

Sowing and Reaping

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I read this evening that we want to speak about sowing and reaping, a very important feature of teaching in the Old Testament and in the New.

At the very outset, in creation, God established a principle that never alters, never has altered, never will alter, that whatever is sown produces a certain crop after its kind.

When God created the herbs, trees, he created them in this fashion that in them they had the ability to reproduce after their kind.

And we know from observation, and it's been from the very beginning, that an apple seed brings forth an apple tree and eventually produces apples. [00:01:04] And so that principle is all through the Scriptures. And in moral matters, in spiritual matters, then the teaching provides the same principle. What we sow, we reap. I've selected this passage in John 4 to show it from a, shall we say, encouraging standpoint. The Lord saying to his disciples, I've got a work to do, and my joy is to continue in that work until it's finished.

For the glory of God, according to his mind and will, that's the consuming desire that I have in my life, that's my fruit, that's my meat in life, to do the will of him who has sent me. Now he says, this is my joy, I want you to be occupied in work, in this world, now lift up your eyes, look on the fields, they are quite all ready to harvest, there's plenty to do.

[00:02:11] Get into the fields, get some reaping done, and when the fruit is gathered in, then shall be brought to pass that true saying, that he who sows and he who reaps, they rejoice together in fellowship in the production of this fruit that was for God. And so I believe the Lord was encouraging his disciples to be concerned about working for God, and I think it's obvious from what he said, there was plenty to do. There was plenty to do in his days, and we can see again, dear brethren, there's plenty to do in our days. Either in an individual way, or in a collective sense, there is plenty to do in this principle of sowing and reaping. And I think there's a great deal of encouragement here. The Lord says to his disciples, lift up your eyes and look. [00:03:11] And I think the inference is that sometimes our eyes are looking elsewhere, we are not occupied with the Lord's work, we are so blind because we are occupied with other things, that we cannot see things to do for the Lord. So he might say to us, as he said to the disciples, lift up your eyes, look around, there are fields that can be reaped, they only require labourers to enter into them, and if we go under the direction of the masters, we'll find that there is work that will be turned to good profit, and there will be fruit for God. Now he said that to the disciples in his day, and we know eventually their lives were thoroughly, definitely committed to

the interest of the Lord, to the interest of God, and to the well-being of unconverted and Christian alike. And we know that most of them laid down their lives in the service of the Master. There could be no doubt as to their devotion to the service of the Lord. [00:04:19] Their day and generation has gone, dear brethren, they serve their day and generation, and we live in our day, with our opportunities, and the Lord speaking to us, lift up your eyes, increase your vision, have a look round about and see what can be done, and seek guidance from the Lord, and he'll give the direction that is necessary, and be thoroughly committed to his interest. And take part in some of this reaping activity, or sowing activity, so that there might be something for the pleasure of the Lord. So I think what the Lord is encouraging us to do here is to see the possibilities that lie in this kind of thing. We bemoan the low condition of things today, both individually and collectively. I'm sure we've all been deeply concerned as to this condition of things. But then, if we continue to moan about it, or be concerned about it, and do nothing about it, then it will never improve. [00:05:27] But to look around, to have our vision increased and enlarged by the Lord himself, may be the means of making the pendulum swing the other way. That if we're all actively engaged in doing something, however small it might be, if we're all actively engaged in the reaping, in the sowing, then things are going to change. And so the Lord is encouraging us, not only to do something that's important, but to see to it that the very practical principle of fellowship is involved in it too. The reaper and the sower rejoicing together. [00:06:08] I'm convinced that no teacher of the gospel has ever gone forth to serve the Lord and had success in his work, and then could say that it all was the result of his prayers and his service. I'm sure no servant worth his salt would ever say such a thing, but would be free to admit that any success he had had in the Lord's service was because others were praying, and others had worked in some way or other. And that both he and they, working together, had secured this fruit for God. And so it must ever be. See, we're not all called to be sowers. We're not all called to be reapers, but we can all do some little service. We can all plant some seeds. And I'm sure every tract that is given away is some seed sown. [00:07:03] Every word spoken for the Lord is some seed sown. Every quotation of the word of God to a soul in need is seed sown. Every word of God quoted to a Christian for his encouragement is seed sown. Every kind act shown towards either converted or unconverted is seed sown. This is how we do it. And all this in the aggregate, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is going to produce fruit. It must be on the basis of the scriptural principle. If seed is sown, it bears fruit. But the Lord is indicating we must do something about it. We must make sure that we're actively engaged in this kind of work. We're looking on some field, we're seeing that something requires to be done, and then we do it under the direction of the Lord. [00:08:03] And we do want to know more about rejoicing. The Lord says, the reaper and the sower, when the work is all done, they rejoice together. Something done, something accomplished, something for the Lord's glory. And I think it's wise that we make sure we are under his hand. After all, he was saying to them, look round about you, look on the field. He was directing them. And we can be sure of this, that if we are under his direction, we shall be led unerringly into the field of his service, so that something will be produced for his pleasure and for his glory. Now he's saying, the fields are white, all ready to harvest. We live in a country where I believe we are well supplied with able ministers of the word of God. There is a continual supply of ministry available for us to read, to enjoy, for our encouragement.

