

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

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Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[0 : 00] Fourth, and two following verses. Doth the ploughman plough 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 scattered 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, the 28th chapter, the 24th and two following verses.

This is, as everyone will have in mind, Thanksgiving Day in Union Chapel. And may the Lord give us a thanksgiving spirit, for this is very much called for, it is very acceptable in the sight of God, and it is good to give thanks unto his holy name and to show forth his praise.

It should be so, I feel with us, more an everyday matter than a once a year matter. For the mercies of God are new every morning, and great is his faithfulness, in that it is so, that notwithstanding the general sinfulness of men and their own unworthiness before him, as we feel it, still, morning by morning, his mercies are renewed towards us in providential ways, and we hope in spiritual ways.

[2 : 12] But it was appointed, as we know, in the Old Testament, that at the time of the harvest, the first fruits should be brought to the tabernacle, or subsequently to the temple, and offered to the Lord, which I take to be first, to imply their acknowledgement that the harvest came from the good hand and blessing of God, and also as an expression of thanksgiving to him for that benefit.

But of course there is nothing in the New Testament to appoint special days and occasions of that nature. But still the same principle applies.

The harvest is a special occasion, and so it calls as much as ever for special thanksgiving to God and acknowledgement of his good hand.

So we are gathered this day, as the Lord may grant us a thanksgiving spirit, that we may offer to him the sacrifice of praise, that is, the giving of thanks to his name.

The Lord grant that spirit to us, that it may not be just a mere formal occasion of that nature. Then we gather to hear his most holy word, that our minds and our hearts may be instructed and profited and nourished by the sacred truth thereof.

[3 : 56] Now may the Lord help me to set his word before you. The Lord grant his blessing in it. So, we turn now from the offering of thanksgiving and praise to God in the hymns and in the prayer to the consideration of his holy word.

And, the verse before the verses that I have read as a text is a very suitable introduction to the subject. The 23rd verse.

Give ye ear and hear my voice. Hearken and hear my speech. For there are three things very necessary to this end that we should profit by the word.

And first, that we should have an ear to hear it. That our attention should be engaged to what God the Lord may speak through his word.

For it isn't everyone who comes under the sound of the word of God has an ear to hear it. And it isn't everyone that will give attention to the word and understand it.

[5 : 18] As the Lord Jesus said on occasion when he was giving instruction to the people, now have you understood all these things? And again he said, he that hath an ear, let him hear.

hear. And especially I fear that is true, spiritually considered, he that hath a spiritual ear to hear, to hear the joyful sound of the gospel or the word of God, in whatever way it may come to him, let him hear then.

Hear my speech, the prophet said. Hear my voice, hearken, and hear my speech. Because I feel in speaking that the very first thing is to gain the solemn, serious attention of our hearers.

but then, if you have, and I feel you have, an ear to hear, then, it is with me as the Lord may help me to set something before you worth listening to.

I couldn't expect you to listen to something or other that you felt lack weight and truth and substance and profit.

[6 : 49] If it is for you to hear with spiritual attention, it is for me to speak such things as will profit you in hearing them. And then, thirdly, without which all else, of course, will avail us nothing, we need the blessing of God to rest upon the word that you'll hear and I speak.

And by the blessing of God, of course, we mean that a measure of spiritual life and power and unction may attend the word that it may nourish our hearts in hearing it.

Because it is exactly that, my friends, it is the unction of the Holy Spirit to make the word savoury, the power of the Holy Spirit to give it application that makes it so profitable to us.

Now, I've come before you on this occasion so many, many years, it cannot be many more at the most, but the Lord grant that at this time he may enable me to speak to the prophet and instruction of you who come to hear.

So much then for the introduction to the subject. Give ear, give ye ear and hear my voice, hearken and hear my speech.

[8 : 20] Then follows what is in the nature of a similitude, the similitude of the plowman and his necessary labour. And I felt this a suitable word for the occasion, because just as naturally there can be no harvest without the labour of the husbandman.

I know that in the wilderness journey of the children of Israel, God was pleased to supply their need without labour. But then that was not to be the normal way in which God would supply to that nation.

