

God doth instruct his plowmen (ii) (Quality: Good)

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Date: 02 October 1974

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[0 : 00] 24th and two following verses. The 28th chapter of Isaiah, the 24th and two following verses.

Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground?

When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fishes, and scatter the cumin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye in their place?

For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. The prophecy of Isaiah, 28th chapter, 24th and two following verses.

There's no time this evening to go over the afternoon's discourse upon this passage, except just briefly to say that I understand it to apply to the labor of the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah amongst them, and to New Testament gospel ministers.

[1 : 25] They are the plowmen, and in these verses we have a description of the nature and profitableness of their work. And if I'm able to expound this passage, it may be confirming to you that the labor of the Lord's servants has been in some degree effectual in your hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Because that should be a concern to us, especially those, and I suppose I speak to all who come within that reach, who are under the labor of a gospel ministry.

That is a great privilege. It is a means of grace. We have much cause to be thankful for it. But we should examine ourselves as to whether there has been any effect of it in our hearts.

Such effect of it as will appear in that day of the last great harvest. For when we read that word this afternoon in that parabolic chapter in Matthew, the harvest is the end of the world, I thought, well, that is the harvest of all this plowing, and sowing, and laboring, and praying, and hearing of the word.

It all leads up to the harvest. And the harvest is the end of it all. The end of preaching, the end of hearing. The harvest.

[3 : 02] Then it is what has been the effect of it all. So I feel the subject is instructive, necessary, with the Lord's blessing, profitable.

This afternoon I spoke mostly upon the last of these three verses, for as God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him how essential it is for the laborers in the Lord's work and service to be instructed to discretion, and taught by the Holy Spirit.

And I mentioned some features of that teaching. I just mentioned without going into them again. For as God doth teach him to discretion, to understand the true spiritual nature, and end, and purpose of his labor, that it is to bring forth a harvest for the Lord's honor and glory.

that he doth teach him with regard to the soil, which is the hearts of men, as to how he should labor for them.

That his God doth instruct him in the nature of the truth, and the holy seed of the word, that it is for him to cast abroad.

[4 : 30] Now, I will carry on from that point, and endeavor to trace out how these spiritual operations, instrumentally of the Lord's servants, and effectually by the Holy Spirit, are wrought out.

And first, the plowman must plow all day to sow. That is to say, he must not immediately think to sow without there has been a first preliminary plowing.

The expression, the plowman plow all day to sow, means that he plows in order to sow. Perhaps I ought just to make this observation, because as I said this afternoon, this is a similitude.

We must not press a similitude too far. No similitude fits exactly in every point that scriptural instruction, which in general it is intended to illustrate and demonstrate.

Now, we must not understand then that what I may call the gospel plowman plows one day, then he doesn't plow another.

[5 : 54] Another day he opens and breaks the clods of his ground. Then another day he makes, he casts abroad these various kinds of seed.

The point is that all these features of his spiritual labor are going on all the time. And in the congregation especially of any number, there may be some who need the plowing, some who need the making plain the face thereof, some who need the sowing of the seed.

But plowing is necessary. Plowing is necessary because the condition, the natural condition in the hearts of men is such that the seed will not enter, there is no earth in which it can root, and there will be no responsiveness, no responsive reception of the word until the condition of the heart is dealt with.

And this is our great burden that we have to deal with hardness of heart.

I think there is nothing so hard as the hearts of man in this natural condition with regard to spiritual things. Impressionable.

[7 : 25] Say what we may, solemnly as we may say it, and earnestly as we may desire to press the consideration of it upon the hearts of men.

I mean the consideration of solemn, eternal things. We are dealing with hard hearts that are not responsive. But I believe that the Lord does use his servants to plow through this hardness of the heart.

Perhaps I might just pause a moment to say what makes the heart so hard? Well, of course, the heart is hard by reason of the sinfulness that prevails in it.

God never created man with a hard heart, but with a tender, sensitive, responsive heart. The heart, of course, in scriptural language, we understand to mean the deep, inward source and spring of feeling, and affection, and desire, and responsiveness.

That's the heart. God never created men with hard hearts. It's the effect of sin. And sin works in the heart in different ways, but always to harden it against the word.

[8 : 54] For instance, how unbelief hardens the heart of men. The Lord Jesus Christ found itself. We read that he marveled at their unbelief, belief, and the hardness of their heart.

