

An handful of corn

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 72. Now let us meditate as the Lord will enable us. In verse 16.

There shall be a handful of time in the earth but on the top of the mountains. The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and thereof the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

Now, as some of you may know, the word handful here appears apparently more than else in the Old Testament, the word that is used in the original.

The oldest expositors believe it meant literally a small quantity, a handful. And yet sometimes the word handful is meaning a great quantity as it does in the book of Genesis, where the earth dropped forth by handful.

And we believe that the context here demands that we translate it as small quantity, believing as we do that this rush is messianic and refers particularly to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 1 9] And it is in this way that we hope to unfold some of the truth that are contained therein. We have the parable of the grain of mustard seed in the New Testament, which really is a parallel verse, and we are to understand it as being the kingdom of God growing from very small beginnings.

And we hope to see true. And we hope that the kingdom of God is in this way. And we hope that the kingdom of God is in the name of God. For the kingdom of God, we hope that the kingdom of God is in the name of God. Well, first of all, I would like to think of this description of the gospel of Christ as unharmedful of corn.

Now, in referring to Messiah's kingdom of its inception, we find that the Holy Child Jesus came into the world in the most inauspicious circumstances.

He was worshipped most surely as the King of the Jews by the Gentiles who came from the East. But to many he was despised and rejected of men.

It seemed very unlikely that this infant who was born in the lowliest conditions and credibly in the most unpromising circumstances imaginable would ever be a King among the Jews.

[2 : 5 1] We bear in mind however that the Old Testament speaks of him as being a child and born of a virgin just as he was.

Then he was of course as we all know who beheld his glory from the time that he was born into the world. Nevertheless he was born into a most hostile and inhospitable environment.

And we will look upon him as being the grain of wheat that eventually was to fall into the ground and die. And to bear much fruit as he himself promised.

He was hated without a cause as we know. So, and throughout his whole lifetime he was persecuted, he was maligned, he was limited, he was treated with the utmost contempt by most of those with whom he came in contact.

Because they did not recognize him as the messianic King. Yet, nevertheless, there were those as we have already seen, that we have recognized that this was God manifest in the flesh.

[4 : 10] That he was just as the angel that promised to Mary, when he said concerning him he shall be great, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall burn over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

O how small a beginning the kingdom of God had in the fullness of time, when him, who was the Prince of Peace, came as the virgin's child.

He was eventually, of course as we all know according to the scripture, he was put to death as a common criminal, and buried in a barred tomb.

All according to the scriptures as we see here. And in this psalm, which we have been reading, we read concerning the eternity of his kingdom, but is elsewhere given to us as in Psalm 45, by throne O God is forever and ever.

And the Godhood of his son is clearly shown there. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy benigum endued unto all generations.

[5 : 31] That is the wonderful thing that we are to bear in mind, even in a day of small things, when the name of Christ is so frequently mentioned in blasphemy, and still treated with the same measure, if not greater contempt than before.

He came as a little child, veiled in sin and flesh, yet this was him who was the Prince of the King of the earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Of course, we also know that this handful of psalm that was sown and raised on the tops of the mountains, and also the word of God as we have it in scripture written for us here.

Here was of course the word that was made flesh, and he spoke of the sown and sown and the word. This is the good seed of the kingdom that we have contained between these two words.

The good seed of the kingdom of God. And yet, when our Savior left this world, he left behind him a few unlettered men that he himself called, or that he Luke calls, the ignorant and unlawless men, unlettered men, a few official men and ordinary men with whom he entrusted this thread of the gospel.

[6 : 58] He said, First, I am here, Lord little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And he gave to these three men the great commission.

Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And Lord, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

But, oh friends, these few men, they had the greatest asset one can conceive of. They had the word of God, which is the great granary from which they took handholds and scattered in the most unfavorable conditions.

And the seed germinated, it grew, and it yielded the harvest, as we shall see by and by. This was to use another figure, the sword by which they were to go forth conquering and to conquer in the ancient world, and to cover the world with fruit.