So we read that when they entered into the promised land, the manna ceased. The first day they did eat of the corn of the land, the manna ceased to fall, because the manna was a temporary provision and not meant to be God's permanent way to feed that nation.

So it is, my friends, to this day. There is nothing impossible with God at all. But it is God's way to provide food for us through the labour of the husbandman.

We have much cause to be thankful for this, that the Lord does give skill and ability to those who engage in this necessary work, work.

[9 : 54] For I might say in passing that, as I understand it, though I'm not engaged in it, husbandry is a very skilled occupation.

And take in this word even literally with regard to that, for as God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him, that is very necessary with regard to natural husbandry.

This is God's way. He made the earth fruitful in its creation, but not that it should bring forth fruit of itself without any labour. It did not even in the Garden of Eden, only the labour there was a pleasure and not a toil, because there was no thorns or briars or diseases to contend with till sin brought a blight on the land.

But sin never destroyed the fertility of the earth. So I pleased God still to maintain the fertility of the earth, and then to bless the labours of such as engage in husbandry, and so to bring forth food for man and beast.

But this is a similitude. I'm sure there is much more in this passage that I have read than a reference to the ploughing and sowing of the husbandman.

[11 : 24] Otherwise, I should feel there was not much I could bring out of it that would spiritually be profitable to you to hear. Now we know that it was much God's way to use similitudes to set forth spiritual things.

I think it is in the prophecy of Hosea, he speaks thus, I have used similitudes. And, of course, we know that that was very much the way of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in instructing the people.

For what are his parables but similitudes? And, you will notice this, if you consider it, that the similitudes that God has used and the Lord Jesus Christ used are very much, if not almost wholly drawn from natural conditions.

For one thing, I feel that such conditions are more suitable to spiritual things than mechanical conditions. So, here we have a similitude.

With regard to similitudes, I feel we need a sober mind not to handle similitudes fancifully because there's no profit in that and I've often thought too that it's very unwise to press similitudes too far.

[13 : 09] It is not intended in them, I feel, that every item should have some special spiritual meaning. The similitude is intended to illustrate some particular point of truth.

When we have discerned that, then we can profit by all the similitude as such. what is intended by this similitude?

I think there's no doubt whatever. Spiritual husbandry is intended by it. And that reminds one of that passage by the Apostle Paul when he said we are laborers together with God.

We are God's husbandry. You are God's husbandry. We are laborers together with God for your benefit and profit.

What a bit of expression. Laborers together with God. Laborers together with God. Because if we were not laborers together with God our labor would be utterly hopeless of any real benefit to anyone.

[14 : 32] And I don't dwell on this just a moment if I may. Now it's come to me. Laborers together with God. That is all the Lord's servants are engaged as laborers together.

Not just isolated independent laborers one with another. As Paul beautifully puts it I have planted well that's the part of labor.

Apollos has watered that's another part of labor. Now Apollos and Paul were laborers together. One did his work the other did his work.

And I do feel sure that as much as true as that the Lord raises up different laborers laborers he appoints them their different work.

But they're laborers together. They're not competitors as to who can do most good and the like but laborers together each by the grace of God confirming the same truth and the same gospel that is committed to them to preach.

[15 : 41] And may the Lord bless every gracious spiritual sent minister from this church and every other to feel that they are laboring together one with the other and that it is God gives the increase.

For if God did not give the increase there would be no increase. Nothing would come of our labor. It isn't the ability or personality or what not of the minister that produces the increase.

It may attract congregation but it doesn't produce the increase. God gives the increase. Now let us turn then to this spiritual significance this similitude and if I were to give my free remark some kind of heading or title I should say we have then here the gospel labor and his profitable labor.