[00:09:13] It's very sad to know that there are places in the world at the present moment, and they are crying out for Christian teachers, because of new converts who have been brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, and they require ministry for their up-building and for their health. And there aren't enough teachers to go round in that part of the world, and so here is a field that requires to be reached at the present moment. Here's something we can pray about. I believe, perhaps the principle of sowing, we can pray that the Lord will raise up those who are able to minister the truth of God to those newly converted souls. We were saying this afternoon in the parable of the sower, that souls that were

unestablished could be led away by various influences from the Lord. So there's a great need for soul-establishing ministry, that those who are converted might stand and bring forth fruit for God. [00:10:19] So again, I would say, dear brethren, that here is something to exercise every soul. The Lord's indicating that there are abundant opportunities for service, for His pleasure, and for His glory. When we come to 2 Corinthians chapter 9, we find the apostle bringing forward a very important feature of teaching connected with this principle of sowing and reaping.

The background is that there was need amongst the people of God of a practical kind. Saints were poor, they required help, and the Corinthian believers could play their part in the service. [00:11:10] It seems obvious that at one time they had expressed that they were willing to help in this matter, but they had been somewhat behind in fulfilling this exercise. And so the apostle encourages them, now brethren, it's time you were really fulfilling what you intended to do. And so he says, if you sow sparingly, you'll reap sparingly. But if you sow abundantly, or bountifully, then you'll reap bountifully. Who can fail to understand this simple figure with its very pointed challenge?

We might take account of our lives, and we might say, well, there hasn't been much in my life from the Lord. And we would need to apply this principle of the apostle and say, well, the reason is, we haven't sowed bountifully. [00:12:08] The reason why we haven't reaped a good healthy crop is because we haven't sowed in a bountiful way. There's a very interesting thing about Isaac. It says, Isaac sowed, and that year he reaped a hundredfold. I don't think that means that he reaped a hundred percent, but every seed that he put into the ground germinated. I believe it indicates that he reaped a very substantial crop. And this is what we would desire in our lives. The Lord blessed Isaac. The Lord was with Isaac. The Lord made promises to Isaac. And the very fact that he sowed and his harvest was a bumper one was an indication of how God was with this remarkable man. He fulfilled his promise. He was with him, he blessed him, and he supported him. [00:13:08] And so I believe what we see and figure in Isaac can be seen in our lives. That if we make room for the Lord in our lives, if we take account of the promises that he has given to us, and the blessings he has made available for us, and if we reap in that, if we sow in that sense, then we can expect to get what Isaac got, a harvest that was really, a striking portion of God's blessing and God's power. And I believe we have to admit with shame that one of the reasons for our spiritual poverty is that we've sown sparingly. How does this operate? If we give little time to the reading of the word of God, how can we possibly expect to understand the word of God? How can we possibly expect to grow in the knowledge and appreciation of that word? If our examination of each day is a brief one, and perhaps many days go by without even a brief visit to the word of God. [00:14:19] How can we possibly become able exponents of the word of God? If we give little time to prayer, how can we possibly expect answers that will be a blessing for us in our lives? If we give little time to service, how can we possibly expect fruit? And so we could go on, that if we use our time very sparingly in the service of the Lord, how can we possibly expect fruitfulness in our lives in all its varied ways?

