

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PRINCIPAL WHEAT.

A Sermon

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“The principal wheat.”—Isaiah xxviii. 25.

THE whole passage runs on this wise: “Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” The prophet, inspired of God, shows that the husbandman is wise and skilful in the management of his farm, in ploughing, sowing, and threshing, and in all the processes of husbandry. He asserts that this skill has been taught him of his God. I suppose that this is set before us, not as poetry, but as fact. The wisdom of earth is a reflection of the light of heaven. Have you not read—“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship”? God is the great teacher of agriculture as well as of handicrafts. If there had not been some information concerning husbandry conveyed to our first parent when he left the garden of Eden he would not have known how to till the soil, and produce a harvest, and before he had found it out by experience he would have died of starvation, and the race would have ended with him.

The twenty-sixth verse says, "His God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." Yes, God has taught men the rudiments of husbandry; and I conclude therefore, that if God gives men instruction so that they are able to cultivate the land and produce a harvest of divers kinds of seed, he will much more instruct us if we wait upon him as to the tillage of our lives, so that we may not sow to the flesh and reap corruption, but may learn how to sow to the Spirit, and may of the Spirit reap life everlasting. We are all of us husbandmen. Some of us may be wicked husbandmen who slay the heir; or slothful husbandmen who suffer hemlock and darnel to come up where there should be wheat and barley; or fickle husbandmen who having put our hand to the plough have looked back; but we all have fields to till and work to do for the great Landlord to whom all things belong. If any of us wish to be true husbandmen, and so to sow and so to reap as to be found accepted of our great Lord, and to produce a harvest unto his glory, then we had better go to him for instruction, and ask him to teach us knowledge, and guide us in the way of wisdom. Breathe that prayer to God now, and may he hear it on behalf of every one of us by sending us his Holy Spirit.

I. There is one point which the prophet mentions as a matter of wisdom on the part of the husbandman. It is this: that HE KNOWS WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL SEED TO CULTIVATE, and makes it his principal object. My text is, "Does not the husbandman cast in the principal wheat?" He does not set to work at haphazard without thought, and go to the granary and take out wheat, and cummin, and barley, and rye, and fling these about right and left; but he estimates the value of each grain, and arranges them in his mind according to their proportionate values. He does not think that cummin, and dill, and caraway, which he merely grows to give a flavour to his dish on the table, is at all of such importance as the wheat; and, though rye and barley have their values, yet he does not reckon that even these are equal to the corn which he calls "the principal wheat." He is a man of discretion, *he arranges things*, and he places the most important thing in the front rank, and spends upon it the most care.

Herein I would have you learn of the husbandman. Do keep things distinct in your minds—not mixed and muddled by a careless thoughtlessness. Do not live a huddled life, without care and discretion, running all things into one; but sort them out, and divide and distinguish between the precious and the vile. See what this is worth, and what the other is worth, and set your matters in rank and order, making some of them principal, and others inferior. I suggest to you young people especially that, in starting life, you say to yourselves, "What shall we seek for?" For he that seeketh findeth. "What shall we sow?" "For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The little things of this life are to be attended to, as a man may sow cummin and fitches; there are some inferior things that ought not to be left undone, as a man should sow rye and barley in their appointed place. Still *there is some principal thing*—some master thing—some chief thing for which we ought to live,—and what shall that be? What ought to be the principal crop that we shall endeavour to cultivate in our hearts and lives? Have you turned that over? Have you really put the problem before

you? or have you gone at it hit or miss, as if it did not matter what.

