

Fertile Ground

By Paris Reidhead*

I ask you to turn to Matthew, Chapter 13... Now to this portion that is familiar, perhaps even too familiar. One of the difficulties we have with the Word of God is to overcome that which might be considered calloused familiarity. If anyone were to ask himself about this Parable of the Sowers and the Ground, he would say, Oh yes. I know that. But what is there in this for me? I think the answer to it is that we are finding in the day in which we live that we have succeeded in Gospel hardening a generation of people to Divine Truth. One of the things that troubles me is the effect of all of our Radio Preaching upon our Nation. Obviously it is difficult to get statistics, and to make too accurate a depth analysis of this. But I am concerned by the effect that I am able to trace in conversations with others that are doing it. I have experienced occasionally of spending a good bit of time upon one of the World's largest parking lot. They call it New Jersey 3. It extends from Lincoln Tunnel, out to #46. But very frequently it is just like a parking lot, bumper to bumper. We sit there for considerable time. And occasionally I have heard people next to me (the windows are rolled down, and you can hear the conversation), and I have heard them as they have turned the Radio, and come upon a Religious Broadcast. And the effect of it is to say something like this, with words I'll not repeat and expletives I refrain from using. There is another one of those assorted different kinds of Religious Programs. Every place you turn you seem to hear them. And then they will switch it quickly off.

Now why should this be the case? Well, I think perhaps the reason lies in this, that we have caused by this means of a general sowing of words people to feel that they are acquainted with what Christians have to say. And they are not, actually. "They have ears to hear, and they hear not. Eyes have they and they see not" (Mat. 13:13). Minds and they perceive not. We have given them enough and told them enough so that the general public feels that they know what Christians are talking about, and what the Bible says. But the actual fact is, they do not. But there has been just enough acquaintance with truth to inoculate them against further interest. Now this is regrettable. We are grateful for Radio Ministry, and for the wonderful effect that it has had, and for the multitudes that have come to Christ. But we are aware of the hardening effect that it will have upon those that hear it.

Now lest you should think that so much as a moment that I am distinguishing against the one medium of communication, may I remind you that we are seeing the same thing happen by means of our literature. We are concerned about literature here. From week to week we press upon you books. But I am still aware of the fact that it is much easier to buy books, as expensive as they may be, than it is to read them and to assimilate the truth that they contain. And I AM afraid that too many times people buy books that have been recommended to them, and with just slight little flip of the thumb will go through it, failing to find it is all in the conversation that characterizes most of the reading material of the bulk of the population, and that there may be some paragraphs of more than five or six lines, generally speaking the person will say, Well, there are not many illustrations in this; I do not think I am interested; and will put it back and leave it there. And now they have the book, they have read — just looked through it — and have had a casual acquaintance with it, they feel that it offers nothing else for them. I remember years ago being in a Pastor's home, a series of problems were there that were breaking his heart, and I told him at the time that I felt that he greatly needed one of the little Pamphlets that we have, that we have used and have pressed upon you, The Authority of the Believer, by J. A. McMillan. And he looked at me, and with something of a smile of disdain said, "Oh no, not that. I got that several years ago, and I looked at it, but I do not think that will help me in this." Well he had just gotten enough acquaintance with it to feel that it was not relevant to him and to his need, and so he put it by.

I think there is a third area of communication which has been instrumental of producing this same kind of an effect. The calloused acquaintance with profound truth that somehow fails to go any further. And that is, preaching, Bible Conference Ministry. To wit, last fall, in our October Convention, we had in my 25 years of experience one of the most remarkable panels of speakers that I have ever heard. With the first message that Mr. Matthews gave on Sunday morning, with the ministry of Dr. G. Allen Fleece, and with the ministry of Major Ian Thomas, and Dr. Tozer¹, and others that were there to share in the days,