We have to face this dear brethren, that prosperity in divine things is mainly connected with the amount of time that we put into it. It is God's secular things. How can we expect to have a healthy thriving business if we lie in our beds half the week and give no attention or very little attention to the things that require attention? [00:15:23] We must be diligent, we must give time, we must be active in relation to these secular matters, otherwise things will fall behind. If we only go once a month into the garden, what kind of crops do we expect? What kind of flowers do we expect to grow? The weeds will take over, everything will be overgrown, everything will get out of hand, and this is exactly the figure that is drawn in the book of Proverbs, the sluggard man, the slothful man. Look at his garden, the walls broken down, the weeds are all over the place, and he's lying and he's enjoying himself and

gratifying himself, and his garden's a hopeless mess. [00:16:10] And our gardens, our lives, might possibly be like that spiritually, because of slothfulness, neglect, not giving sufficient time, not sowing bountifully, and so we don't reap bountifully.

I'm perfectly sure of this, dear brethren, that this is part of our troubles spiritually. We don't give enough time to it, and we can't afford to waste time. I know that in these days time can be very difficult to obtain because of the pressures of work and home and other things, but I believe the Lord takes this into account. And if we do apply our lives, what time we have, I believe he will turn those few moments into good account. If we give them to the Lord, apply them in that sense, but if we're careless and casual in our approach to these things, we can't possibly make progress, we can't possibly reap fruit for the Lord's glory. [00:17:18] Now in this section, in Second Corinthians, what Paul is insisting upon is again the principle of fellowship, because other persons are in need, and we've got to be diligent to meet that need. In this case, it was a material one, but I want to apply it in relation to our collective experiences, our collective energies. If we sow sparingly, that is, if we attend a meeting, say, once a week at the breaking of bread, and then we forget about the weeknight Bible reading or the weeknight prayer meeting, well, this is sowing sparingly. This isn't supporting the interest of the Lord in the local company, and if our prayers are only once a month in connection with local interest, this again is sowing sparingly, and so we could go on, and we have to examine ourselves. [00:18:17] How much energy, how much time do we put in to fellowship matters in a local sense? What do we put into the fellowship? Sometimes we're looking for a great deal from it. But the apostle is insisting here, it's sowing, sowing bountifully, putting something in with a view to getting something out. That's a well-known principle in the garden, isn't it? What folly for anyone to look at the earth and say, well, I hope that some turnips come up this year, I would like some turnips, and not to sow, some turnip seeds. What folly! And yet, so sad, this is the attitude that we can adopt towards the company of Christians. We want to get something out, but oh, how sad it is that we put nothing in. And how can we expect to get something out if we make no endeavour to put something in? [00:19:15] And so Paul's saying, brethren, sow bountifully, and there'll be a bountiful reaping. And there's nothing so happy in Christian life and experience and service but to be devoted to do something, to put something in, so that there is something available for others. The happiest service is to be a provider for others. Every soul that waters is watered bountifully himself. Every soul that provides is provided bountifully for himself. This is a principle that is again and again seen, and it's worthwhile putting into practice. And then Paul says that it's God who provides the seeds, so that things can grow, so that fruit can come to life. It's God who is the real source of all fruitfulness and blessing, and we know that so very well. [00:20:16] We know that we can provide the very best seed for our garden. We can till the ground. We can do everything just according to the gardening book. But if we don't get the rain, and if we don't get the sunshine, then nothing will happen. God is the one who provides all the food that we eat. Everything that is good comes from the hand of God, and it is beneficence, it is kindness and love he provides for mankind. Or you might say, as you look on the shelves of the shops, with the tins and the jars and the packages, and say, oh no, man's a very clever being. He provides quite sufficient for himself, does he? Take all the wrappings away, and what are the basic commodities that are there? Everything that has come from the ground. [00:21:13] Everything that God has provided. Man may dress it up, he may put it through certain processes, but basically it came from the good air. It came from God. You remember what Paul says in the Corinthians? That Paul planted, and the polish watered, but it was God who gave the increase. And so we're very thankful that although we've been stressing what is personal in endeavour, and view of the collective position, we're thankful to fall back on the sovereignty of our God, who supplies us with the seed to sow, and supplies us with the rain and the heat to make the seed grow. In other words, in spiritual things, that while we endeavour to do things as guided by the word of God, the one who has the final say is God

himself. In his wisdom, he provides the fruit just as it is required. [00:22:14] And now we come to this passage in the Epistle to the Galatians. A very solemn one in many respects, and yet encouraging too.