Remember, the eye is a most important part of the body. How shall a man direct his steps if he cannot see? And the motive is the eye. What have you an eye to? What are you living for? What is the principal aim with you? Is it going to be that of the old gentleman satirized in Horace who said to his son—"Get money: get it honestly, if you can; but, by all means, get money"? Is money-getting to be the principal wheat with you? Or will you choose a life of pleasure—"a short life and a merry one," as so many fools have said to their great sorrow? Is it in dissipation that your life is to be spent? Are thistles to be your principal crop? Because there is a pleasure in looking at a Scotch thistle, do you intend to grow acres of pleasurable vices? And will you make your bed upon them when you come to die? Oh, look and see what is worthy of being the principal object in life; and, when you have found that out, then pray God of his Holy Spirit to help you to choose that one thing, and to give all your powers and faculties to the cultivation of it. The farmer, who finds that wheat ought to be his principal crop, makes it so, and lays himself out with that end in view. He looks around and says, "What is the best thing for me to produce?" and when he has found it out he calls it his principal thing. Dear friends, do, I pray you, remember that true godliness is the principal thing; therefore get it and prize it above all things.

Now, mark that this farmer was wise, because *he counted that to be principal which was most needful*. His family could do without cummin, which was but a flavouring. Even the fitches are thought to have been a plant which yielded a grain used in giving a taste to bread, but they were not a valuable crop. The family could do without cummin and fitches. Perhaps the mistress might complain, or the cook might grumble; but that did not signify so much as it would do if the children cried for bread. They certainly could not do without wheat, for bread is the staff of life. It is bread that strengtheneth man's heart, and therefore the Eastern farmer must grow bread if he does not grow anything else. That which is most necessary he makes to be the principal thing.

Is not this common sense? If we were wisely to sit down and estimate, should we not say, "To be forgiven my sin, to be right with God, to be holy, to be fit to live eternally in heaven, is the greatest, the most needful thing for me, and therefore I will make it the principal object of my pursuit"? To glorify God and to enjoy him for ever is the most necessary thing for a creature; for a creature cannot be satisfied unless he is answering the end for which he was created, and it is the end of every intelligent creature, first, that he may glorify God, and next, that he may enjoy God. What a bliss it must be to enjoy God himself for ever and ever. Other things may be desirable, but this thing is needful. A certain competence, a measure of esteem among men, a degree of health—all these are the flavouring of life, but to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, this is life itself: this is the bread by which our soul's best life is to be sustained. Oh, that we were all wise enough to feel that to be one with Christ is the one thing needful; that to be at peace with God is the principal thing;

that to be brought into harmony with the Most High is the true music of life. The moralities and courtesies of life, like the minor seeds, may take their place in due order upon our farm ; but the fear of the Lord is the principal wheat, and we must cultivate it with our whole heart.

This farmer was wise, because *he made that to be the principal thing which was the most fit to be so*. Of course, barley is very useful as food. Nations have lived on barley bread, and lived healthily too ; and rye has been the nutriment of whole nations : neither have men starved when restricted to oats, and other grains. Still, for all in all, give me good wheaten flour. I know our Scotch friends like oat-cake better, but I hardly think that we shall all come to their mind while wheat flour is of a reasonable price. We still like a piece of wheaten bread, and look upon it as being the best staff of life. The oat is rather a knotty staff, but wheat is a fair good walking-cane, with which a man may go through life right merrily. Only give men enough of bread, and why should they complain ? though I suppose they would, for even when the Israelites had manna in the wilderness, and that was angels' food, they called it light bread. Brethren, the Eastern farmer knew that wheat was the most fitting food for man, and so he did not put the inferior grain, which might act as a substitute, into the prominent place ; but he planted the most fitting thing, namely, the wheat, into the most prominent position. He did not speak of "the principal barley," or "the principal rye," much less "the principal cummin," or "the principal fitches," but "the principal wheat."

And what is there, brethren, that is so fit for the heart, the mind, the soul of man as to know God and his Christ ? Other mental foods, such as the fruits of knowledge, and the dainties of science, excellent though they may be, are inferior nutriment and unsuitable to build up the entire structure of our manhood. If I can get my God, my Saviour, I find my heaven and my all. My soul sits down to a crumb of truth concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and finds the greatest satisfaction in living upon it. The more we can know God, and enjoy God, and become like God, and the more Christ is our daily bread, the more do we perceive the fitness of all this to the new-born soul. O beloved, make that to be your principal thing which is the fittest theme for an immortal mind.

"Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below ;
May I its great importance learn,
Its sovereign virtue know !

"More needful this than glittering wealth,
Or aught the world bestows ;
Not reputation, food, or health,
Can give us such repose."

Moreover, this farmer was wise, because *he made that the principal thing which was the most profitable*. Under certain circumstances, in our own country, wheat is not the most profitable thing which a man can grow ; but, ordinarily, wheat is the best crop that the earth yields for general consumption, and therefore the text speaks of "the principal wheat." Our grandfathers used to rely upon the wheat stack to pay the rent. They looked to their corn as the arm of their strength ; and

though it is not so now, yet so it always was of old, and perhaps it may yet be so again. Anyhow, the figure is just as good with regard to true religion: to fear the Lord is the most profitable thing. I am told that rich men at the present time find it hard to get hold of anything which yields five per cent. Oh, but this blessed fear of the Lord is an extraordinarily profitable kind of business, for it brings in far more than a hundred per cent. or a thousand per cent. In this business a man begins without any capital; in fact, he commences over head and ears in debt, and yet he makes a fortune such as misers never dream of. You will say it is a strange way of starting in business: but the believing sinner does so. When he comes to God he is penniless, and as much in debt as he can be: the Lord discharges his heavy arrears of sin, and then the believer rises in riches by sinking more deeply into debt of another kind; not of sin, but of gratitude. He owes his great Lord more and more, till he is quite unable even to imagine the depth of his obligation. Neither does this grieve him, he comes to love the poverty which enables him to avail himself of the heavenly treasury; he even aspires to be more and more deeply in debt to the sovereign grace of God; his ambition is to increase his obligations, which even now overwhelm him. He grows richer as he feels himself poorer, and he is stronger as he knows more of his personal infirmity. It is a wonderful business this, in which bankrupts make fortunes, in which beggars rise to sit among princes.

"'Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We have no full discharge.

"But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our Lord forgives us all."

Being freely discharged of our sins, we are by overflowing grace greatly enriched, so that we number among our possessions heaven itself, Christ himself, God himself. All things are ours. Oh, what a blessed trade it is to enter upon! There never was such a transaction as this; for when an empty sinner trades with a full Saviour he is himself filled with all the fulness of God. Assuredly this soul-enriching communion with Christ ought to be first upon our thoughts.

Then let godliness be the principal wheat, for there is nothing so profitable. Godliness is profitable for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. Godliness is a blessing to a man's body: it keeps him from drunkenness and vice. It is a blessing to his soul: it makes it sweet and pure. It is a blessing to him every way. If I had to die like a dog, I would like to live like a Christian. If there were no hereafter, yet still, for comfort and for joy, give me the life of one that lives like Christ, or strives to do so. There is a practical everyday truth in the verse—

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live;
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die."

Only that religion must not be of the common sort ; it must not be a vain profession, but it must have for its root a hearty faith in Jesus Christ. See ye to it. Religion must be either everything or nothing, either first or nowhere. Make it the principal thing, and it will fill your soul with treasure.

