

“WANTED: SEED-SOWERS”

(Mark 4:26-29)

“And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” (King James Version)

“The Jesus said, “God’s kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows — he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps — harvest time!” (Eugene Peterson translation, The Message)

Let me begin this study with an outline of the parable. First, it reveals *A Simple Procedure*, verse 26. Then, *A Secret Providence* takes over, verses 26b-27. Finally, it closes with *A Sure Promise*, verse 28. *A Simple Procedure*, *a Secret Providence*, and *A Sure Promise*. These three points may be clearly seen, in order, in the text.

I. A SIMPLE PROCEDURE

Now, let me explain these three points from the text itself. First, a Simple Procedure. A man, possibly a farmer, goes out into a field and casts seed upon the soil of that field. The verb, “cast,” is an aorist tense verb in the original language, and that is very important in understanding the parable. The aorist tense reveals point action, or one-time action. It is like a dot, or a period, on a time-line. It describes action that occurs only one time. So the simple procedure pictured in the parable is that of a farmer who goes out into an open field with a bag of seeds at his belt or in his hand. He gathers a hand-full of those seeds in his fist and flings them wholesale over the soil. He “broadcasts” those seeds as far as he can over the soil of the field. And it must be kept in mind that *he performs this action only one time*. Admittedly, we don’t know whether he does it with one sweep of his arm and one opening of his hand, or this is several days’ work drawn up into one activity (a time of sowing), but the text clearly pictures his action as one-time point action. I repeat, this is very important in understanding the parable.

II. A SECRET PROVIDENCE

When this one-time action has been completed, then a Silent, Secret Providence takes over. The farmer himself “sleeps, and rises, night and day.” The Peterson paraphrase called *The Message* says that after the farmer sows the seed in the field, “he then goes to bed and forgets about it.” In other words, he completes the one-time act of sowing the seed in the field, and then he resumes a normal schedule of activities day and night thereafter. He goes to sleep each night, and rises to the particular activities of each new day. It is again very important in understanding the parable to note that the verbs, “sleep” and “rise” are present tense verbs, picturing continuing activity.

Again, Eugene Peterson captures the idea vividly and accurately in his translation called The Message, when he translates, when “the seed (is) thrown on a field . . . the man then goes to bed *and forgets about it.*” In fact, the text pictures day after day in succession in this man’s life — he sleeps each night and rises up to the business of each new day. He sows the seed once — and then goes about his daily business as if he has totally forgotten the sowing of the seed.

However, though he now disregards the seeds and the soil, a silent, secret providence has taken over. “The seed sprouts and grows — and he has no idea how it happens.” Again, the verbs are present tense verbs, picturing continuing action. “The seed *keeps on* sprouting and *keeps on* growing,” and the ironic fact is added, “and he has no idea how it happens.” The pronoun “he” bears major emphasis in the sentence, which means, “He *himself* (the very one who sowed the seed, mind you!) doesn’t have the slightest idea how it (the growth of the plant from the seed) happens.” So, while he is just “minding his own business,” day after day and night after night, a secret providence has taken over and a great crop is grown.

III. A SURE PROMISE

The text then concludes with *a Sure Promise*. “For the earth brings forth fruit of herself,” Jesus said (King James Version). Again, The Message translation vividly declares the meaning: “The earth *does it all without his help*: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps — harvest time!” We cannot hear this statement too many times: “The earth brings forth fruit all by itself”! Again, a grammar lesson is absolutely vital. The term translated “all by itself” bears major emphasis, which means that the Holy Spirit has, if effect, shouted these words from the page. Reread this sentence aloud, and shout these words: “*All by itself!*” It will help you to know what the word actually is. It is the Greek word, “*automate*.” We derive our word “*automatic*” from this word. Now the promise is seen in its full assurance; it is indeed a sure promise! Once the seed has fallen on the soil, “the earth brings forth fruit *automatically!*”

Every farmer loves the harvest season of his farming year. He loves to look upon the golden grain in the fields on the day before the harvesting process begins. He moves diligently, efficiently and eagerly into the time of harvest, knowing that his income and livelihood depend on that harvest. However, every farmer also knows that he cannot get to “point B” on the calendar of his farming year — the time of harvest, without going through “point A” — the time of sowing. A profitable harvest will come only after seed has been properly sown. There simply will be no desirable harvest unless the appropriate seed is sown.

