill you!

4. *The Soil*—Seed cannot grow without soil, and soil will nourish both good and bad seed. The moral field of the parable is the universal heart of humanity. This soil will nourish either kind of seed, good or bad. Oh, for wisdom to receive the good and reject the bad, as eternal consequences hang on the issue.

5. *The Harvest*—In the natural course of events, seed-sowing produces a harvest. A good harvest, what a joy—the proper basis of thanksgiving and praise! A harvest of

noxious weeds, what a sadness, what a loss! Keep the end in view—shall it be “the furnace of fire,” or “the kingdom of the Father?”

FLASHLIGHTS.

1. Sin, like weeds, needs no sowing or tending.
2. It is many times easier to weed while the weeds are small.
3. The only permanent weeding is to crowd the ground with good plants.
4. Every weed has some cousin among the good plants. So all sins bear a false resemblance to some virtues.
5. The weeds look sometimes quite like the flowers and the wheat; but *conscience* is a good botanist—it can tell.
6. Leave the weeds lying around after the weeding and they may take root again. Burn the tares. Utterly have done with your sins.
7. However sin came into the world, we may be sure it did not come from God. He sows only the good seed.
8. It is while we sleep, while we are off guard in our lives, that the devil sows his tares. Look out for your periods of amusement, of relaxation.
9. The tares look like the wheat in the early stages of growth. Drunkenness looks like jollity, licentiousness like love, avarice like enterprise.
10. There is a scraping of the hoe along the surface, which cuts off the tops of the weeds and makes the garden look clean; but the weeds soon come up again. Nothing will answer long that stops short of the roots.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

Continue in this meeting the evangelistic character of the services. Strive to bring the associate members to Christ—make special appeal to them to openly accept and confess the Saviour. Hold another prayer meeting for the officers a half-hour before the regular service. Invite others to come this week. Make it your serious business to lead souls to Christ during these weeks. Select your hymns beforehand, and have them accompanied by the organ or piano, if you have a capable player. The organist should practice the hymns before the meeting, if not experienced. God's service demands the best. Have four short prayers or addresses on “The Sowers,” “The Seed,” “The Soil,” “The Harvest.” For hints see the foregoing.

SEPTEMBER 30.—“OUR FOOLISH EXCUSES.”

Luke 14: 15-21.

HOME READINGS.

- Mon., Sept. 24. The common weakness. Gen. 2: 1-13
 Tues., Sept. 25. Their unreasonableness. Ecod. 3: 7-16
 Wed., Sept. 26. Show willingness. Rom. 11: 18-22
 Th., Sept. 27. Life's messages uninterpreted. Job, 80: 27

- Fri., Sept. 28. Growth impeded. John 7: 14-17
 Sat., Sept. 29. Happiness in service. John 12: 17

Most people are kept out of the kingdom of God because of their habit of making excuses—to God, to the truth, to themselves. Few turn away deliberately from the divine call. Some day they will accept it, they say, but not now. Each satisfies his conscience by saying, like the man of the parable, “I pray thee have me excused.” Failure in excuses when business claims present themselves. Men are discharged from their positions in business houses because of their excuses, when punctuality, promptness and push are demanded. When a man begins to make excuses in any department of life, then failure begins. It is a principle that applies equally to things secular and things religious.

THE GREAT FEAST.

The Gospel Feast is great both in regard to the satisfying food and the ample room for the guests. It meets all the hunger and

need of the soul. “As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” There is joyousness, abundance, variety and satisfaction at the divine banquet. It is compared to a *wedding feast* in Matthew, to express the rejoicing and supreme quality of the feast, as well as the fellowship with God and the mutual love and delight in one another. It also indicates unity of purpose, of character, of hope, and the abiding together in one perfect, blissful harmony. Of course, a feast implies that good things are provided for those who are invited. And good things are provided at the gospel feast. Here are some of them: Forgiveness of sin, renewed natures, noble motives, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the care and love of God, new revelations of truth, great opportunities of usefulness, joys unspeakable and full of glory, eternal life and blessedness. These are a few of the rich dishes spread upon the table of our Lord.

WHY THE FEAST IS GREAT.

- Great*, because of the greatness of him who prepared it—God.
- Great*, because for the whole world—“Preach the gospel to every creature.”
- Great*, because of the company—the Holy Trinity, angels and saints.
- Great*, because of its duration—it will be an eternal feast.
- Great*, because the place of joy and rest—“They are bed of glory.”
- Great*, because purchased at a great price—the blood of Christ.
- Great*, in its excellence—“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard the things that God hath prepared for them that love him.”—*Van Buren*.

THE INVITED GUESTS.

In our day, the guests represent all who have been brought up in Christian families, who have been trained in church and Sunday School, and in the knowledge of God's word. These have long been called to serve the Lord; they are again and again invited to the gospel feast. It is true that gospel privilege and blessedness are intended for all mankind, but the people of Christendom have greater opportunities for acceptance and enjoyment than the people of heathendom. The *second* who extended the invitations represents Christ himself. But the meaning is not confined to him, but includes the whole order of God's messengers. How does God now invite men to the feast?

- (a) By his word.
- (b) By his wisdom and goodness in nature.
- (c) By the love and character of Jesus Christ.
- (d) By providence, by conscience, by the Holy Spirit.
- (e) By the lives and influence of good people.
- (f) By pastors, parents, teachers, friends.
- (g) By revival influences, and all the means of grace.

Nothing is left undone; all things are now ready. Jesus Christ is ready, the Holy Spirit is ready, the Church is ready, the angels are ready, the great banquet is ready. Are you ready? Are you ready?

THE EXCUSES.

The Greek word for “excuse” in this passage is the exact equivalent of our “beg off.”—“I will all with one accord began to beg off”—not to give the real reasons for their conduct, but to render the most plausible excuses they could find. And these excuses, although they differ in matter and manner, yet all of them spring from worldliness in some form. These statements are *excuses*, not reasons. A reason is a just ground for action. An excuse is a plea to cover a fault. There can be no just ground for rejecting the invitation to earthly and heavenly blessedness. To refuse such a call is to offer a *plea* which reason, conscience, and revelation refuse to endorse. Excused from what? From God, from heaven, from glory, from happiness, from immortality, from the noblest life possible to man.