Thus, you see, the farmer was right in having a principal crop, and in selecting the right seed to be his principal care. I do not suppose that he ever entered into any dispute upon the matter. He felt sure that wheat must be his principal produce, and he gave his thoughts to it. I cannot bear to hear people disputing as to whether it is worth while to give their heart to Christ. The people who question the value of faith have never tried it. Whenever you observe some conceited creature writing an essay against true religion, and putting it into one of our precious "reviews," do not be carried away by hearing people say that it is mightily clever. If you read it, say to yourselves, "Certainly, this is a clever thing, for here is a blind man writing upon the harmony of colours ; see what learned observations he makes upon scarlet and blue, which, he says, are precisely the same, only some narrow-minded folks insist upon their being different." You may regard the wise remarks of an unregenerate philosopher as a very fine essay by a deaf man, upon music. Can a horse write upon angels ? He does not know anything about the subject, nor does the unrenewed man understand the regenerate man. He has not the powers and faculties that would enable him to know, for the carnal man knows not the things that be of God : they are spiritually discerned, and as he has no spirit he cannot discern them. Until he is born again he has no spiritual knowledge or judgment. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." "Ye must be born again." We are willing to take the evidence of scientific men upon the science that they have mastered ; but we care nothing for their opinion upon a matter which is quite out of their range. Who shall tell me that there is no sweetness in honey ? I do not accept the verdict of one who asserts it to be as tasteless as the white of an egg ; but I wonder at the palate which can so deceive a man. Has a man lost the power of taste ? What is his judgment worth ? I put a piece of honeycomb into my mouth, and my experience of sweetness is a complete deliverance from all infidelity in that direction. When a man tells me that there is no sweetness in godliness, I smile for myself and drop a tear for him, and tasting yet more and more the deliciousness of godliness, I smile again to think that he should talk so fast about a thing of which he knows nothing. Oh, yes, we have made up our minds long ago ; we are not going to argue about it any more : godliness is the principal wheat to us. We know it by experience. We have tasted and handled the good word of life. As the Eastern farmer was quite sure that the wheat was the principal thing, so are we quite sure of it, and henceforth, God helping us, we shall sow the principal wheat and leave others to sow tares or darnel if they will.

Thus have I said sufficient upon our first observation : the husbandman is a lesson to us because he knows what is the principal thing.

II. Secondly, he is a lesson to us because HE GIVES THIS PRINCIPAL THING THE PRINCIPAL PLACE, I find that the Hebrew is

rendered by some eminent scholars, "He puts the wheat into the principal place." That little handful of cummin, for the wife to flavour the cakes with, he grows in a corner; and the various herbs he plants in their proper borders. The barley he puts in its place, and the rye in its acre; but if there is a good bit of rich soil—the best he has—he says to his men, "That is for the wheat." The principal place is for the principal crop. He gives his choicest fields to that which is to be the main means of his living.

Now, here is a lesson for you and for me. Let us give to true godliness our principal powers and abilities. Let us give to the things of God our best, our ripest, our most careful, *our most intense thought*. I pray you, do not take religion at second hand from what I tell you, or somebody else tells you; but think it over, and give it your principal thoughts. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of God. The thoughtful Christian is the growing Christian. Remember, the service of God deserves our very best consideration and endeavour. We are poor things at our best, but we ought to give the Lord nothing short of our principal powers. God would not have us serve him heedlessly, but he would have us use all the brain and intellect and mind that we have in studying and practising the things of God. "Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace." "Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them." If ever your mind is more clear and active at one time than at another, then sow the principal wheat of godly contemplation and gracious devotion. If you feel more fresh and more inclined to think at one time of the day than at another, let your whole mind at once go forth towards the best things.

Be sure, also, to yield to this subject *your most earnest love*. The best field in the little estate of manhood is not so much the intellect as the affections; sow the principal wheat there. Oh, to have true religion in the heart; to love what we know—intensely to love it; to hold it fast as with the grip of life and death—never to let it go! The Lord says, "My son, give me thy heart," and he will not be contented with anything less than our heart. When your zeal is most burning, and your love is most fervent, let the warmth and the fervency all go towards the Lord your God, and to the service of him who has redeemed you with his precious blood. Let the principal wheat have the principal part of your nature.

Towards God and his Christ also turn your strongest, and heartiest, and *most fervent desires*. When you enlarge your desire, desire Christ; when you become ambitious, let your ambition be all for God. Let your hunger and your thirst be after righteousness. Let your aspirations and your longings be all towards holiness, and the things that shall make you like to Christ. Give to this principal wheat your principal desires.

Then let the Lord have also always *the attentive respect of your life*. Let the principal wheat be sown in every action of life. I think if we are truly Christians we must, of necessity, be as much Christians outside the church as in it. We shall try to make our eating and our drinking, and everything we do, tend to the glory of God. Draw no line between the secular and the religious part of your conduct, but let the secular be made religious by a devout desire to glorify God in the

one as much as in the other. Let us worship God in the commonest duties of life, even as they do who stand before his throne and serve him day and night. Pray daily, "Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven." Let us sow the principal wheat in all the fields of our life. May we each one feel, "For me to live is Christ." I cannot live without Christ, I would not live forgetting Christ, I could not live for anything but Christ. Let your whole nature yield to Jesus and to none else.