Even his gracious words of themselves, without the power of the Holy Spirit, did not overcome the hardness of the hearts in men.

I know some were overcome by it, because the Holy Spirit worked even with the words of Jesus Christ to that effect. And a spirit of scorn and mockery with regard to the things of God greatly hardens the heart, as we find in the context of this word.

God's heart. Now, therefore, be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong, that is, unless God give you up to that mocking spirit, and your heart becomes harder and harder.

Be not mockers. I know we cannot give ourselves tenderness and grace, but be not mockers. You young people listening to me this evening, I hope there's not a mocking spirit in your heart, because that will turn your heart into a stone, where spiritual things are concerned, and the day may come, when you may wish, and wish, and wish enough that you could feel something in your heart.

[10 : 40] If that day should come, the Lord deal graciously with you, but be not mockers. There's nothing like mocking holy things to harden the heart. And then, of course, there's the continual influence of earthly and carnal things upon the heart, that have a hardening effect upon it.

Well, now, I want to a longer on that. It is absolutely necessary that this condition should be broken down or ploughed up. The Lord's servants preach for the conviction of their hearers.

There's nothing like conviction of sin to plough up the heart. When that fastens on a person's conscience, there's no use, he may try to harden his heart against it.

I've known people do that. harden their hearts against the convictions that were fasting on their conscience. But, my friends, it was the work of God, the Holy Ghost, that will overcome all that opposition, that rebellion against the Word.

The ploughman ploughs all day to sow. But we need the Lord to teach us to discretion about this matter of ploughing all day in order to sow.

[12 : 07] Because we might make a great mistake if we suppose that hard and harsh declamations and threatenings is going to plough up this hard heart.

Now, that may make the heart all the harder. That may stir up a resentment and opposition that goes just the other way. my friends, solemnity is one thing.

Harshness is something quite different. It is a great mistake to suppose that if we are going to overcome the Lord using us to that end, the hardness of the heart, we must speak in a hard way to do it.

Now, my friends, I quite agree that God's holy law, if the Holy Spirit use it, does have a very great effect in this way of preparing the heart for the gospel.

But at the same time, I quite agree with Joseph Hart's feelings and sentiments that law and terrors do but harden all the while they work alone, but a sense of blood-bought pardon, that will melt a heart of stone.

[13 : 29] Well, my friends, whether it's law or gospel, something must break down the hardness of the heart and make the heart concerned about its condition and its state.

And if that work is done, the work is done. Because as I'm saying, the natural condition of the heart is to be unconcerned, unbelieving, unimpressionable, unresponsive, so long as that condition is broken down, the works done so far as that is necessary.

Now, may the Lord instruct us how to speak so that the hardness of the heart is broken through.

perhaps some may say, but I don't know that everyone's heart is so hard as that. There are some people who seem very, very ready to respond to the word.

And one wouldn't judge of them, but what there, there's a tenderness in their heart. well, my friends, there's something here I think is very solemn.

[14 : 50] I'm thinking about the parable of the sorrow that we read this afternoon. There were the wayside hearers. They were hard. They were just in the condition that I've described.

They were not receptive. The word didn't enter at all. They were not responsive. The devil had easy work to catch away that which was sown out of their hearts.

Very easy work indeed he had. But then there was another class of hearers that the Lord described under the figure of the stony ground hearers.

Some seed fell upon stony ground. Now, stony ground in that parable doesn't mean ground with a lot of stones in it.

Stony ground means ground that has got a very thin layer of earth beneath which there's all this hardness.

[15 : 59] And that hardness, in the case of those described in that category of hearers, was never ploughed up at all. and the consequence was that there was no depth of earth.

That's a most significant expression. No depth of earth. It doesn't say no earth at all, but no depth of earth. Now, what is that?

Well, my friends, it's just a superficial religious disposition or a certain sentimentality in the heart that's very easily touched, very easily wrought upon.

They receive the word immediately, and they receive it with joy, and it springs up because there's no depth of earth, there's no rooting down. Presently, when the condition is subjected to trial, it withers away.

Beneath all that shallow earth, there was still that hard condition, unbroken. So, there's nothing like this work of the Holy Spirit through the word of truth in breaking right down the heart to give it depth of earth.

[17 : 16] Religious sentimentality, there's no depth of earth to it, brethren. There's no depth of earth to it. But I let's pass on, and quickly.

