

THE GOOD GROUND HEARER¹

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Evening October 8th, 1865

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“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the word, and understands it: which also bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” Matthew 13:23

THERE will, in the experience of those who are taught of God, be discouragements, and, indeed, the Lord does discourage them in order to test their sincerity. Take, for instance, the woman that came to the Savior on behalf of her daughter; see the five discouragements that woman had; but she persevered, and that perseverance showed the reality of her faith, the sincerity of her soul, and her determination, God enabling her, not to come short of what she sought. Hence the first discouragement, or the first thing she had to discourage her, was that she was a woman of Canaan, and therefore, had no ancestral flesh and blood, as it were, right to expect that the Messiah should show her any favor. However, faith in God's mercy enabled her to overcome that. The next discouragement was, that the Savior “answered her not a word.” And so you shall seek the Lord from time to time, but no word shall come from the sermon, no word from the hymn, no word from the Bible, you get nothing, and this will try you; but nevertheless, your language still must be, if you are advised to give up seeking, “Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life.” And the third discouragement she had was, that the disciples encouraged the Lord to send her away. Of course, the disciples were exceedingly wrong in this, but still it must have been discouraging. What, the children of God reject me! the disciples reject me! the ministers of God reject me! those that walk with the Savior reject me! Why, his disciples are against me; that is very trying. I thought that good people were always glad to see sinners seeking the Savior, but here seems an exception: “They besought him, that he would send her away.” Nevertheless, she knew that they were only servants, they were not the Master; she knew they were only creatures, and not the Creator, and therefore, she still persevered, she still sought the Lord. Then the fourth discouragement was, that when the Savior did speak, he said, “I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” As though he should say, You are a woman of Canaan; you do not belong to Israel, you do not belong to the people of Israel; “I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep

¹ Mr. Wells not being able to preach last Lord's day, April the 8th, the present sermon, never before published, is given for this week.

of the house of Israel.” But even that could not drive her away; to show that she was a good-ground hearer she still persevered, still sought the Lord for his mercy. And then he answered her in a way enough, one would think, to sink her into despair; but his answer was unkind only in appearance, because the Savior knew the effect it would have. “It is not correct to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord”, truth, Lord, call me what you pleases; there is no name too degrading, there is no name too ugly; I am a poor Gentile dog, I am a poor degraded sinner, I am a poor creature, “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” And, if I may say so without irreverence, the Savior could not get rid of her; and he did all this to try and to prove the reality of her faith. “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is your faith; be it unto you even as you wish. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” Oh, my hearer, if you have but a grain of faith in the dear Mediator of the new covenant, if you have but a grain of faith in the mercy of God by Christ Jesus, look to the Lord, wait, and wait, and wait again, and never give it up, but still say to yourself, I shall yet praise him; I shall yet see him; he will yet have mercy upon me. I will cleave to him, and if I perish, I will perish only there. That were to perish as none ever did, for “him that comes to me I will in no way cast out.” Now all who are thus brought to the Lord, all who have this faith of perseverance and decision, are sure to bring forth fruit; they are sure to bring forth the fruit of noble testimony, they are sure to bring forth the fruit of perfect faith, and perfect love, and perfect prayer, and perfect decision for God.

Now the text I have read is rather a long text, but it is only one clause in it that you may consider as our text this evening, because it is from that one clause that I shall say all that I have to advance, and that is the words “and understand it”, “He that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the word, and understands it.” You know it was a good question which Philip put to the eunuch, when he heard him reading in Isaias the prophet, “Understand you what you read?” And if the question seems to suggest itself to you, I wonder if I have this understanding about to be pointed out now; well, if you have not, then you can say as the eunuch did, “How can I ” understand what I read “unless some man should guide me?” unless the Lord is pleased to send an interpreter. “And he began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus,” until they came to a certain water, where the eunuch was as willing to be baptized as the apostle was to baptize him. Thus, the Lord looked down from heaven, and he puts inquiry into the hearts of sinners after his mercy, and where he gives that inquiry, he will answer it, he will appear unto such, to the joy of their hearts.

