

Parables

Earthly stories with heavenly meanings

Week 2: The Church from Planting to Harvest



And that sown upon the good earth is he who hears the Word, and understands, who also bears fruit, and does, indeed some a hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty. (Matthew 13:23)

(with highlights)

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One use of parables is to provide an earthly image of a spiritual concept. The parables for this week focus on the church growing in each of us like seed growing up to be harvested.

The spiritual harvest, the church, will never cease.

AC 932. There will be no such thing as a failure of the church to come forth somewhere on the earth, which is here signified by there being seed-time and harvest all the days of the earth.... Seedtime and harvest, or the church, will always come into existence.

Day One: The Sower

Matthew 13:1-9 (see also Mark 4:3-9, Luke 8:5-8)

And in that same day, Jesus, going out from the house, sat by the sea. And many crowds gathered together to Him, so that stepping into a ship, He sat; and all the crowds stood on the shore.

And He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, Behold, there went out a sower to sow; and in his sowing, some seeds indeed fell along the way, and the birds came, and devoured them. And other fell on rocky places, where it had not much earth, and straightway it sprang up, on account of not having depth of earth; and when the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And others fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up, and choked them. But others fell on the good earth, and gave fruit, indeed some a hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Different kinds of ground

Doctrine of Life 90. It is the truth that is meant by the “seed [sown] in the field” ... Here the “sower” is the Lord, and the “seed” is His Word, thus the truth. The “seed upon the way” exists with those who do not care for the truth. The “seed upon stony places” exists with those who do care for the truth, but not for its own sake, thus not interiorly. The “seed in the midst of thorns” exists with those who are in the lusts of evil. But the “seed on the good earth” exists with those who love the truths that are in the Word from the Lord, and do them from Him, thus who bear fruit. That these things are meant is evident from the explication of the parable by the Lord (Matt. 13:19-23, 37; Mark 4:14-20; Luke 8:11-15). From all this it is evident that the truth of the Word cannot take root in those who do not care for the truth, nor in those who love the truth outwardly and not inwardly, nor in those who are in the lusts of evil, but in

those in whom the lusts of evil have been dispersed by the Lord. In these the “seed”—that is, the truth—takes root in their spiritual mind.

AC 1940.3. Unless the rational submits itself to the Lord’s goods and truths, it either suffocates, or rejects, or perverts the things that flow in; and this is still more the case when they flow into the sensuous knowledges of the memory. This is what is meant by seed falling on a highway, or upon a rocky place, or among thorns, as the Lord teaches (Matt. 13:3-7; Mark 4:3-7; Luke 8:5-7). But when the rational submits itself and believes the Lord, that is, His Word, the rational is then like good ground or earth, into which the seed falls and bears much fruit.

DMin 4637. CONCERNING CHARITY TOWARDS THE NEIGHBOR.

When holiness and good descends from the Lord, through angels, into man and the delight of his life, then it is like a seed hidden in the ground. If the delight be pride, or the love of self, then it falls into evil ground, where there are thorns. So, also, if it falls into that delight of man which is the lust of gain. Wherefore, such ground is regarded by the angels as something sterile, foul and excrementitious, into which nothing good can sink down, because it is swallowed up by evils. But if good and holiness from the Lord fall into the delight of charity, into the affection of justice and rectitude, and into contempt of gain and honor except for the sake of use, then it falls into good ground and bears much fruit.

Affection itself is the ground, whose quality is not perceptible in any other way than from the delight of the man. There is the best ground, if the affection is of charity; and, also, if the charity is of faith in the Lord. The worst ground is the delight of honor and dignity not for the sake of use; and next, the delight of riches not for the sake of use. As is the quality of the use, such is the delight.

Birds devouring the seed

AC 5149.6. “Birds” [here] denote reasonings, and also falsities.