Everywhere I move in churches over this land, people are lamenting the sad moral and spiritual decline of this nation. The question, “What is happening?” sounds out consistently. The question, “What is wrong?” is asked monotonously. If (*since*) this text is correct, the answer is simple: There is far too little one-on-one sowing taking place on the soils of men’s hearts. The entire problem may be reduced to this simple statement: *the harvest is potentially plentiful, but actually pitiful — because of the failure of Christians to consistently, continuously, compassionately sow the seed on the soil where the crop must be raised.*

According to Jesus, the soils represent men’s hearts, and *each man’s heart* is the field for sowing the Gospel seed. Earlier in this same chapter (Mark 4), Jesus had told the “parable of the sower,” or the parable *of the soils*, and He tells us that the soils represent men’s hearts individually, and the reception of the seed into the soil represents each man’s response to the Gospel when he hears it. But it must be noted in each of these two parables that *one man did the sowing, and he did it close-up and hands-on*. The sowing was not accomplished by a piece of mechanized farm equipment or from an airplane (this type of evangelism is actually caricatured in Joe Bayley’s *The Gospel Blimp*) or by a “piped in” technique. *It was done by a farmer whose feet had carried him out into the field, and whose hands held the seed and applied it to the soil.* In other words, these parables basically picture personal evangelism, whether one-on-one or wholesale.

Every wise farmer knows that he is in partnership with God and His providence as he waits for a crop, but he also knows that he is himself a crucial part of the miracle merely by sowing the seed on the soil. So farming is a “co-op” activity. “The Farmer’s Co-op” is not merely the name of a business; it is

the formula for a miracle! And while even the seed is stored with life by the hand of God, the farmer must release it from *his* hand if there is to be a harvest.

Our parable is a bit strange in that the farmer engages in sowing just one time and then forgets the action he has taken. This is the whole point of the parable. Once the seed strikes the soil, *the harvest is automatic*. Now, every farmer knows that not every seed sown will be a part of the crop, but he also knows very well that, without the sowing of the seed, no reaping will occur. Every Christian should know that not every testimony given to a lost person will produce the fruit of eternal life, but he also knows that, unless the testimony *is* given, eternal life will never enter any human heart. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,” and Christians have been assigned to speak the faith-stimulating Word which echoes the truth of God’s Word in their experience. When they do so speak, the harvest is automatic. So where are the seed-sowers?

I want to spend the remainder of this study illustrating the truth of this parable from my own experience. I have seen the truth of this parable demonstrated and proven many, many times. In fact, I could write a substantial book about experiences which prove the accuracy and faithfulness of these words of Jesus. I will confine myself to just a few of the many possibilities.

Let me begin by telling you, from a human standpoint, how I became a Christian. My personal testimony is replete with several substantiations of the truth of this parable. The part of the story with which I have become familiar begins before I was born (a long, long time ago!). The story begins on a street in the city of Chicago. A man with a German name and background, Joe Beine, had left his daily workplace at “quitting time” one afternoon, had stepped onto a wide, busy sidewalk, and was moving through the crowd toward his home. Suddenly, his shoulder struck the shoulder of a man facing in the opposite direction on the sidewalk, and the bump was hard enough to turn each of them toward the other. Joe later told me that he did not remember a single word being spoken by either of them at any time during their momentary encounter. The man had a slip of paper between the fingers and thumb of one hand, and was passing out such pieces of paper to anyone on the sidewalk who would receive one. When they turned to face each other, the man simple thrust the leaflet into Joe’s hand. Joe thoughtlessly took it, quickly put it in his shirt pocket, and moved silently on down the sidewalk.

When he arrived home a short while later, his wife was cooking the evening meal, so he went upstairs and took a quick bath. Then he put on leisure clothes for the evening and started down to supper. As he passed the bed, he picked up the clothes he had removed and put them in a clothes hamper at the closet door. When he turned again go down to supper, he noticed that the piece of paper he had placed in his pocket had slipped out onto the bed. He reached down casually, picked it up, and glanced at the front side of the leaflet. He later said, “I had not scanned one paragraph of it before I knew that I needed what it was offering more than I needed life itself.” Of course, the leaflet was a Gospel tract. Joe Beine stood beside the bed and read it — twice. Then, he got down on his knees, read the “instructions” on the bottom at the back — and was eternally saved beside his bed! Possessed with his experience, he placed the leaflet on the end table beside him.