Now, then, there are four things that the good-ground hearer personally and experimentally understands; there are four words, I will call it, or four departments, which the good-ground hearer understands the value of, and he cannot on any account part with any one of them. You know persons in their senses are always unwilling to part with that that is of the most value, and it is a natural and proper feeling; and when a sinner is made acquainted with God’s gospel, there is such an intensity and eternity of value in it, that when once you know it, it will be such a pearl of great price to you that you would rather part with anything and everything than part with it. And the four words or four departments that, if you are a good-ground hearer, you must understand, are these. First, *the completeness of mediation*. Second, *the word of separation from the world*. Thirdly, *the word of discriminating grace*. Fourthly, *the word of divine assurance relative to your ultimate destiny*.

First, then, *the completeness of mediation*. The good-ground hearer understands the word of the completeness of the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And here I have been always at home. It is a theme the very thought of which has done me good innumerable times, and will do you good too. Now, then, let us look at what we mean by the completeness of the Savior's work. We simply mean this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for sinners, and that he did entirely finish, entirely so and forever, the transgression of those for whom he died; that he has brought in everlasting righteousness, while he wants nothing of you but an acknowledgment of your having nothing of your own but sin, and then receiving him in what he has done. Let me point out five or six circumstances in the Old Testament before I come to the New, as expressive of the completeness of the Savior's work; after I have just observed, it is not your work to add something to what he has done, but to receive what he has done; it is not your work to do something by which you are to be entitled to what he has done; but your work, the work of the believer, the man taught of the Holy Ghost, is to receive as a sinner, just as you are, what he has done. It is not your work to do something to keep your interest in this good, your work is simply to abide by what he has done. Now the completeness of the Savior's work is perpetually kept in view throughout the Old Testament. Who can read the 1st verse of the 2nd chapter of Genesis without being struck with the language, and without feeling that there is a reference to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." There is creation. Now apply those words to salvation; apply those words to the work of Christ. You recollect he said, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." So, that by his atoning death he did virtually prepare the new earth in which we are to dwell; he prepared the new heavens in which we are to dwell; and by this same atoning death he virtually prepared the people for the same heavens; for "by his one offering he has perfected forever all them that are sanctified." "Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." Now, then, can you understand this? Do you see that the good-ground hearer is he that receives the testimony of this completeness of the Savior's work, and this testimony becomes rooted in the soul, and wraps the soul up in fellowship with the Father, fellowship with the Savior, fellowship with the Holy Ghost, fellowship with eternity, fellowship with boundless glory, and the soul, ere long, becomes immersed in a fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore? Is not that a word too valuable ever to be parted with? Again; we come to the ark of Noah; there you get again this doctrine of completeness, "The Lord shut him in." Where is there a Christian that does not understand spiritually that scripture? The flood refers to a more dreadful flood, which is yet to come; the last was a flood of water, the next will be floods of liquid fire that shall engulf the globe, and swallow up the lost. What is the kind of ark we shall need, then, to escape the wrath to come? Jesus is that ark. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and that word of grace, that gave him a completeness of escape, was too valuable for him to part with. Now linger here for a moment. Was Noah's escape from the flood partial, conditional, precarious, uncertain? No, say you, none of these conditionalities attended it, certainly not. His escape was entire, unconditional, absolute, certain; his being drowned by the flood was an impossibility. "The Lord shut him in." And so, the Lord will shut your soul up in Christ.

"And where's the power shall reach you there,
Or what shall force you thence?"

Here is completeness, then. Do you understand this, that Jesus Christ is the way of certain and complete escape from the wrath to come? Thirdly, we come to the paschal lamb; there again you