I think it may well if I was to start at the end of the passage for his God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him this is absolutely necessary whoever the Lord is pleased to call into the labor of this husbandry he must first teach them to discretion he must first instruct him to discretion and teach him for there's no one even if he's a godly man has discretion sufficient to engage in this spiritual labor unless the Lord doth guide him and teach him and teach I'm quite convinced I hope I'm not speaking improperly because I've been in the ministry these long years but I'm quite convinced that there needs to be a special instruction and teaching for anyone to be engaged in the spiritual labor such as my text implies ways and it's only God can instruct him to discretion and to teach him only God can do this only God can do it now I'm not going to introduce thoughts and ideas that are not necessary but you know all through the ages back in the

Old Testament there was great ideas about schools of the prophets and I'm not speaking against that but I don't read that the Lord made much use of that means now you know in the days of Elijah Elijah established a school of the prophets it is very evident that Elijah thought a great deal of this school of the prophets he perceived what a need there was for faithful men in Israel to stand for the truth so he established apparently the school of the prophets but the time came when Elijah was to be taken from his work and labor he needed to be a successor to Elijah where did he come from surely God would have brought him to the school of the prophets that was what the school of the prophets was for no he sends

[19 : 32] Elijah into the field and finds a man plowing the yoke of oxen Elijah puts his cloak or his prophetic garment over Elisha Elisha you are to be the next prophet you are to be the next prophet and God did teach him to discretion and instruct him maybe perhaps that might be some benefit come from scores of the prophets but certainly this is the essential thing is God does teach him to discretion he must teach him for what does God instruct his spiritual labourers his plowmen and sowers of the truth what does he instruct them in in what way does he give them discretion well in different ways

I feel for one thing is God doth instruct him in the nature and purpose of his labour for there is a special purpose in the labour of the gospel plowmen they don't labour without any objective to some extent at least God instructs them as to the reason and purpose and objective of their labour some may think this is not necessary but I think it is for what is the object of our labour is it just to make men religious or is it make them new creatures in Jesus Christ is it to make them moral or is it to make them godly is it to establish the cause of religion in the world as such or is it to be a means in

God's hand of souls being born again and quickened by the power of the Holy Ghost now the Lord does teach his labourers the objective of their labour that it is not just to labour in a flower garden to bring forth flowers but to labour in the field to bring forth a harvest a harvest that will be for the Lord's honour and glory and the eternal and everlasting good of souls brethren the Lord instructs us who preached labour mainly for these two objectives one that souls may be born again convinced of sin and brought to the knowledge of the truth to believe in Jesus Christ to be repentant and to believe in

Jesus Christ the other objective of our labour is to establish believers in their most holy faith the salvation of souls and the establishment of believers is the objective of the ministry and may I ask you who have an ear to hear and understand these things to pray for us ministers that the Lord will teach us to discretion in this matter and so guide us and so use us as that these ends of our labour may be brought forth according to his sovereign will it's not enough my brethren that a minister should fill this chapel is his ministry bringing souls to Jesus Christ that's the point is it feeding the flock of God or is

God doth instruct him in these matters and doth teach him and then again God doth instruct him and doth teach him with regard to the conditions in men that he is called to deal with in other words God doth instruct him in the nature of the soil and remember the hearts of men are the soil on which we have to labour your hearts are the soil for us ministers to labour on now how very essential it is that labour should understand the nature of the soil I remember some time ago I was travelling in a bus away from Crowborough to a country area and there were two men sitting in front of me the next seat in front of me and I couldn't help hearing what they said besides

[25 : 02] I became interested in it because it appeared very evident that another farmer had come into the area and his methods weren't gaining very much approval from these old established farmers in the area and one of them made a remark that I thought was very telling this was a remark they said or one of them said to the other he doesn't understand the nature of the soil for one thing I thought that was very telling I thought well if he doesn't understand the nature of the soil he won't know how to kill it and although I'm not a specialist in soils I gather that the nature of the soil difference in different areas and that successful husbandry or labor needs to understand the nature of the soil now my friends how much depends on the