We should give to this principal wheat *our most earnest labours*; I mean for the spread of the gospel. A man ought to consecrate himself to the utmost in the matter of holy work for Jesus. I dread to see a professing man zealous in politics, and lukewarm in devotion; all on fire in the parish vestry, and chill as winter when he comes to a prayer-meeting. Some fly like eagles when they are serving the world, but they have a broken wing when they come into the worship of God. This should not be. If anything could rouse us up and make the lion within us roar in his strength, it should be when we confront the foes of Jesus, or fight for his cause. Our Lord's service is the principal wheat, let us labour most in connection with it. Lay all your talents under tribute to King Jesus. Nay, lay out your whole body, soul, and spirit for God, who is your all in all. Spend and be spent, that this highest, noblest object of your life may be achieved: if you spend all and win Christ you will be a glorious gainer.

This should also take possession of us so as to lead us to *our greatest sacrifices*. The love of Christ ought to be so strong as to swallow up self, and make sacrifice our daily joy. For Christ's name's sake we should be willing to endure poverty, reproach, slander, exile, death, and count them all joy. Nothing should be precious to a Christian in comparison with Christ, who is preciousness to them that believe. I will put it to you whether it is so with you or not. Is the love of Jesus the principal wheat with you? Are you giving your religion the chief place or not? I am afraid that some people treat religion as certain gentlemen treat a part of their estate. They have a farm away from their dwelling-house which they call an off-hand farm; they put a bailiff into it, and only give an eye to it now and then. Some people hold their religion as an off-hand farm, and their minister is the bailiff, who has to see to it for them. I am sure such spiritual farming never pays. They have religion? Certainly. Yes. Oh, certainly; yes. But I am afraid they are like the man of whom the child spoke at the Sunday school. "Is your father a Christian?" said the teacher. "Yes," said the child, "but he has not worked much at it lately." I could point out several of this sort, who are sowing their wheat very sparingly, and choosing the most barren patch to sow it in. They profess to be Christians, but religion is a tenth-rate article on their farm. Some have a large acreage for the world, and a poor little plot for Christ. They are great growers of worldly pleasure and self-indulgence, and they sow a little religion by the roadside for appearance sake. They spend more time at billiards than at prayers. This will not do. God will not thus be mocked. If we despise him and his truth we shall be lightly esteemed. O come let us give our principal time, talent, thought, effort to that which is the chief concern of immortal spirits. May God help

us so to do. May we imitate the husbandman who gives the principal wheat the principal place in his farm.

III. Let us learn a third lesson. THE HUSBANDMAN SELECTS THE PRINCIPAL WHEAT OR THE BEST SEED WHEN HE IS SOWING HIS FIELDS. That is another meaning of the text, namely, when a farmer is setting aside wheat for sowing, he does not put by the tail corn and all the worst of his produce; but if he is a sensible man he likes to sow the best grains that he can meet with. Many farmers search the country round for a good sample of wheat for sowing, for they do not expect to get a good harvest out of a bad sowing. The husbandman is taught of God to put into the ground the principal wheat—the selected kernels. If I am going to sow to the Lord and to be a Christian, I should sow the purest form of our holy religion, and I should try to do this, first, *by believing the weightiest doctrines*. I would like to believe, not this ism, nor that, but the unadulterated truth which Jesus taught; for if I want to produce in my soul a holy character, it will come by the Spirit of God out of true doctrine. Falsehood always breeds sin: truth begets and fosters holiness. You and I, therefore, ought to pick over all our seed carefully, judge and decide between truth and error, and not let our soul receive anything but what is according to the word of the Lord. We ought to choose out the most important truths; for I have known people attach the chief importance to the smallest things, and this is an error in judgment. I know a denomination which has differences amongst itself such as no ordinary person could understand; but the members make no end of warfare over these minute differences: they even exclude one another for not being exclusive enough, and if by vehement effort they all reach one point of exclusiveness they spy out another hopeful reason for quarreling, and commence to exclude again. Some microscopic point of doctrine or ritual suffices for the creation of party upon party. They are like mercury: pour it on a table, and see how it divides into tiny globules: it splits and splits again. They, no doubt, are persons of great precision and discernment; but it were well if their tithing of mint and aniseed led them to attend to the weightier matters of brotherly love and Christian unity. They fight over the fitches, and leave the wheat to the crows. I am not at all of their mind. Those who will may dispute over vials and trumpets, I shall mainly preach the doctrine of the precious blood and the glorious truth of substitution and atonement. These doctrines are the principal wheat, and therefore these shall fall into our furrows.