Rocky soil, earth and sun

AE 401.35. “Seeds” signify the truths from the Word, that is, the truths man receives from the Lord, for it is afterwards said, that it is “the Son of man who sows.” “Rocky places” signify a historical faith, which is another’s faith in oneself, which is believing a thing to be true, not because one sees it in himself, but because another in whom he has confidence has said it. “Earth” signifies spiritual good, because this receives truths as soil does seeds. “The sun’s rising” signifies the love of self, and “to be scorched” and “to wither away” signify to be adulterated and to perish.

This makes clear what is signified by these words of the Lord in series, namely, that the truths that are implanted from infancy from the Word or from preaching, when man begins to think from himself, are adulterated and perish by lusts from the love of self.

Questions and Comments

1. The seed is the Lord’s Word. What good habits can we adopt to make sure we are continually receiving it?
2. AC 1940.3. teaches that the good ground is like the rational that “submits itself and believes the Lord, that is, His Word.” What does it mean for us to submit our rational like this?
3. DMin 4637 explains that affection is the good ground. What do you think this means? And how can it help us to be good ground?
4. What is a specific falsity that can devour seeds of truth like the birds in the parable?

Day Two: Jesus' Explanation of the Sower

Matthew 3:18-23 (see also Mark 4:13-20, Luke 8:11-15)

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom, and does not understand, the wicked one comes, and seizes upon what was sown in his heart; this is he that was sown along the way.

And that which was sown upon rocky places is he who hears the Word, and straightway with joy receives it. And he has no root in himself, but is temporary; and when affliction or persecution comes because of the Word, he is straightway caused to stumble.

And that which is sown among thorns is he who hears the Word, and the anxieties of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful.

And that sown upon the good earth is he who hears the Word, and understands, who also bears fruit, and does, indeed some a hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty.

The Word of the kingdom

AC 9987.4. That "the Word" here is truth Divine is evident without explication. It is said "the Word of the kingdom," because it is the truth of heaven and the church, for "the kingdom" is heaven and the church.

Seed upon the way

Doctrine of Life 90. The "seed upon the way" exists with those who do not care for the truth.

AC 9222. The very first thing with the man of the church is to believe the Word; and this is the chief thing with him who is in the truth of faith and the good of charity. But with those who are in the evils of the love of self and of the world, the chief thing is not to

believe the Word, for they reject it the moment they think about it and likewise blaspheme it. If a man were to see the magnitude and the nature of the blasphemies against the Word that exist with those who are in the evils of these loves, he would be horrified. While the man himself is in the world he is not aware of this, because these blasphemies are hidden behind the ideas of that active thought which with men passes into speech. Nevertheless, they are revealed in the other life, and appear horrible.

Seed upon rocky places

Doctrine of Life 90. The “seed upon stony places” exists with those who do care for the truth, but not for its own sake, thus not interiorly.

AC 8993. The genuine affection of truth wills and longs to know the veriest truths of faith for the sake of good use as the end, and for the sake of life. But the affection of truth that is not genuine desires and longs for truths for the sake of self, thus for seeking honors and for hunting gains. They who are in the affection of truth from this origin do not care whether the truths they know are genuine, provided they are such as they can pass off as truths; and therefore they stick in the mere confirmation of the doctrinal things of the church in which they were born, whether these be true or not true. They are also in darkness in respect to truths themselves, for worldly ends, which are gains, and bodily ends, which are honors, completely blindfold them.

Seed among the thorns

Doctrine of Life 90. The “seed in the midst of thorns” exists with those who are in the lusts of evil.

NJHD 86. So long as a man does not shun evils as sins, the lusts of evils block up the interiors of the natural mind on the part of the will, being like a thick veil there, and like a black cloud beneath the spiritual mind, and they prevent its being opened. But in very deed, the moment a man shuns evils as sins, the Lord inflows from heaven, takes away the veil, dispels the cloud, opens the spiritual mind, and so introduces the man into heaven.