He stood up, full of a new glory, but when he went downstairs, he discovered that he was too embarrassed to tell his wife what had happened! They finished the evening meal, she washed the dishes, and he went into the den of their home to read the daily newspaper. When she finished the dishes, *she went upstairs to change into leisure clothes for the evening as he had done shortly before*. You’ve guessed by now what happened. She saw the leaflet on the end table by the bed, picked it up, read it — and she, too, was saved beside the bed! But she also discovered that she could not immediately tell him about her experience of salvation. In fact, they got all the way to breakfast the next morning before one broke the news to the other. Joe was already seated at the table to eat breakfast, and she was about to be seated, when she suddenly dropped to her knees and began to weep. He rushed around the table and knelt beside her with his arm around her, thinking she was ill. She sobbed, “Honey, there’s something

I've got to tell you," and she told him what had happened to her the evening before. "You, too!" he responded, half choked with emotion. And thus the *simple procedure* and *secret providence* and *sure promise* crowded together in the experience of two beautifully simple sinners. Now, the story shifts to a scene which occurred many miles away from Chicago and several years later.

The Beine family, now consisting of Marilyn (a daughter), Bob (a son), and Mr. and Mrs. Joe Beine, had moved south to the little mountain town of Winslow, Arkansas, some miles south of Fayetteville, Arkansas, the Ozark mountain town where I was raised. At the time of this part of the story, Bob Beine was sixteen years old and I was seventeen. It was a very, very hot day in Fayetteville and I had gone to the city swimming pool for a swim. I was on the side of the pool with many, many kids of all ages. Morally and spiritually, I was a renegade sinner at the time, full of the devil. This problem was compounded by the fact that I had a terrible sense of self-worth and thus was always trying to perform and prove myself. I loudly said something I thought was very clever, wanting all the kids around me to hear it, took God's Name in vain, coupled it with a "damn," and dived into an opening in the water of the pool. I came to the surface and came swimming back to the edge of the pool, proud of my cleverness. Bob Beine (whose name I barely knew, if at all) had been standing a few feet away at pool side, and he heard my blasphemous words. He moved down the side of the pool until he stood over the place where I was preparing to climb out of the water. He extended his right hand, and I took it, assuming he was just helping me from the water. However, when he had assisted me out of the water, he didn't let go of my hand. Instead, he held it tightly right up near his own chest. When I had brushed the water out of my eyes with the other hand, I looked into his face, wondering why he did not let go of my hand. He looked into my eyes and gently said, "Herb, do you know that you just 'damned' the only Person who ever loved you enough to die for you?" That was all that was said between us. I laughed like I thought he was being clever and jerked my hand away, immediately diving back into the water. However, I could not get rid of his words as easily as I got rid of his hand. For nine months, I carried that sentence in my heart, creating increasing conviction. "Herb, you just 'damned' the only Person who ever love you enough to die for you." Then, on my eighteenth birthday, a man told me how to receive Christ into my life as my own Saviour, Lord, and Friend. I did not fully understand everything, but I knew I desperately needed what he was offering. So I trusted Jesus Christ to save me, and He came into my life. But the stimulus for my decision came from one sentence spoken by a sixteen year old boy — who later did not even remember speaking that sentence!

I have now been a Christian for just over fifty years. I have been incredibly privileged to influence many people toward Christ. But the thought remains: every person whom I influence and "win" to Christ, every person whom god uses me to enlist and train in the Christian movement, every person whom my trainees enlist and train, *will line up at the judgment seat of Christ behind a man whose name we don't even know, a man who did nothing but place a piece of paper in another man's hand.* That man probably did not even know the principle, that when the seed reaches the soil, the harvest is automatic. But it is God Who governs those matters, and they do not wait on the intelligence of the sower, and they cannot be deterred by his ignorance. To God be the glory. Now, *where are the seed-sowers?*