Next to that, we ought to sow *the noblest examples*. Many men are dwarfed because they choose a bad model to start with. They imitate dear old Mr. So-and-so till they grow wonderfully like him, only the best of him is left out. One minister happens to be of a gloomy turn of mind, and he preaches the deep experience of the children of God, and in consequence a band of good people think it to be their duty to be melancholy. How unwise! We should never copy any man's infirmities. To be like Paul there is no need to have weak eyes; to be like Thomas there is no necessity to doubt; to be like Peter we need not be rash. If you copy any good man, there is a point at which you ought to stop short. Yet, if I must have a human model, I would like to have one of the bravest of the saints of God; but, oh, how much better

to imitate that perfect pattern which you have in Christ Jesus. Thus when you are sowing the wheat of holy living, sow the best seed you can, by having Christ Jesus himself as the example by which you shape your life.

We shall sow the best wheat by seeing that we have *the purest spirit*. Alas, how soon do spirits become soiled by self, or pride, or despondency, or sloth, or some other earthly taint. But what a grand thing it is to try and live to God in the spirit of Christ Jesus. May we be humble, lowly, bold, self-sacrificing, pure, chaste, and holy: this can only be produced by the Holy Ghost.

And, then, there is one more mode of sowing selected seed. We should endeavour to live in *the closest communion with God*. One dear brother prayed in our little meeting before the present service that we might have as much grace as we were capable of receiving, and that God would work in us all that he willed to work in us, and bring us into such a state that we might not hinder him in any good thing which he willed to do by us. This is to be our desire: we should rise to the highest form of spiritual life. If you do sow the principal wheat, get the best sort of wheat. There is religion and religion. There is a spirit and a spirit; and there is a system of divinity and another system of divinity. The best is always good enough for me. I exhort you not to rest content with anything short of the best that can be had. O young men, if you mean to follow Christianity, go in for it thoroughly. If you mean to serve the devil, serve him. He is a pretty master! Remember his wages! But if you wish to serve Christ, do not go sneaking through the world as if you were ashamed of your Lord. If you are Christ's, show yourself. If you are worthy of so great a captain, put on your regimentals. Rally to his banner, gather to his trumpet call, and then stand up, stand up for Jesus. If there is any manhood in you, this great cause calls for it all. Exhibit it, and may the Spirit of God help you so to do.

IV. Fourthly, THE HUSBANDMAN ATTENDS TO THE PRINCIPAL CROP WITH THE PRINCIPAL CARE. This Hebrew language always astonishes me, for it conveys such a mint of meaning. Sometimes when I study a verse I find that the critics say that it means this, that, and the other, until I have thought, "This language is miraculous, so full, so deep: very different from our poor English tongue. It teaches us many truths in a few words, and, like a diamond, it has a hundred facets, each flashing forth a distinct ray of light. This plenitude of meaning leads us to reflect upon a far more weighty matter. It is wonderful how much God can put into a word. Why, he put himself into one. The name of our divine Lord is "the Word of God."