You shall be the witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uppermost, in Judea. This was what the disciples went forth with.

[8 : 19] What witnesses were, because they had the Holy Scriptures. This was their asset. This was what the Lord committed to them.

They went everywhere preaching the word. That was what they did. And Paul tells the believers at Corinth, I determined to know nothing among you, so have Jesus Christ and him crucified.

They did not modify their speech. They did not modify or dilute their message. They did not emasculate it of its power. They preached the word, Jesus and the resurrection, for the men would be offended or not.

It did not matter to them. They had a commission to preach the word, to sow the seed, and to unfold the mysteries of the Old Testament scriptures, the fulfillment of prophecy and law.

And what dramatic results they received, they witnessed. They cast handfuls of the good seed wherever they went. They sowed beside all waters, and God honored their witness.

[9 : 32] The word of God prevailed and grew mightily. And no one could halt the germination of the seed that God foreordained and predetermined was to yield an abundant harvest.

Besides this, before we leave this point, this cosmic view of the Gospel, this worldview, we have the progress of the work of grace in a subjective and individual level, that is with individuals to whom the word was preached.

Over the ancient world and even today, the Spirit of the Lord maketh a reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners.

This is what will change the lives of men and nothing else, because God ordained it so. It is a great mystery, and the rise and progress of true religion in the soul is something that is indiscernible to man.

The kingdom of God is within you. And as the Gospel writers spoke of this in the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matt, we have this great mystery, this analogy given to us in Matt chapter 4 and at verse 26.

[11 : 00] 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, then the full corn in the ear. There are these various stages of germination, growth, development, unearing, and then the hardening of the seed.

And what is the analogy that we have here? The sowing of this seed, the growth and development, or as it is put in the book of Ecclesiastes, Thou knowest not how bones do grow in the womb of Hargoth, that is was child.

So thou knowest not the way of God, who maketh all. The great mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit within. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. The word germinates in the hearts of men and women, and it is unseen.

[12 : 19] It goes on quietly, it goes on steadily, and perhaps completely unobserved from the outside. The early stages, it is so small that it is imperceptible, and one is unable to see it.

It was observed by Paul eventually in the lives of his Philippian converts, as we were thinking about on Saturday, when he says, He who hath begun the good walk in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Yes, he saw these things. And growth in grace and in knowledge is similar to what we have here. The handful of corn sown in the heart that is prepared by the Holy Ghost.

The seed may be dormant for many years. As your minister was reminding me today, of how someone under the ministry of John Flavos, so long ago, at the age of twelve, had heard a sermon that impressed him, but not until a hundred and two years later, was there evidence of the seed having germinated and grown, and now yielding a harvest when he was converted at that advanced age.

The seed will lie dormant in the earth until all the favorable conditions bring forth germination and growth.

[13 : 50] And that is the great mystery that is here. Now let us see in the second place, friends, the place where the seed is sown upon the tops of the mountains.

Now that is not the normal environment where seed would be sown. Seed is normally sown in the valley. By the riverside, you read in Psalm 65, you will find that the pastures are clothed with corn, and these are on the lower reaches.

The tops of the mountains are places that are so inhospitable, where there is so little soil, that it would be foolishness to sow seed there.

And yet, we are to preach the word, even in conditions that seem less than promising. And this applies to almost all of us who have sat yesterday at the Lord's table.

We have the obligation laid upon us to communicate the word, and not to hide our life under a bushel. It is incumbent upon believers to read self to others.

[14 : 58] The seed was sown after Christ came into the world in the most inhospitable environment. It was preached to the Jews. And that is still probably the most difficult field of all, evangelism.

It was preached, Go, he says, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Why were the Jews so prejudiced and so hostile to the gospel?

Well, probably largely because the externalized religion. And they relied on their being the children of Abraham.

They failed to understand that there was a distinction between the children of Abraham according to the flesh and the children of Abraham according to the promise.

And they claimed direct descent from Abraham, and they deemed this sufficient for them. The vision of the messianic kingdom to them was one of an external kingdom when the empire of David and Solomon would again be resuscitated in all its outward and external glory as it was formerly.