Now, let us come to the next feature of this work. When he hath made plain the face thereof. I see it in this way.

When the ground is plowed, it isn't plowed up immediately into a smooth till that is suitable to sow the seed in.

I know there are farmers in this congregation, if I shouldn't speak correctly, they must excuse me because I'm speaking according to this metaphor. Well, now, when the ground is plowed, it needs to be made plain because of the clods.

The plow turns up the clods. It breaks up the hard condition, but it turns up the clods. and these clods have to be made plain.

[18 : 28] I think this expression making plain the face thereof means to break down into a finer till these clods. clods. What are the clods?

Well, I understand it spiritually to imply those difficulties that are raised up in the heart and mind when the plow has done its work.

It raises difficulties which are like clods. I'll mention one or two. there are one difficulty sometimes, perhaps fairly often, is that one has a kind of feeling that their sinfulness is of such a nature they can't expect to be forgiven.

Now, while the heart is hard in its original case, they don't trouble a bit about their sinfulness. It doesn't worry them unless perhaps some moral lapse may bring some shame upon their name and character, but I mean the real evil nature of sin doesn't worry them.

It's more their element than their burden. But when the plow has done its work, in some cases especially, it casts up in the conscience such a sense of sin.

[19 : 53] And it might seem as though well now, given that sense of sin, it's easy work to put the gospel to them. No, my friends, it isn't all that easy.

There are two things I have found in my long experience and personal contacts with these conditions very, very difficult. And one is to bring people to be really convinced of their sin and guilt.

And when they're convinced of it, to bring them to believe in hope in God's mercy. Now, some time ago, an old gentleman who had lived without God and without hope in the world since he was a boy.

He forsook the ways of God and the worship of God and the house of God. But when he became very old, his heart was plowed up, in his instance, not under a ministry, but by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon his conscience.

His heart was really plowed up and he was brought into such distress of mind and I was asked to visit this old gentleman because he was so terribly depressed.

[21 : 16] He was very old, rather senile and deaf, so I went to visit him and I never saw a man in such distress of soul before. I won't lengthen this story and I tried to deal with this condition but it was very hard work to break this clod.

He felt he'd sinned so long he'd forsaken the ways of God and there was no hope for him. And I tried to help the poor man. I said to him one day, I said, you know, if only you could look away from yourself and your sin to Jesus Christ and try and consider this, that he came into the world to save sinners, try and look to his precious blood and consider that it was shed for sin.

I couldn't get him to see it, you know. I know one day when I'd been speaking to him in that way, he said to me, well, Saul went to see a witch. Wasn't that awful?

But oh dear, I don't know how to deal with this case. All he can see is Saul going to see a witch being destroyed the next day. However, the Lord can do what a man can't do.

The Lord brought him out of all that and broke down that hard clod and I must say, not without using me somewhat to that end, that was made smooth and plain in due course.

[22 : 49] and then the seed of the gospel entered into his heart. Once he got over that tremendous feeling that there was no hope for him because of the length and greatness of his sin.

And I remember one Sunday evening, and this was when he was about 90, because he used to say to me sometimes, you know Mr. Delves, I was 88 years in death and sin.

88 years in death and sin, that's enough to harden anybody's heart. Ever, one Sunday evening, he said to me after he'd been delivered from all this, said, you know Mr.

Delves, sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains. The dear old man thought he was telling me something, you know.

He thought he was telling me something, and I said to him, yes, isn't that beautiful, but isn't that just what I used to tell you? here we do need these clods to be broken down.

[23 : 54] Then the seed of the word can enter and spring up in the heart in faith and love and hope and praise. But there are other difficulties, other clods.

things. Now, how often has been the case that when the hardness of the heart is ploughed up and their deep concern felt in the soul before God, that question of the unpardonable sin comes up in the mind.

And how many felt though they couldn't understand and couldn't explain what the unpardonable sin was, but they find it in the scripture that there is this sin against the Holy Spirit that hath never forgiven us, neither in this world nor the world to come.

And they pray they've been guilty of it. well, my friends, the seed of the word can't enter until their heart has broken down.

Because they still feel, say what you may, if I've committed the unpardonable sin, there's no hope for me, neither in this world nor the world to come. This has to be dealt with.

[25 : 09] We have to make plain this great difficulty. We have to explain as far as we can what that really is. And to show that those who have committed that sin have got no brokenness of heart.