Lord's servants the plowmen understanding the nature of the soil now how differently a man will go to work if he supposes that there is something in the heart of men in its natural the natural condition that can be prevailed upon appealed to to to believe and so on you know and accept the gospel and what not as though there's something in the soil that's responsive to spiritual things if only the appeal can be made strong enough to obtain the response how different a man will go to work with his plowing if God has instructed him that there's just nothing like that in the soil at all that is utterly barren soil in itself that there's nothing in the heart of man that's capable of bringing forth spiritual things not in and of itself i know that the apostles did speak as they did to men even in their natural condition and i'm not saying anything against that indeed my friends i feel i feel more and more that i must submit my mind to the teaching of the scripture and the methods that the apostles used in preaching the gospel i feel they were inspired men and therefore they couldn't have made a mistake if they were not inspired they might in the warmth of their heart spoken unadvisedly but they were inspired and therefore they couldn't have spoken unadvisedly but even so my friends that doesn't alter my point at all there'd be a very great difference in the way men preach the word if they suppose that there's something in human nature that can be wrought upon and will be responsive to the word of truth and be fruitful or whether the lord instructs and he does instruct i'm sure he does all his labors that it is not so at all it is not so at all there must first of all be a new birth in the soul before there can be any spiritual feeling at all any repenting any believing any responding to the word there must be a new birth in the soul and if the lord teaches him that what emphasis he will put upon those words of jesus christ and nicodemus he will say to men now you must be born again you must you must be born again it's nothing if you're not born again his nose to speak about repenting and believing and thinking you can bypass the new birth the new birth is essential to repenting and believing for his god doth instruct him with regard to the nature of the soil and the nature of the soil is the condition of men's hearts he doth instruct him not only in the

purpose of his labor and the nature of the soil but in the seed that he has to sow and how to go to work with regard to this plowing up of the hearts of men for you must remember that although in this similitude there are different ideas the plowman and the seed and the different kinds of seed but as I said when I began you can't press a similitude too far the lord gives his servants only one instrument to use and that's his word that's the plow that's the principle wheat that's all the other kinds of seed it's all his word in different applications and different operations of it now God doth instruct him with regard to the word he doth instruct him in its truth not only for himself but for his ministry he doth guide him in such ways as to rightly divide the word of truth and that's a very important matter rightly dividing the word of truth is a very different thing my brethren from rightly dividing a text into so many points very different or there is one part of truth applies to one condition of men's hearts another part of truth applies to another condition of men's hearts and so on now who is to rightly divide the word of truth unless his

God doth teach him to discretion and doth guide him in this for his God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him and this appears sometimes in a striking way I mean especially with regard to this first description of his spiritual labour doth the ploughman plough all day and so on but it applies to each part of the similitude is God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him now if we who preach were to set our work out to ourselves and say well now we must preach in such and such a way to plough up men's hearts and so on but we might go quite wrong about that the Lord may teach us to say perhaps it may be only a very few words that will do the work that is the Holy

Spirit will cause that word to do that work I was reading only a few days ago and I can't just think to whom this applies now but the way in which this particular person was brought into a concern of soul which proved to be the beginning of a genuine work of grace was through just one remark and it was simply this a prayerless soul is a Christless soul well now that might not seem all that striking and sword like but it did the work it did the work surely the Lord guided that man to say that those few words that a prayerless soul well perhaps it was a lost soul or a lifeless soul or a Christless soul I can't just remember but that was what it amounted to now we who speak my friends often speak at a random

[34 : 20] I don't mean that we speak at a random in the sense that we are not instructed in the objective and purpose of our preaching but we cannot say well now I'm going to deal with that person's case and condition and so on we can't do that we speak the Lord must guide the word the Lord must cause the word to have the effect intends it to have but I verily believe that the Lord often instructs his servants to discretion not only with regard to dividing the word of God aright but to speak in such a way as will do the work that God intends to be done is God must teach him to discretion for now the time has gone this afternoon doth the plowman play all day to soul 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 human and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye in their place or is

God doth instruct him to discretion and doth teach him there we will leave the subject this afternoon I would just mention that the collections today as announced will be for the general fund of Union Chapel I must say it's privilege to me to come into this portrait again and the memory that is dear to me and tender to me of the late beloved pastor always seems very close to me in Union Chapel and I feel thankful the Lord has maintained your cause and lot together as a people since your godly pastor who was a plowman and a sower and a workman that needed not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth being taken home to his rest now may the Lord bless you still here at

Union Chapel keep you in the unity of the faith and in the love of the truth and in steadfastness in your profession of it guide you in all your ways heavenly wisdom preserve you in the powers of truth and godliness and bless you indeed for his name's sake