have the doctrine of entirety, the doctrine of completeness. The lamb was slain, the blood was sprinkled according to the divine direction, and they ate unleavened bread, as a figure of the truth of God; with bitter herbs, as a figure of those soul-troubles that endear the Savior. I ask the question again, was the escape of the Israelites from the angel of death, or, to use the word exemption here, was the exemption of the Israelites from the angel of death partial or conditional? It was certain. They were directed to receive the spotless lamb; they did, and, under divine direction, so did that the angel pass by. O that I had more grace and gifts to open up to this assembly the wonders contained in that one sentence, "When I see the blood, I will pass by"! Let the man be as great a sinner as he may, let his character have been what it may, let him have been what he may, however degraded, whatever blasphemy, whatever he has been, made sensible thereof, and through mercy brought to plead a Savior's blood, confidence in a Savior's blood, hope in a Savior's blood; when I see a sinner place his hope in atoning blood I will pass him by. "No man can come unto me," said Christ, "except the Father which has sent me draw him." Therefore, if you are drawn by the blood of Christ, God the Father has drawn you, the Holy Ghost has drawn you; yes, Christ has done this. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Here, then, "the heavens and the earth were finished;" here is the escape from the flood entire; here is the exemption from the angel of death by the blood of the Paschal Lamb complete; all pointing to the completeness of the Savior's work. Again, we come, fourthly, to the victory of the Israelites over the Egyptians. Was the victory of Israel over Pharaoh and his host partial, conditional, precarious, or uncertain? Was there any uncertainty about it? Did not the great God stand between his friends and his foes? Did not the great God minister judgment in solemn perfection, and thereby complete the victory of the Israelites, so that they might well say, "The Lord has triumphed gloriously"? Fifthly, it is subsequently said of the priests in Jordan that the priests stood in Jordan; and they must have had some faith to have stood there, for the river of Jordan on the right hand must have accumulated mountains high, though on the left hand the waters receded to the Dead Sea, and could not come back again; and the waters receding to the Dead Sea are a figure of the troubles of the people of God, that their troubles pass away into the Dead Sea, never to come back again. There are rivers come out of our great oceans and inland lakes, but I believe, from what we can gather from all travelers, that there is no outlet from the Dead Sea. Jordan runs into it, and some other streams, but there is no river running out of it. So, the waters on the left hand ran down into the Dead Sea, to come back again no more; a beautiful figure of the troubles of the people of God going down to death, and they can never live again. Your troubles will die, die, die, and die, till your last trouble is lost in the Dead Sea, to live no more forever. Forgive this digression. Now it is said of the priests that they stood still in Jordan until all things were finished; and if you do not understand what I am going to say now, you are not a good-ground hearer; and if you do feel that you are not, and are concerned about it, you will pray to the Lord to make you a good-ground hearer. The priests stood still in that apparently dangerous position until all things were finished. Now, then, Jesus Christ came into deeper waters. Hear his own language, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of your waterspouts; all your waves and your billows are gone over me." And oh, how firmly he stood at Pilate's bar while these waters were accumulating! One wave of sin came in, and another wave of sin came in; one wave of wrath came after another, and these waters accumulated, and multiplied and multiplied, until they made a vast ocean. How still the Savior stood! how firm he stood! never lost his self-possession for one moment. He did not there forsake us, he did not there leave us; he did not move. Perhaps the Church may have some allusion to this when in Solomon's Song she said, "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold." He took a pure, a righteous, a solemn stand, and all our sins put together, with all the wrath of God they had

accumulated, could not move him. What then did he do? He rolled this torrent eternally away; he divided the waters of this sea whose waves roared, and made a way for the ransomed to pass over. And when all was completed, when everything was finished, mark the language, "The priests stood still in Jordan till all things were finished," and Christ stood still in his sufferings till the law's demands were finished, till the claims of justice were finished, till the stipulations of the new covenant were finished; and directly they were finished he then said, "It is finished," bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Again, come to Solomon's temple. I might notice the tabernacle, but I pass by that, and come to Solomon's temple; there again you have the doctrine of completeness. The temple was finished, and filled with the glory of the Lord; the fire descended upon the sacrifice, but did not touch the people, and the people fell on their faces, and they said, "The Lord, he is good," to find a sacrifice that would meet and quench the fire, and to suffer the guilty people to escape. "The Lord, he is good, and his mercy endures forever." And as to the New Testament, it is full of this great doctrine of completeness. But to sum up the whole of this part of our subject; the apostle makes use of this completeness of the Savior's work, and said, "You are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." Have I made this clear? Did the Lord finish the heavens and the earth? So has the work of Christ prepared the new heavens and the new earth, and the people for the same. Was the ark complete, and Noah's escape entire? So, shall yours be if you are a believer, if you understand so much the value of this doctrine of mediatorial perfection as never to part with it. And was the Israelite with certainty exempted from the angel of death? So, shall you if you understand the truth I am stating, receive it in the love of it, and abide by it. Was the victory complete? So, will yours be if you understand that the Savior by the completeness of his work has wrought eternal victory, and you receive the same, and abide by the same. And did the priests stand still in Jordan? So, the Savior has abode by you. And I must just say a word here to the good-ground hearer, for it is to him I am speaking. You may well stand by the Savior, you may well stand by his truth, for he stood by you till all things were finished; and if he did not forsake you then, much less will he forsake you now; if he died for you when you were sinners, much more now that you are reconciled shall you be saved by him. That is one word, then. I pray God Almighty every one of you may understand the truth, may see your need of the completeness of the Savior's work set forth by these circumstances; and if time permitted, I could bring twenty more to set forth the same doctrine. It is that that brings the perfections of God together; that that brings us nigh to God; in a word, everything is by the completeness of the Savior's work.