The Holy Spirit has given them up and left them to their natural condition. I mustn't preach a sermon on that tonight. That's a great God.

All the wild people are in their hard, unbelieving, unregenerate state, the consideration, of an unpardonable sin, doesn't worry them at all.

But once their heart is plowed up, these clods appear to them and in their condition. The plowman needs to be instructed by his God to discretion to deal with such matters as this.

And then there's another question crops up. Once one is brought into real concern of soul, and that is the doctrine of election.

[26 : 18] Now they say, if I'm not elected, there's no hope for me. Now we must deal with this matter, because however we put the gospel for them, still there's that point, but it's not for me if I'm not elected to salvation.

We have to deal with this matter, very sympathetically, and with much judgment. It's no way of dealing with this matter to say there's no such thing as an election of men to eternal life, because the Holy Spirit never gives any relief to a conscience to what's not true.

No, that's another point that has to be dealt with. You have to make plain the face of the ground by dealing with these clods. And there's another and that is the truth and doctrine of a particular redemption.

We can't tell people, now you're redeemed because everybody is. We can't deal with it that way. The Lord must teach us to discretion to make plain these great difficulties that arise in the soul.

As I said when I began a few minutes ago, as long as the heart is hard and unbelief and scorn and carnality such don't care.

[27 : 47] Two minutes about such matters as the unpardonable sin and particular redemption and God's sovereign election of men to eternal life. But these clods come up when the heart is really brought into a state of concern.

God's will be to be known as the word of God itself and the instruction of the ministry and the teaching and application of the Holy Spirit deals with these difficulties and brings such into what I may call a hearing spirit.

Now, when that is so, then we come to the next point. When he hath made plain the face thereof by dealing with these difficulties, doth he not cast abroad the pitches cumin, principal wheat, pointed barley and rye in their place, there's a word or two to say about this.

And I will fall, because the time is pressing me, I will fall straight away to the principal wheat. For there's something special about this, doesn't say the wheat as though it was of one value and importance with the cumin and barley and rye.

No, the wheat we read is a principal wheat. And the margin gives an alternative rendering, which is very helpful, wheat in the principal place, and barley in the appointed place.

[29 : 35] That is to say there is a place for the barley and the other kinds of seed, but there's a principal place for the principal wheat.

Now, what is the principal wheat? Now, I'm not doubt or in my mind about that. The principal wheat, my brethren, is the doctrine of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now, that's not fanciful, because the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of himself under that very similitude. When he said, except a corn of wheat, fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Now, he meant himself by that. He was a corn of wheat, but he could not bring forth fruit, that is, in the salvation of precious souls, unless he first gave himself up to death to bring forth fruit.

So, I feel it's not fanciful or improper for me to say the principal wheat is the doctrine of Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ crucified.

[31 : 01] Now, this is a principal wheat, my friends, of all truth, that we can preach, that we can believe, the principal truth is Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And, as that is the principal wheat, it must have the principal place. Now, consider then that this doctrine and truth as the principal place in the gospel itself.

For, the gospel would not be a gospel if it were not for Jesus Christ. And, not only Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ and his death.

That corn of wheat that fell into the ground in death to die is the principal doctrine of the gospel. and it is that which enriches the gospel and which makes it such a suitable gospel to such as feel their sinful condition.

The seed of that gracious wheat, that holy doctrine dropped in the heart and taking root in the heart is the real heart of the whole matter.

[32 : 27] I'll come to that more in a moment, quickly. Now, the principal wheat must have the principal place in our ministry. The apostle himself felt that so much that he said that he would know nothing amongst the Corinthians about Jesus Christ and him crucified.

That is, that would be the principal theme of his ministry. And when he would remind the Corinthians of the gospel that he preached to them, he said, I delivered unto you that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scripture.

Friends, there's no forgiveness, there's no pardon, there's no peace, there's no eternal life, there's no hope of heaven apart from Jesus Christ and him crucified.

That's the principle, the principle wheat, the principle doctrine in the gospel, and the principle doctrine in the ministry. And now let me add this, this truth of Christ and him crucified must have the principal place in your heart.

Now, I feel like, was it Epaphras, who prayed earnestly for the saints that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

[34 : 06] That's the ideal, to be complete in all the will of God, to receive believingly every gospel truth and everything that pertains to the will of God.