Some critics insist upon it that the proper translation of our text is, that the farmer plants his wheat in rows. I do not know whether our farmers often *plant* wheat. They sow the seed in due order, but I do not hear much of planting it. It is said that the large crops in Palestine in old time were due to the fact that they planted the wheat, absolutely putting it in root by root, so that there might be no more wheat in a row than there ought to be, and they set it in lines so that it was not checked or suffocated by its being too thick in one place, neither was there any fear of its being too thin in another. The wheat was

planted, and then streams of water were turned by the foot to each particular plant of wheat. No wonder, therefore, that the land brought forth abundantly.

We give our principal care to the principal thing. Our godliness should be carried out with earnest thought: our service of God should be performed with great care. Brethren, are we careful enough as to our religious walk? Have you ever searched to the bottom of your profession? Have you ever enquired into the reason of your belonging to your present denomination? Why do you happen to be members of a certain church? Your mother was. Well, there is some good in that reason, but not enough to justify you in the sight of God. Why do you happen to profess, as you do, such and such a form of Christianity? Did you ever look into it? I do pray you judge your standing. If any Christian minister is afraid to urge you to this duty I should stand in doubt of him. I am not at all afraid. I wish you to examine all that I teach you. I beg you to do it, for I would not like to be responsible for another man's creed. Like the Bereans, search and see whether these things be according to Scripture or not. One of the greatest blessings that can come upon the church would be a searching spirit which would refer everything to the Holy Scriptures. If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them; therefore try the spirits by this infallible test. In all things render service to God as carefully as the Eastern farmer planted his wheat. You serve a precise God, therefore be precise in his service. He is a jealous God, therefore be jealous of the least taint of error or mistake in anything that you do unto him.

Take care, also, that you nourish every part of your religion with prayer, even as the farmer watered each plant. Pray for grace from on high that your soul may never be parched and dried up. Perform to your faith, to your hope, to your love, and to all the graces that are in your soul every needful service which the husbandman renders to his wheat. Watch, weed, ward, and water every gracious principle: give your graces your principal care, for they are to yield your principal harvest.

V. With one more lesson I close. Do this, because FROM YOUR PRINCIPAL CARE YOU MAY EXPECT YOUR PRINCIPAL CROP. If religion be the principal thing, you may look to religion for your principal reward. The harvest will come to you in various ways. For instance, you will make the greatest success in life if you wholly live to the glory of God. Success or failure must much depend upon the suitability of the endeavour. I shall never be able to conduct a choir, but I may succeed in preaching, for that is my proper work. Now you, Christian man, if you try to live to the world you will not succeed, for you are not fitted for it. Grace has spoiled you for sin. If you live to God with all your heart you will succeed in it, for God has made you on purpose for a holy sphere. As he made the fish for the water, and the bird for the air, so he has made the believer for holiness, and for the service of God; and you will be out of your element, you will be a fish out of water, or a bird in the stream, if you leave the service of God. The Eastern farmer's prosperity hinges on his wheat, and yours upon devotion to God. It is to your faith and love that you must look

for your joy. Is there any bliss like the bliss of knowing that you are in Christ, and are the beloved of the Lord? It is to your religion that you must look for comfort on a sick and dying bed; and you may be there very soon. "Ay, and the sooner the better," you may say, if you have grown this principal wheat, and have sown to the Spirit that you may reap life everlasting.

In the world to come what a crop, what a harvest will come of serving the Lord! What will come out of all else? Nothing but vanity of vanity. A man has made a million of money, and he is dead. What is he the better for his gold? A warrior becomes an emperor, his fame rings throughout all the earth: he dies. What has he of all his honours? What will any of you have at the last if you live to the world? To live to the world is like playing with boys in the street for halfpence, or entertaining yourself as children do with bits of platter and oyster shells. A life devoted unto God yields real and substantial results, but all else is waste. Let us think so, and gird up our loins to serve the Lord. May the divine Spirit help us to sow the principal wheat, and live in joyful expectation of reaping a joyous harvest in due season, according to the promise, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." That which was the cause of our principal anxiety here shall be the source of our endless felicity hereafter.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew vi. 19—34.

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