Seed on the good earth

Doctrine of Life 90. The “seed on the good earth” exists with those who love the truths that are in the Word from the Lord, and do them from Him, thus who bear fruit.

TCR 245. That the church is according to her doctrine, and that the doctrine is from the Word, is known. But still it is not doctrine which establishes the church, but the wholeness and purity of doctrine, consequently the understanding of the Word. But the specific church, which is in man in the singular, is not established and made by doctrine, but by faith and a life according to it. Similarly the Word does not establish the church in specific in man, but faith according to truths, and a life according to goods, which he draws from [the Word] and applies to himself.

Questions and Comments

1. The explanation of the parable says, “When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom, and does not understand, the wicked one comes, and seizes upon what was sown in his heart; this is he that was sown along the way.” What should we do when we don’t understand something in the Word? (AC 6479 is helpful.)
2. NJHD 86 says, “the moment a man shuns evils as sins, the Lord inflows from heaven.” Does this match your experience?
3. TCR 245 is about the church being established—the seed in the good ground. What does the “wholeness and purity of doctrine” mean? And how does that make a difference in the establishment of the church individually and collectively?

Day Three: The Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30

Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man sowing good seed in his field. And while the men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares in the midst of the wheat, and went his way.

And when the blade sprouted, and bore fruit, then appeared also the tares. And the servants of the householder, coming, said to him, Lord, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then has it the tares?

But he declared to them, A man, an enemy, has done this. And the servants said to him, Willest thou then that we go and collect them?

But he declared, No, lest while you collect the tares, you root up the wheat together with them. Let both grow together even to the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First collect the tares, and bind them into bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.

Sowing good seed and tares

AE 911:3. "The man who sowed good seed in his field" means the Lord as to the Divine truth, which is the Word, in the church. "The man," who is called in the following verses "the Son of man," is the Lord as to the Word. "Good seed" is Divine truth, and "field" is the church where the Word is. "While men slept his enemy came and sowed tares, and went away," signifies that while men are living a natural life, or the life of the world, evils from hell secretly, or while they are unconscious of it, introduce and implant falsities, "to sleep" signifying to live a natural life or the life of the world, since such a life is sleep as compared with spiritual life, which is wakefulness. The "enemy" signifies evils from hell, which influence that life when it is separated from spiritual life. "To sow tares" signifies to insinuate and implant falsities. "And went away" signifies that it was done secretly and when they were

unconscious of it. "But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the tares appeared also," signifies that when truth increased and brought forth good, falsities from evil were mingled with it. "The blade springing up" signifies truth such as it is when it is first received, "fruit" signifies good, and "tares" falsities from evil, here these mingled with truths.

Don't collect the tares

AE 911:4. "But he said, No, lest while you collect the tares you root up the wheat together with them," signifies that thus truth from good and its increase would also perish. For truths are mingled with falsities with the men of the church, and these cannot be separated and the falsities cast out until they are reformed.

TCR 532. VII. TRUE REPENTANCE IS EXAMINING, NOT ONLY THE ACTIONS OF ONE'S LIFE, BUT ALSO THE INTENTIONS OF ONE'S WILL. True repentance is examining, not only the actions of one's life, but also the intentions of one's will, for the reason that the acts are done by the understanding and the will. For man speaks from his thought, and acts from his will. Therefore speech is the thought speaking, and action is the will acting. And this being the source of words and deeds, it follows indubitably that it is the will and thought that sin when the body sins.

Man can indeed repent of evils that he has done in body, and still think and will evil. But this is like cutting off the trunk of a bad tree, and leaving its root in the ground, from which the same bad tree grows up again and spreads forth its branches. But it is different when the root also is torn up; and this is done in man when he examines the intentions of his will and puts away his evils by repentance.