1 Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

there has to my knowledge never been such a profound and complete proclamation of the Truth, that this Church has stood for, and this society has stood for, in its wholeness, and in its balance, and in its entirety, that there was last Convention, but I have found very few people have recognized what God was saying, or responded to it. The same happens from the Pulpit. Truths are presented, truths which have had the effect of changing lives, the effect of completely altering characters, and changing homes. People listen, nod their heads, and say, Yes, I guess that is so. And there it stops. I remember some years ago when the Spirit of God had made truths that I now believe, and for which I stand, precious real, and I came into an area of fellowship where these truths had been held, and as I began to share them and give them, the effect was on my hearers often, Well that's fine. We are so glad that you believe the way we do. And they were more or less like a homiletical judging society, trying to test whether or not the sermons were, shall I say, Kosher or not. And, satisfied that they were, they then proceeded to forget everything that was said, and simply left them. Now this is that of which our Lord speaks.

Our Lord speaks saying, that there is a tremendous danger in truth, a danger that most people fail to recognize. Truth has an effect upon everyone that hears it, every time he hears it. No one can be indifferent to truth. You are either going to be drawn nearer to God, you are either going to be strengthened, built up in the faith, something positive and worthwhile, and glorious is going to happen, or something very dangerous, and subtle is going to happen in your heart. One or the other. It depends entirely upon you, upon your preparation, upon your attitude, upon your response, but you never can hear truth and be quite the same again. Now our Lord knew this. He had come to this generation of people, His generation, and His invitation had gone out: "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat. 11:28-29). But they did not come. They did not come.

John the Baptist had come saying, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Some had repented, but most had not. Christ came, saying, Come. Repent and come, and live, and learn, and be blest; and they turned away from Him. And our Lord said, You rejected John because he was uncouth, wearing a rude garment of camels hair, and eating locusts and, wild honey, and did not know any of the niceties of your day and time. You said. Why how can this man, how can this fellow have anything to say to us? We are accustomed to learning truth from men that are dignified and polished and cultured, educated, and wear the fine garments that betoken their relationship to the Church, or to the Synagogue in their case. And so they rejected John. Our Lord came, with all of the refinement, and all of the culture, and all of the genuine character and poise that characterized the Son of God, and they said, Why this Man is genial, and congenial, and He eats with the publicans and the sinners. Why He is a man that accepts hospitality. We can't. He is not a Prophet. A Prophet ought to wear garments betokening His distance between Him and His generation. So the very reason that they rejected John, is the reason why they rejected Christ. He did not have what they said He ought to have, so they rejected HIM. They did not go through the matter and say, Is John speaking the Truth? The Truth is to be dealt with on the basis of its own worth, and its own meaning, regardless of the package in which it comes. When Christ came, they did not deal with that which He said on the basis of Truth. Is this God's Word? It was on their response to the individual. And this has characterized people, down across the ages. Whenever you hear something that offers some obligation, some moral responsibility, or spiritual burden, and you do not want to do it, the thing to do, is to find fault with the one that brought it. And immediately that you do that, you salve your conscience for the moment, saying, "Now I am not obligated to deal with what was given." And this was why that generation crucified Christ. They said, He is a fool. He said He could tear that Temple down that took 40 years in the building, and rebuild it in 3 days. Why this is ridiculous. You cannot listen to a man that is so out of touch with reality that he thinks he can compress 40 years work into 3 days. You couldn't listen to anything that a man like that says. Why He is a wine bibber, and He is glutton. You mustn't listen to what He says. Why this Man says He is a King. He is a traitor. You must not listen to what He says. And so, to escape the obligation of dealing with what was said by Christ, they picked flaws in His character, and in His Name, and in His reputation. They did anything they could to escape from the obligation of coming to grips with what He said. They did same thing with John, and they did it with Christ. And this is the process that is happening today, and will continue to happen as long as God in Grace allows truth to find its way to the minds of men.

Since there are three areas of communication, and you are part of all of them, and since there is the possibility that something of what I have said may be true in each of you, will you be so kind as to relate yourself now to His Parable. He has described it

in terms of different kinds of people. We realize that as the Word has gone out over the air waves that it has fallen upon these different kind of ground. It always does. Literature falls into these different types of hands. Preaching always falls on the same kind of ears, and there is possibility that you are represented by one or more of these groups, then I suggest that you relate them very personally to your own heart, and then we will make an application.