But, Jesus Christ was now the principle place. Now, look, my friends, never put anything in the place of Jesus Christ. And, if you have experience in spiritual things, if you've had times of favor and blessing and teaching, that you must not make a Jesus Christ of your experience.

You must not make a Jesus Christ of your experience. You must have the principle place. And, what is more, you may feel as I do, that though we would not for a moment deny what the Lord has done for us, and what we have professed in our testimony to his grace and favor towards us, that after a long ministry and long experience, as I hope in these spiritual things, it is with me tonight, none but Jesus can do my helpless soul any good.

And, I feel that if I were to meet my end tonight, I would have to cling simply and solely and unreservedly to Jesus Christ and him crucified.

That's where I am tonight. Never make a Jesus Christ out of your experience and cling to that. Cling to Jesus Christ is a principal we.

[36 : 14] Then, what are these others? Now, I'm not caught upon, I haven't time anyway, but the time has gone. But, in any case, I'm not caught upon to find some spiritual significance in fishes and cumin and barley and rye.

it is quite sufficient for me to put it like this. These different kinds of seed need to be sown. They all have their appointed place.

barley in the appointed place, not the principal place. Now, there are these things then. First, they are the invitations of the gospel.

Now, they have their appointed place. A gospel without invitations would be like a house well supplied with food with no open door. This is the word.

Oh, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and neither hath no money. Come ye, buy wine and milk without money. Don't think you must bring money.

[37 : 23] Come buy wine and milk without money. Is there free? Is there free to the poorest? The very poorest.

Is there free? Come ye to the waters. They are flowing still from the same inexhaustible fountain. of life and grace and love, even from the very heart of Jesus Christ.

And they flow in the gospel. And wherever the gospel is preached, the waters flow. And the word is, come, drink of these living streams of love and grace.

There's an invitation to all who have hearts to hear it. It has its appointed place, brethren, as the invitations of the gospel. But the invitations are not Christ.

It has been said that the gospel could be all comprised in one word, and that is come. But I don't quite agree with that. I think the gospel is what the word come invites us to come to, and that's Jesus Christ.

[38 : 35] then what are the promises? They have their appointed place. What a precious place the promises of the gospel had.

And very helpful and strengthening they are to our faith. For he is faithful that promised. Then what about the admonitions?

What about the precepts of the gospel? Have they any appointed place? Yes, verily. And Jesus said, If ye love me, keep my commandments.

What about the ordinances? Have they any appointed place? Most certainly they have. And a very solemn place they have.

And very solemnly they should be observed and regarded. All these have their appointed place, brethren. for as God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him.

[39 : 40] I must close abruptly. I would like to have gone on to have shown how this seed dropped into the heart, the principal wheat, Jesus Christ, and these other seeds of the word, how they spring up in the heart, nurtured by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine that drops as the rain nourishes it. The dew that distills nourishes it. The sun that shines nourishes it.

And so there's a growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now I hope this is going on in your hearts. This breaking down of the state of indifference and hard, careless, unconcerned, this solving of your difficulties stand in the way, this dropping of the seed of Jesus Christ into your soul, and these various aspects of the gospel, I hope they're working in your heart.

I hope that a spirit of faith is springing up, a spirit of hope, a spirit of love, a spirit of obedience, because this is the effect of the seed as it springs up in the heart.

Now I hope it is so. God knows if it is so. I desire to put these things before you in all sincerity and truth. God knows your heart and what the response is to these words of is.

[41 : 25] If your heart is hard, God break it down. If your heart is broken down, God drop the seed of Jesus Christ into your soul, and all the truths and promises and encouragements and invitations of the gospel.

If it is in your heart, the Holy Spirit nourish it through the word and bring it to a gracious perfection. salvation. Just a word in conclusion.

The rest of the chapter of course goes on to deal with another necessary work and that is threshing and separating. But I must not go into that now. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.

Now what wonderful counsel there is in all this. The counsels of his eternal purpose of grace and wisdom and mercy.

He is wonderful in counsel. There is such wisdom in his counsel, such knowledge, such understanding, such purpose, and excellent in working.

[42 : 42] For his working is the working out of the counsels of his infinite and all wise will in the hearts of men.

He cometh from him who is wonderful in excellent in counsel and wonderful in working. Now I do hope and I do pray that you may know this God all of you, that you may experience that excellent working of his word and his holy spirit in your hearts and that will end in his eternal praise.

Amen.