The next word I want you to understand is *the word of separation from the world*. Now, if you receive this work of Christ, and abide by it, then you are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world. Let me have a word with some of you that are comfortably off, that have been prospered in the world greatly. That has been the lot of some. I ought not to tell it, perhaps, yet I do not see why I should not; it has been the lot of hundreds of the people of the old Surrey Tabernacle, people that worshipped there for many years, the Lord has appeared for hundreds of them in his providence most wonderfully. I knew them when they were not worth two pence, I knew hundreds of them, and I do not know how much they are worth now. Our good friend and brother at our public meeting, the mayor of Gateshead, he was once a member with us, and he here publicly acknowledged that the Surrey Tabernacle had been the means, in God's hands, of laying the foundation both of his eternal and of his temporal welfare. And many have been thus prospered. Now, then, I have just a word to say to those that do prosper. Those of you that are thus prospered,

what a mercy it is that your prosperity has not lowered God's truth in your estimation, but rather heightened it! What a mercy it is that you have been kept humble, been kept sincere, and that you have honored the Lord with your substance! I am sure to some of you the words may well apply that John Bunyan applies to a man:

“There was a man, though some did count him mad,
The more he gave away the more he had.”

Well, say you, what has this to do with your subject? Why, it has this to with it, that those of you that have prospered the most have been enabled through all to see that much as God has prospered you in his providence, you have a better object in view than that, that the kingdom of heaven has stood first all the way. I bless God, you say, for temporal prosperity, yet I prize the kingdom of God above it all; I prize the riches of his mercy above it all; I prize the promises of his word above it all. Well, now, you that know not the Lord, that are of the world, this temporal prosperity is all the hope you have, and that may be blasted in a moment. Your poor mortal life hangs upon a breath. Sixty times every minute is the question put by your pulse whether you shall live or die. Down you may drop before you leave this chapel. Oh, what a miserable hope is yours! Whereas those that know the Lord, let them be prospered ever so in providence, their language is:

“Thanks to your name for meaner things,
But they are not my God.”

Therefore, for such to live is Christ, and to die is gain. So, I want you to understand, then, that a man may prosper in providence, and yet be a thorough, spiritually-minded, exemplary, useful, and devoted Christian. Then again, on the other hand, some few, comparatively few, among the people have been subjected to great adversity, all of them, more or less to tribulation. Well, they have said, this goes against me, and that goes against me, and the other goes against me. But it only makes way for more of the Lord's mercy, more of the Lord's presence, more of the Lord's blessing. So that the brother of low degree rejoices that he is exalted into the fellowship of the saints, and the brother of high degree rejoices that he is brought low; notwithstanding his temporal prosperity, he is brought low, humbled down to the feet of the blest Redeemer; and thus the poor and the rich meet together; neither of them is of the world; whether they have prosperity or adversity, they are severed from the world.