Our Lord, as you know, simply took an event that was happening at the time, or could have been, the sowing of the grain. Something with which every hearer was familiar. And He said that as the man took his grain to the field that he had plowed with a crooked stick — which incidentally is the method of plowing that is being used widely in our land today, getting away from the moldboard plow. Someone has well said that our land has been more damaged by the moldboard plow than all the wars that have ever been fought over it. But be that the case, just a crooked stick stirred up the soil and then he took the pouch of grain, and he went out, put his hand in, and would throw the grain. He tried to spread it as evenly as he could. And He said that “some of this grain fell on the path” (Mat. 13:4a). Perhaps a little path that was made to delineate the field. You can see it. Now He is not interested. The issue involved in the Parable is not the quantity of grain, but the kind of place upon which it fell. It was just the ground that was packed, and hard and solid, and a few of the kernels fell there. There was no earth, to receive them. They could not be buried. They just lay there, and “the fowls of the air came, and ate this” (Mat. 13:4b). It was simple for them to do it. They could see it from the air, just walk along the path and pick the grain up.

And then there was a second type. This was the stone. The country of Palestine is so stony. I spent several days this week in the company of Mr. Sharf, Nathan Sharf, who has been (to) Israel during the last year for some six months. And he has been telling me about Israel, how stony the Land is, and yet how fertile the soil is. This soil would be over a layer of stone, substrata of stone, very thin. Immediately, with the “heat of the sun it would spring up; since there would be no depths of earth it would with the coming of the sun wither away” (Mat. 13:5-6).

“Off to the side there would be a patch of thistles, or thorns, and some of the grain would fall into that and would be choked. Then there was the good soil” (Mat. 13:7-8). I would like to ask you what you have done with the truth you have heard. And in the answering of the question as to what you have done with truth you have heard, I would like to have you find in your own mind the kind of soil that you represent. If you do this, you see then there is this one difference between you and soil. Soil cannot change itself. Soil cannot alter its character. But I believe the reason our Lord said this was so that men might discover the attitude they have had toward Truth, and then change it. And so when I am exhorting you to relate this to yourself, I do it with the hopes that if you discover that yours is the hard packed soil of the path, or the stony soil without depth, or the thorn filled soil, that you will do something about it. You can, you know. You are not like the dirt of the path. You have mind, and will. You can do something about what your attitude toward Truth is. Our Lord was asked by His disciples this question: “Why do you speak in parables” (Mat. 13:10). Remember this is the first parable that our Lord has used. Up until now He has taught didactically. He has said, “Repent. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mat. 4:17). Our Lord said, “I did not come to send peace; I came to send a sword” (Mat. 10:34). He said, You are not going to find that this will help you to win friends and influence people. Why, He said, your family are going to be the ones. Your father will turn in his son. Children will turn against their fathers. And “they will see them put to death for My Name’s sake” (Mat. 10:21). He said, “I’ll give you rest, but you’ll have to take My yoke upon you in order to receive it” (Mat. 11:28-29). You’ll have to learn of Me. Oh, it has been a straight message, a message of repentance and return, that has been brought thus far.

But you see, there has been the effect of this message. And now our Lord has begun to change His teaching. The disciples said, Lord, why are you teaching in parables. He reverts back to the Old Testament, and says in effect, I am doing, this in order that the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled. Isaiah was sent, and was told by God that he should go, knowing even in the going that there would be those who would hear, and would not understand, who would see and would not perceive. They would be hardened by the Truth that was sent to be the means of their deliverance. So He said, I have come. I have given the message. And the effect of the message has been that some of the people that were out there on the hillside this afternoon when I spoke to them have already made up their minds that they are not going to repent. They have made up their minds that they are not going to bow. They are not going to submit to sovereignty. They are not going to take up their Cross and come follow Me. They refuse to deny themselves. They would rather save their life and lose their soul, and He said, I have nothing more to say to them. I have nothing more to say to them.