Man examines the intentions of his will when he examines his thoughts, for in these the intentions make themselves manifest; as, for example, when his thought, will, and intention incline to revenge, adultery, theft, false witness, and to lust after them; also [when he inclines] to blasphemy against God and the holy Word and the church, and so on. If he continues to direct his attention to this, and to inquire whether he would actually commit these evils if fear of the law and for his reputation did not hinder; and if after this scrutiny he determines that he does not will these things because they are sins, he truly and interiorly repents; and still more when these evils are delightful to him, and he is free to do them, and yet

he resists and abstains. He who practices this repeatedly, perceives the delights of evil, when they return, as undelightful, and finally he condemns them to hell. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord:

Whoever wishes to find his soul shall lose it; and whoever would lose his soul for My sake shall find it (Matt. 10:39). He that puts away the evils of his will by such repentance is like one who in due time plucks up the tares sown in his field by the devil, so that the seed implanted by the Lord God the Savior finds a clear soil and grows to a harvest (Matt. 13:24-30).

Questions and Comments

1. How might “evils from hell secretly, or while [we] are unconscious of it, introduce and implant falsities”?
2. AE 911.4 says that with the men of the church falsities are not separated and cast out until they are reformed. Can falsities be cast out while we are still here on earth?
3. TCR 532 seems to indicate that “tares” can be pulled up during life on earth. How do we do that and make sure we get the roots too?
4. Thinking from TCR 532, what happens if we pull up a tare before we can get the roots out too?

Day Four: Jesus' Explanation of the Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:36-43

Then leaving the crowds, Jesus came into the house, and His disciples came to Him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.

And He answering them, said to them, He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. And the field is the world; and the good seed, they are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the wicked; and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. And the harvest is the consummation of the age; and the reapers are the angels.

Therefore just as the tares are collected and burnt up by the fire, so shall it be in the consummation of this age. The Son of Man shall send out His angels, and they shall collect out of His kingdom all offenses, and those who do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of the fire, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then shall the just give forth brightness as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The consummation of the age

AE 911.2. The Lord by [the parable of the wheat and the tares] illustrates all that is said in this chapter [14] of Revelation (in verses 14 to 19) respecting the Son of man having a sickle in His hand and reaping, and that the earth was reaped by Him and the angels....

AE 624.2-3. Why the Last Judgment does not come until the consummation, that is, when there is no longer any good or truth remaining with the men of the church, is wholly unknown in the world, although it is known in heaven. The reason is that **there are**

two classes of men upon whom judgment is made. One class consists of the well-disposed, and the other of those who are not well-disposed. The well-disposed are the angels in the ultimate heaven, most of whom are simple, because they have not cultivated the understanding by interior truths, but only by exterior truths from the sense of the letter of the Word, according to which they have lived. For this reason their spiritual mind, which is the interior mind, was not indeed, closed, but neither has it been opened, as it is with those who have received interior truths in doctrine and in life. This is why they have become simple in respect to spiritual things, and are called well-disposed.

But the ill-disposed are those who have lived outwardly as Christians but inwardly have admitted evils of every kind into the thought and into the will, so that while in the external form they appeared to be angels, in internal form they were devils. When such come into the other life, they come into association for the most part with the well-disposed, that is, with the simple good who are in the ultimate heaven. For exterior things consociate, and the simple good are such that what appears in external form to be good they believe to be good, their thought not penetrating farther.

These ill-disposed must be separated from the well-disposed before the Last Judgment comes, and also afterward, and they can only be separated successively. This is why before the time of the Last Judgment the Word must still be taught, although interiorly, that is, in respect to its interiors, it is undelightful. And because these interior things are undelightful, the [ill-disposed] do not receive them. They only receive such things from the sense of the letter of the Word as favor their loves and the principles derived from them, on account of which the Word in respect to the sense of the letter is delightful to them. It is therefore by means of these interior things that the well-disposed are separated from the ill-disposed.

That for this reason the time is extended after the Last Judgment before the new church is fully established, is an arcanum from heaven which at this day cannot enter the understanding except with a few; yet this is what the Lord teaches in [this parable in] Matthew....