The third word I wish you to understand is that of *discriminating grace*. Now I must be very particular here, and very careful. In order to be saved you must receive the testimony of Christ's finished work; in order to be saved you must come out from the world. Do not be afraid to come out. If you lose a shilling in one place God will give you half a crown in another; and if you lose half a dozen friends on your left hand, he will give you a dozen on your right hand. Trust him; do not be afraid; come right out, and go to those places of worship where you can hear that gospel that suits your case, and leave the result with God. He always has, does now, and always will appear for those that trust in him and walk in his paths. But now I come to discriminating grace. I want you to understand this clause which I will quote, and then approach it in the way we are directed by the word of the Lord. “The election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” Let us now carefully approach this department which the good-ground hearer receives, understands, and abides by. 11th of Romans, “Know you not what the Scripture said of Elias; how he makes

intercession to God against Israel?" and a dreadful testimony it was. "They have forsaken your covenant." That is what you, good-ground hearer, cannot do. Can you forsake the completeness of the Savior's work? Can you forsake that covenant which he has thus sealed, a covenant ordered in all things and sure? How highly honored am I! After preaching the gospel pretty well forty years, I can stand this evening and speak to hundreds that I am as satisfied I shall meet in heaven as I am of my existence, to whom the Lord has revealed his everlasting covenant; and you feel you could not forsake it now, you could not give it up now, Now, then, the mere professors, "they have forsaken your covenant." Then the next step was, "thrown down your altars." Away with the sacrificial perfection of Christ. And then the next thing is to slay the prophets, in order that the covenant may not be preached, and in order that the sacrifice may not be set up in its proper place. Now mark the answer of God. What is the answer of God? There are seven thousand better than the rest? There are seven thousand to whom I am indebted for condescending to accept something offered? There are seven thousand that have been well educated at college, and have been taught better manners? No, no, no, ten thousand times no. God's answer shows the nothingness of the creature, the sovereignty and efficiency of his grace. "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men" I have done it, "who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." "Even so, then, at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Now if you are brought to understand Christ's work, and are severed from the world, it is because the Lord wrote your name in his book before the world was; it is because he chose you, and blessed you with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, followed up that decision with his great decree, having predestinated you to the adoption of children by Christ Jesus to himself. But now mark me, the apostle is there speaking of election, of eternal election; and now we have, for a minute or two, to enter into a little very careful reasoning. "There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace", that is, friends, if election be by grace, the apostle is speaking of election, not of salvation, nor regeneration, nor glorification, nor perseverance, but of election, "if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work." Now in our English language there is something rather circumlocutive in those words; let me make them plain. The apostle's meaning is this, that if our election of God be conditional, then it is no more unconditional; if it be unconditional, then it is no more conditional; so that you must have this election either freely or else conditionally. That is the apostle's argument. If it be of grace, that is, if it be unconditional, then it is no more conditional, otherwise conditionality is no more conditionality; and if it be conditional, then it is no more unconditional. So, then, it must be either the one or the other. If you obtain an estate worth millions in terms of money, and you give one farthing for it, why, then you have bought it. You have a wonderful bargain, but at the same time you have bought it. And so, in this election of grace, not a farthing, not anything on the part of the creature; it is an election of grace. "What then? Israel has not obtained that which he sought for," because they sought it in opposition to God's electing grace, in ignorance of God's electing grace; they sought it in blindness: "but the election," those who are brought to receive this great truth of electing grace, "has obtained it;" because they seek it in the right way, they seek it by grace, by mercy, by the perfection of Christ, and by the good pleasure of God.

Just one word upon the last point, *the word of divine assurance relative to your ultimate destiny*. I meant to have gone halfway through the 31st and 33rd of Jeremiah, and the 10th of John, and the 1st of Peter, and the last of the Revelation; in fact, I had a thousand things more to say than I could say; bless the Lord for that, for a fulness in these things. Now, then, just one word. The apostle

Peter sums up the whole in this way: “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” However unready you may be in your feelings to go, that is ready to take you. And what, hear it, let this assembly hear it, what will be the public gratulation of the great God when he shall meet all those millions of saved souls upon earth? What shall be the gratulation? How shall he meet them? He will thus meet them: the Holy Ghost has taught his servant to put the testimony upon record; so the Bible closes; so your destiny will close. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” However deficient the prodigal is, when he gets to his father’s house the deficiencies are all made up. So, with you: you have a little faith, a little hope; but as you enter heaven you are met with the all-sufficiency of his grace.

May the Lord help us to understand these things, live in them, walk by them, and glorify his name, for Christ’s sake. Amen.