He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

[00:23:02] What Paul is saying, guided by the Spirit, is that if we sow to what is evil, we shall reap evil. If we sow to what is good, and pure, and precious, we shall reap the harvest.

Do you remember the Lord Jesus told the story of a man who sowed good seed in his field? And while his servants slept, an enemy came and sowed darnel, pear, wheat in the field.

And eventually, when the seed grew, they found that there was good seed and wheat all mingled together. And the servants were astounded. Did we sow good seed in the field? Where have the wheats come from? And the Lord had to tell them that while they slept, an enemy had sown the wheat. Now this is exactly what Paul is saying in the Epistle to the Galatians.

[00:24:13] The good seed of your life, sowing to the Spirit, and reaping from the Spirit all that is precious, all that is abiding, all that is eternal, all that is marked by life and vitality according to God. Sowing to what is wicked, and reaping all that's wicked, it's a principle that never alters. Even in the affairs of men, this holds true. You reap whatever you sow. How can it be otherwise? We think of a case well within our memories, those of us who are middle-aged and perhaps a little younger, that prior to the Second World War, there was an ideology in Germany that was followed with ruthlessness.

[00:25:06] And it was an evil ideology. It was based on hatred, desire for power. And this was followed out in an extremely ruthless way. And then eventually war was waged by that nation on other nations, a great deal of sorrow and misery.

But oh, what a harvest came. All that they sowed, they reaped, and much more. Well then, if this is so in the affairs of men, it is so in a Christian's life. And Paul is reminding the Galatians that as far as this context is concerned, we are either sown to the flesh or we are sown to the Spirit. There are no in-betweens. We are either making provision to reap something that gratifies our hearts personally, or we're sowing to the Spirit that there might be something reaped in our lives that is for the pleasure of God. [00:26:14] And so here again, the challenge is to each one of us. Are we sowing to the Spirit, or are we sowing to the flesh? As a young Christian, it was often a snare as far as I was concerned, the question of reading. I loved to read, and very often my natural heart desired to read something that pleased my natural mind. There would be a pull toward my Bible. Naturally, I was a Christian. And the conflict was often waging, will I spend time with my Bible, or will I spend time with this novel or this book that I like so much? Well, sad to say so very often, this book that could provide nothing for me spiritually won. And then I was sown to the flesh. I was providing the flesh with an opportunity to produce fruits that certainly weren't pleasing to God. [00:27:20] I was gratifying my own natural desire. And time that could have been better spent was being wasted. Of course, if that book was portraying something highly sensational, then it created a desire in my heart to be where those sensational events were taking place, or to be occupied with them in some way, and this is the kind of crop it produces. You become like the thing that you're occupied with. It creates desires. Now then, if on the occasions of which I'm thankful to say there were, when I turned away from those books and I read

my Bible, then things were different.

[00:28:10] The reading of this pure and holy book created other desires, contrary to those natural desires. As I read the service, for instance, of devoted men of God, then this created desire. When I read about the pure life of Christ, when I read about the life of Paul, when I read about incidents in the Bible that were encouraging, this stimulated spiritual desire. So here was a different kind of crop. And so we can say, dear brethren, without any hesitation whatsoever, that the things that we are occupied with are the things that govern our lives and produce either a crop for God, or contrarywise, something that's of no value. And so Paul says, brethren, don't let us be debtors to the flesh. Let's apply our lives to sowing to the Spirit. Give the Spirit of God the opportunity to produce in our lives the things that are pleasurable for God.

[00:29:18] In the previous chapter, let me refer to it, we are told about the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. What a lovely crop, dear brethren.

I believe these things can be produced in our lives as we sow to the Spirit. That is, we allow the Spirit in our lives to produce these things.

There are none of the things that we were reading about this afternoon. The bugs that came and snatched away the seed, the rocky ground, the weeds, the shrubs, the things that prevented the seed from growing. All these things are the production of the flesh. [00:30:14] But all these things, cleared away from our lives, allow the Spirit of God to produce in us those features, features of Christ, features that are so pleasurable to God.