“The consummation of the age” signifies the last time of the church. That until then, the well-disposed are not to be separated from the ill-disposed, because they are consociated by outward

things, is signified by “lest while you gather up the tares, you root up the wheat together with them.”

LJ 70. There were many reasons why such societies [of the ill-disposed], or such [false] heavens were tolerated. The main reason was, that by external holiness, and by external sincerity and justice, they were conjoined with the simple good, who were either in the lowest heaven, or were still in the world of spirits and not yet introduced into heaven. For in the spiritual world, there is a communication, and thence a conjunction, of all with their like. And the simple good, in the lowest heaven and in the world of spirits, look principally to externals, yet are not interiorly evil. Therefore if these [inwardly evil] spirits had been forcibly removed from them before the appointed time, heaven would have suffered in its ultimates; and yet it is the ultimate, upon which the superior heaven subsists, as upon its own basis.

Questions and Comments

1. Why is it important for us to know about the Consummation of the Age and the Last Judgment?
2. Like AE 624.2-3, most of the passages on this parable in the Heavenly Doctrine explain that it is about how the Last Judgment was effected. What does this process teach us about the Lord?
3. Last Judgment 59 explains in more detail why the separation of the “wheat and the tares” took place over time, rather than all at once, if you are interested in further reading on the subject.

Day Five: The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

Matthew 13:31-32 (see also Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:20-21)

Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man taking sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herb, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and nest in its branches.

Another parable He spoke to them: The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman taking hid in three satas¹ of meal, till the whole was leavened.

The least of all seeds

AC 55.3. The earth is replenished or filled when there are many truths and goods. For when the Lord blesses and speaks to man, that is, works upon him, there is an immense increase of good and truth, as the Lord says in Matthew 13:31-32....

A “grain of mustard seed” is man’s good before he becomes spiritual, which is “the least of all seeds” because he thinks that he does good of himself, and what is of himself is nothing but evil. But as he is in a state of regeneration, there is something of good in him, but it is the least of all.

The second rational and the mustard seed

AC 2657.4. How the case is with these things may be illustrated by comparison with the fruit of trees. The first rational, in the beginning, is like unripe fruit, which gradually matures till it forms seeds within itself, and when it is of such age as to begin to separate itself from the tree, its state is then full (see above, n. 2636). But the second rational, with which one is gifted by the Lord when he is being regenerated, is like the same fruit in good ground, in which those things which are round about the seeds decay, and the seeds push forth from their inmost parts, and send

¹ AC 7906:3 (in the Latin) uses the Greek word “sata” here, from the Hebrew seah. A “sata” is about 1.5 pecks.

out a root, and then a shoot above the ground, which grows into a new tree, and unfolds itself at length even into new fruits, and then into gardens and paradises, according to the affections of good and truth which it receives (see Matt. 13:31-32; John 12:24).

The birds of heaven

AE 1100.8. "A tree from a grain of mustard seed" signifies a man of the church, and also a church beginning from a very little spiritual good by means of truth. For if only a very little spiritual good takes root with a man, it grows like a seed in good ground. And as a "tree" thus signifies a man of the church, it follows that "the winged things of heaven" that made nests in its branches signify the knowledges of truth and thoughts from them. Anyone can see this is not a mere comparison, for if it were, what would be the need of such things in the Word and of like things in the Prophets?

Leaven

DP 25. The union of good and truth in others is provided for by the Lord by means of purification; and this is brought about in two ways, one by temptations, and the other by fermentations.

Spiritual temptations are nothing else than combats against evils and falsities which emanate from hell and make their influence felt. By these combats man is purified from evils and falsities, and good is united to truth in him, and truth to good.