This is the principle — that the moment that you come to Truth, and you do not walk in that truth, you have put a barricade across the road to progress in your spiritual life. Did you know that? The moment that you come up to some revelation in God's Word, some Principle in God's Word, some Truth in God's Word, that you refuse to walk in, right there is the end of your pilgrimage. You never will grow beyond that point. You never will develop beyond that point. That is the point of paralysis. That is the point where you stop. Now I hate to emphasize this, but I must do it to be fair to the Word of God. The effect of knowing the Will of God, and not doing it, is the effect of stopping all spiritual progress at that point. There can be no progress beyond it. It is like a ladder, that when you come to a rung upon which you refuse to step, you cannot go any higher on the ladder. This is where you are. This is where you stop. You cannot go beyond it. You can go around it. You can go somewhere else, but your spiritual progress will stop at the point that you come against truth and refuse to walk in it. This is a sad thing because, you see, we have been so careless about what we have heard. We have been so indifferent. They say, Just sermons, just books, just messages. If anyone ever stands before you and all he has is a sermon, or just something to say, then he has no more spiritual relevance to you than a Siamese Temple dancer has to the people that witness her maneuverings. You can imagine, can you not, this little girl out in some distant Buddha Temple in Siam. Down cross the centuries she has been told that there are certain finger motions that are to be used, and certain undulations of the body, and so worship consists in the people coming, and to use those finger motions. And I submit to you that when you come to a Service and are not prepared to obey whatever it is God says through His Word, that the preacher has no more spiritual relevance or moral significance to you than the Temple Dancer that goes through the historic, traditional undulations has to the witnesses there. The truth becomes positively dangerous the moment that one comes against it and refuses to walk in it. It has a paralyzing effect on the person. And our Lord has given to that generation the message of repentance. They have refused to repeat, and there is nothing more for them. They cannot go on. And so, from that time on, when He speaks to the company, He speaks in parables, because that "they may hear and not hear, and see and not see." There is nothing further for them to see, or to hear, or to know until they do that thing back there they refused to do, that they did know, and did see, and did hear. This is the reason why some churches insist upon milk.

I know of church in the general area who was thinking of calling a Pastor, well known to you if I were to cite his name. You would be familiar. He would be familiar to you. You might know him personally. And the church said, "We don't want that man. We are not ready for him yet. He brings meat, and we are just ready for milk." Well now they have been 40 years on milk, 50 years some of them, but you see the fact is that back there the first time that they had meat they would not take it, and so now they insist on milk. They will not have anything other than milk, because when they came up against meat they refused it. And now if anyone comes in and preaches meat, then they are brought face to face with the stubbornness of years ago. But if you stay right on the milk level, then they are quite happy because their consciences are not disturbed. They will heap to themselves therefore teachers that will scratch the gentle itching in their ears. But they do not want anything that will bring them on past it. And so they refused this man whose ministry is world blessed as the one to teach and preach before them, because they said, "He teaches meat, strong meat." What had happened? They had come up against light. They had come up against truth, but they had refused to go in it, and so they would have nothing beyond that that might disturb them or upset them. This is what happens. This is the effect.

Our Lord came to that generation, and gave them the basic message of repentance and faith, of obedience to light, and having refused it, and then He said, "There is no use telling them about it, so I will speak in a parable."

I want to ask you, How much truth is real in your experience? How much truth is brought forth 60 fold, or 100 fold? What truth has sprung up into life in your life? Where did truth last become real in your experience? May I ask you to consider it particularly. "Stony ground." You have heard truth in the past. You have heard messages. You have read books. You have been exposed to teachings. And if I were to cite the name of the author of the book or the preacher, you would say, "Oh yes." In fact, the wheels of memory would begin to turn, and you would recall that he spoke. But was that which was said just seed that fell on a path trodden by indifference and callousness, and the seed itself has been taken away? Hard ground? Has that happened to you? Perhaps there has been some hard ground in your experience? Look back now — precious things in God's Word that were unfolded to you, and you never took them. Just hard ground. The fowls of the air came. Have you ever seen? You haven't perhaps, most of you. But when you are sowing grain by hand, the birds often will swoop down and catch it before