Let us be sure, dear young Christians, that early in our lives we apply ourselves to sowing to the Spirit and avoid, like the plague, sowing to the flesh. It will never produce sowing to the flesh. It will never produce anything in your life that will help you as a Christian and will never produce anything in your life for God. You'll never be like Isaac, reaping a hundredfold. You'll never be one that will in any way stand for God. But sow to the Spirit. Make sure that the things that you follow are pure and clean and wholesome and upright before God, and you'll produce these features that we've been reading of, these features of peace and love and uprightness and temperance against which there is no law. [00:31:27] And so, dear brethren, let us take courage, because Paul says, we shall reap if we continue, if we don't fail. Oh, you say these things are so slow in my life. This is why I give up and despair. Paul says, keep going on. Keep sowing, because you'll reap eventually, and that reaping will be well worthwhile. That harvest will be precious to God, and it will be something worthwhile in your life. [00:32:14] He that sows in tears shall reap in joy. He that goes forth and weepeth, bearing precious feet, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaf with him. I've heard, and I don't know if this is correct, but I suppose it was correct, I've heard that the figure employed here is a man with nothing to eat in his home, and all that he has is some seeds. And he's faced with this problem. Will I use the seed? Will I use this grain? Will I grind it and make flour and eat it, and then that's it? There's no future. Or will I take this and plant it and then expect a crop, more food, not only for myself, for my wife, for my children, and for others?

[00:33:15] And so he says, I'll plant it. And with tears, with grief, because the position is so acute, he goes forward and he sows the seed, and he waits until the crop comes, and then there is sufficient for all.

And then the figure is, ah, the joy. After all the sorrow, because of the pressure of circumstances, oh, the joy that now the time has come when the reaping is taking place. And there's a bountiful harvest, and therefore a problem is being met. There is an abundance of food available for all, and all the sorrow and all the sacrifice has been well worthwhile. Now, I've heard that this is an interpretation of the passage. It may be so. I don't know. It's certainly an interesting one. [00:34:13] But we cannot mistake the plain teaching of the passage that here is a situation that involves tears, pressure, anxiety, but it's come to joy, and instead of this condition of pressure, there's a condition of rejoicing.

Dear brethren, this is one of the patterns of Christian life. It's not all joy. It's not all success. It's not all easy. But there is sorrow, pressure, difficulty, problems. Oh, when we go forth, sowing the precious seeds and leaving all in the hands of God, there's the joy. There is the time of blessing and fruitfulness, and then there is the realization that every exercise has been well worthwhile. [00:35:12] Every problem has been well worthwhile. It brought with it a corresponding fruit. That's a joy. It's a pleasure that creates the satisfaction in the heart. It was so preeminently in relation to our Lord Jesus. What pressure he went under. What pressure he endured. We think of the sorrows of the cross. I know what it meant to him personally. But oh, we're thankful that for him sorrow's night was soon over, and he became the man of joy, anointed with the oil of gladness, anointed and glorified at his Father's right hand. The sorrow was over forever, and joy was his experience.

[00:36:06] You remember at the end of Psalm 16, it was said of him prophetically, speaking to his God, thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

If we were to ask the Lord this evening, was it worthwhile, the sorrow of the cross? Oh, we could hear his ringing, triumphant voice. Well worthwhile when he entered into his Father's presence to receive his Father's joy. Oh, that was well worthwhile. And then to gather in the lost, and to see the purpose of God being fulfilled in perfection. Well worthwhile, all the sorrow and all the pressure. Ask the saints of God, if we could ask them, was it worthwhile to endure the stake? To endure the burning and the tortures? Was it worthwhile? And they would say, well worthwhile. [00:37:14] We preserve for others who have to follow the liberty to stand for God, to worship God, to serve God. Ask Christians today who have gone through pressure of various kinds. Ask them, was it worthwhile to sow that seed in sorrow and difficulty and pressure and scorn and rejection? Was it worthwhile? Wouldn't it have been better to please yourselves and take it easy? No, they would say, it was well worthwhile. It was the pathway of the Master. It was the will of God. And we've reaped the harvest of joy and satisfaction that proves it being well worthwhile. Dear brethren, let us sow in this way. Let us be prepared to sow, even though it means tears, pressure, difficulty, scorn, misunderstanding. Let us be prepared to sow in this way, provided that what we reap is for the pleasure of God and for the blessing of others. May it be so. Amen.