Spiritual fermentations are brought about in many ways, both in the heavens and on the earth; but in the world it is not known what they are and how they are brought about. For there are evils together with falsities which, when introduced into societies, act like ferments put into meal and new wine. By means of these, discordant things are separated and concordant things are conjoined, and purity and clearness are the result. They are what are meant by these words of the Lord [in the parable of the leaven]

Questions and Comments

1. According to <https://www.britannica.com/plant/mustard>, a mustard seed is about 2.5 mm in diameter.
2. It says in AC 55.3, “when the Lord blesses and speaks to man, that is, works upon him, there is an immense increase of good and truth.” This seems to be reason for hope in any circumstance we may find ourselves in.
3. The first rational is compared to unripe fruit in AC 2657. How does that help us understand why we need to move beyond the first rational into the second rational?
4. What is an example of “an evil injected into society” that acts like a ferment, as mentioned in DP 25?

Day Six: The Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, the Net,
the Householder

Matthew 13:44-52

Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man finding, he hides, and from the joy of it goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, a merchant, seeking goodly pearls; who, finding one very precious pearl, went away, and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a seine² cast into the sea, and gathering of every kind; which, when it was full, they brought it up to the shore, and sitting down, collected the good into vessels, and cast out the bad. So shall it be in the consummation of the age; the angels shall come forth, and shall separate the wicked from the midst of the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus says to them, Have you understood all these things? They say to Him, Yes, Lord. And He says to them, On account of this, every scribe instructed for the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, and a householder, who puts forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Buying

AC 5374. The signification of “buying” is to procure for oneself, thus to appropriate [or make it one’s own]. Procuring and appropriating spiritually take place by means of good and truth.... [as in] Matt. 13:44-46.

² a net; not the common word for “net” in the New Testament

Pearls

AE 1044.3. “Pearls” signify the knowledges of good and truth.... “The kingdom of the heavens” means both heaven and the church. The “merchant” means those who acquire for themselves the goods and truths through which heaven and the church come. “Pearls” signify the knowledges of good and truth, for these are the truths of the natural man. “The one precious pearl” means the knowledge respecting the Lord and His Divine. “Going away, he sold all that he had and bought it” signifies to reject what is one’s own [proprium] to receive life from the Lord.

Casting a net

AE 513.17. The separation of the good and the evil is here likened to “a net cast into the sea bringing together every kind of fish,” for the reason that “fishes” signify natural men in respect to knowledges and cognitions, and in “the consummation of the age,” or at the time of the Last Judgment, such are separated from one another. For there are good natural men and bad natural men, and the separation of these in the spiritual world has the appearance of a net or drag-net cast into the sea, bringing together the fish, and drawing them to the shore, and this appearance is also from correspondence. This is why the Lord likens the kingdom of the heavens to “a net bringing together the fish.” That the separation of the good from the evil presents this appearance it has been granted me to see.

The furnace of fire

AE 540.2. Evidently here (13:41, 42, 49, 50) “a furnace (*caminus seu fornax*) of fire” means the hells. “The consummation of the age” is the last time of the church, when judgment takes place. That the evil must then be separated from the good and be cast into hell is signified by “the angels shall gather all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity,” and “they shall sever the wicked from the midst of the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.”

Hell is called “the furnace of fire,” because it appears to be on fire from the loves of self and of the world. That “hell fire” signifies torment from these loves may be seen in the work *Heaven and Hell* (n. 566-575).

Gnashing of teeth

AE 566.18. "Gnashing of teeth" in the hells means continual disputation and combat of falsities with each other and against truths, and thus of those who are in falsities, joined with contempt for others, enmity, jeering, derision, blaspheming; and these also burst forth into attempts to tear each other in pieces, for everyone fights for his own falsity from love of self, of learning, and of fame. These disputations and contests are heard outside of these hells as gnashings of teeth, and are also turned into gnashings of teeth when truths flow in there out of heaven.

Questions and Comments

1. The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price in the literal sense seem to be about how what we buy shows what we value. In the spiritual sense, these parables may help us reflect on how much we value the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. What similarities do you see between the parable of the Net and the parable of the Wheat and the Tares, in both the literal and spiritual senses?