it hits the ground, and perhaps even before you left you had lost all interest in what was said. That is the hard ground. But do you recall in the past some truth has come to you, and you have been awakened by it, and enlivened by it, and then after a day or two, three or four days, a week or month, it withered away. No depth. Could this have happened in your experience, with some relationship to divine life and light? Could it have taken place in your life and experience, that something sprang up in time past, but then persecution and misunderstanding came, and it withered away? Could that have happened? If all the people that have been to the Altar for full surrender and entire consecration were walking in full surrender and entire consecration, this world would be in the midst of one of the greatest revivals that history has ever known. This is one of the reasons why I personally have come to question seriously the value of that. I am sure for some it has been valuable, but I have seen so many times the same people coming to the same altar, year after year after year, and going back and doing the same things for which they came, with no change. It was like seed that fell on stony soil, sprang up and withered away. Has that happened in your experience? You have made vows to the Lord. You have taken a new step for the Lord. You have taken a new stand in truth. But a little persecution, a little opposition, and you have just wilted. Could that have happened? Have you ever had thorns choke out the truth of God? Have you? Have you ever had Truth find its way to your heart, and begin to grow, but then you get so busy, too busy to pray. My dear, when you are too busy to pray, you are far too busy. Too busy to meditate. Too busy for your quiet time. Too busy to read. Too busy for fellowship. When you become so busy that you have any reason to neglect your soul, then you can understand that it is not legitimate business that you are rendering to the Lord, but it is the thorns and the thistles of the Satan's planting that are springing up to crowd out the truth. What kind of a Christian would you have been if at times your heart had not had in it the thorns and the thistles to choke the truth of God which started to spring up? The cares of this world.

Now let me ask you. What truth is there that in your experience has brought forth 30 fold? 60 fold? 100 fold? What do you mean? It is some truth that has gloriously transformed your life, and in transforming your life, it has completely redirected your energies, and your thoughts. It has put a transparency to your heart, and it has put a glow to your life, and it has changed you, and it is bringing out 30 fold, 60 fold, and a hundred fold. Others are being blessed by that which has blessed you, with the comfort with which you are comforted, you can comfort others also. Has this happened? Has this happened? What has happened to the truth that you have heard?

On September 17th, I will have completed five years of ministry in the Gospel Tabernacle Church. I understand, I do not know, that I am the first man since Dr. Simpson² to have completed 5 years ministry in the Gospel Tabernacle Church. I may be incorrect about that. But I have brought near a thousand messages to you. Surely somewhere, with all of the errors of homiletics and failures of personality, surely somewhere there has been a grain of truth that found the soil. What have you done with it? What have you done with it? Oh you need not answer to me. I am not asking for you to report to me. Because I am just the sower. What have you done with Truth? Not my truth. Not Alliance truth. His truth. His truth. What have you done with it? Has it sprung up? Or has your heart needed back there 5 years ago, 10 years ago, and 40 years ago to have been broken with the plow, and because there was not breaking, all that truth that has ever come in 40 years has fallen on hardened ground. Have you made any spiritual progress? You, since Simpson died? Are you a better Christian? Are you warmer, richer, more like Christ? You that have been here for 40, 50 years? Or has your soul somehow back there been packed, and since then all that has been is just truth on hard ground? You that have been here less years, a month, a week, a day, today, what has happened to truth in your heart? It is not my truth. It is not the truth of this church, this society. You may have heard it from the air. You may have heard it in a Conference. You may have heard it up at Calvary Baptist Church in the Christian Life Convention. You may have heard it in our Missionary Convention. You may have heard it on the street corner. You may have read it in a magazine. But it is truth. It is His truth. What has happened to it? Has it found good soil? Has it sprung up? Is it bearing 30, 60, 100 fold? What has happened to truth? I assure you this, that that point where you come up against truth, and you do not walk in it, you have barricaded the highway of your spiritual progress, and said, I do not want to go any further. This is where I stop. You have cut the rungs out of the ladder, and you have said, I do not want to climb any higher. This is where I want to stop. There is only one way to deal with truth; if you want Him to continue to reveal, you continue to obey. And the moment that you say, Lord, I have had enough. I DO NOT WANT ANY MORE. I am going to show it to you just by being

² Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

indifferent to this. That barricades the road. Where did your spiritual life stop, if it has stopped? Where did your spiritual progress cease. Maybe it came back to some point of bitterness. Maybe it came back to some point of resentment. Maybe it came back to some sin of uncleanness of mind, or word, or body. I do not know what it is. Maybe it came back to some broken fellowship. I do not know where. Where did spiritual progress stop? And you say, "Well, it is not stopped." Then, dear heart, do not let it stop. Do not let it stop. Treasure more than your life itself a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men and walk in the light of truth as God gives it to you, because it is so easy to let the soil become stony or choked.

What are you going to do? I will minister to you next Lord's Day, and then will begin in the fall again. What are you going to do? Our year seems to begin in September, somehow. What are you going to do in this coming year? Are you finishing up this summer the way you finished last? You should not, you know. Oh there should have been change in every way. Has there been? Have you made the progress you ought to have made? the growth you ought to have made? Just as our Lord said to His generation, I have nothing for you now but parables that you cannot understand, because when I spoke to you directly you did not obey, so He says to you today, Are you prepared to walk in the light? to treasure the truth? to nurture it? to nurse it? to brood over it? to let everything, the stones be taken out, and the thorns be taken out, and the soil ploughed up so that your heart can be good soil. What have you done with what you have heard? What has happened to the truth? What has taken place in your life? What kind of soil are you? You can change. You can make your heart good soil if you will walk in the Light and obey the Word. He that heareth My words, and doeth them, he it is that loveth Me. And if you love Me, My Father and I will come and make our abode with you. We will stay with you. You can change the quality of your soil if you want to.

Shall we bow in prayer? Just a question. Is your heart this morning been hard, the path? Has it been stony? Some are going to have it spring up and say; Oh I must do something about it. But by Tuesday morning you will have forgotten you will have forgotten. Is it thorn choked, or is it good soil? May God just find us each where we are. Do not rest, dear heart, unless your heart is that good soil that can, by His Grace and brooding presence, spring forth a hundred fold, in you to bless, and in others.

What are you doing with truth? Truth is dangerous. Walk in it, and it blesses. Reject it, and it sears and burns and hardens.

Our Father, we bow before Thee, a company of eternity bound men and women. No pastures around us, no fields about us, and yet the analogy is clear in every mind, for we have seen the sower go forth to sow. And we know that there has been coming, by Thy gentle grace truth into our minds and hearts throughout the days of past years, and as we look into our hearts this morning, and try to evaluate the kind of soil we have been to Thy Truth, we are not happy, Lord. It has not brought forth for most of us that hundred fold it ought to have brought. Oh God we must deal with it. Do not leave us complacent, or indifferent, but grant, Lord, that we shall go back to the barricade that was erected in our spiritual progress, obey the truth that we tried to pass, and let Thee begin to turn our soil again into that good, rich soil that will bear 100 fold for Thy Glory. Bless every one before Thee, Lord. Show us that whatever we have been, we do not need to continue to be, because our hearts are not soil. They are like soil, but they are not soil. There are hearts that Thou canst change, and we can change, and it will be up to us as to what kind of a soil we represent tomorrow and the days to come. Move upon us, therefore, in grace and mercy. We know Thou dost forgive and cleanse, and restore. But grant, Lord, that none of us shall be satisfied until the soil of our heart is become that good, rich soil that will bring forth 100 fold and truth shall bless us, and through us bless others. For Jesus sake. Amen.

Shall we stand for the Benediction. And "now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory, honor, dominion and majesty now and forever. Amen" (Jud. 1:24-25).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, August 13, 1961 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.