[16 : 16] In fact, some of the disciples fell into this pitfall also, and did not understand the reason for his coming, or why he should die.

Oh, friends, they had an unearthed-bound vision of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and because of this they did not realize the meaning of these words, my kingdom is not of this world, and it does not come with observation.

It comes in the hearts of men and women. An earth-bound vision and a push. Moreover, they were scandalized and offended by the poverty, the meanness, the lowliness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They had expected a messiah that would have outward glory, that would have power that would subdue their enemies. The enemies that they believed were their greatest enemies, the Romans.

But, oh friends, we are a far greater enemy than this within us. And the reason why he came was to save us from our sins.

[17 : 31] Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. The Jews were greatly prejudiced, and yet they were converts among them because the apostles adhered to the great commission that was given to them, and they confirmed the remit to the Lord in this way.

They preached to the Jews, and from small beginnings the Jews were converted, although not many of them. Yet there were, although he came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Yet to as many as received him, to them give he power to become the sons of God, to all such as believe in his name. We should never think that anyone of the human race is beyond the ability of the Lord to save.

The world can work miracles, because germination and growth is a miracle. It is a resurrection of new ways of life. But then the gospel was also preached to the Gentiles.

And as you know, corn is usually sown in the growing season when there are conditions fair of favorable foregrowth.

[18 : 53] But Paul says this, Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, and the apostle did exactly this.

And one can see the tremendous success, the harvest that was reaped, because of his faithfulness to the commission which the Lord gave him. And we are not to be discouraged by circumstances that are less than promising.

We too must proclaim God's word. We must speak the truth to our fellows. Did he not have congenial soil to sow when he came to the Gentiles, the great apostle?

No, friends, the human heart is not congenial soil for the word of God at any time. The carnal mind is enmity against God.

The human heart is never good unless it is prepared by the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Spirit can create a favorable condition for growth even in the tops of the mountains.

[20 : 04] The most unlikely places. After all, was it easy to preach to philosophers at Athens? Or idolaters at Ephesus?

Or barbarians at Melita? Was that favorable soil? Did Paul go there with great expectations that he personally was going to achieve his objective?

Oh no, the apostle knew the difficulties. But God had promised, there shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains.

The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon. And when God gives the increase, increase there will be. Remember the great catalogue of sufferings that we have the apostle gave us in the second epistle to the Corinthians.

How he was stoned, how he was beaten with rods. He was imprisoned. He was shamefully entreated. There were riots where he went. There was tremendous opposition. And it seemed so unlikely that the word of God would take root downward and bear fruit upward on such inhospitable soil as these hearts that were prejudiced against him.

[21 : 24] And yet, the Holy Spirit created all the favorable conditions for germination and growth and development in his own time. That is the confidence of every minister of the word.

And every believer who has an obligation in his own way to be a missionary to others. That the word will not only survive, but that it will bring forth a harvest.

Did it seem unlikely, or did it seem likely, when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus gently and lovingly stretched out our Lord's body in a garden tomb, that he would rise to a glorious resurrection and with them bring such a bountiful harvest that is being ingathered even to this day.

Oh, it seems so unlikely. But that is what God is promising here. It did not deter the apostle to go to the Gentiles, because God said to them that he was to bear his name among the Jews, among kings, and the children of Israel, and the Gentiles, afar off in the Roman Empire.

Paul believed he took God at his word. And the success of the gospel is not with us as individuals. It is the Lord's prerogative alone to give the increase.

[22 : 57] Now what about ourselves today? Is it an easy matter? Ah, no friends, it is no different from what it was in those days. We have congregations to preach to, and the heart of every one of those is inhospitable to the gospel.

It is unfavorable to growth. The conditions there are not congenial for germination. Spurgeon speaks of the day when the great husbandman himself came and with ten black horses began to plough his soul.

The ten black horses were the ten commandments of the law, and then he says there came the cross ploughing, the preparation for the tilt that is so necessary for the seed to be covered, and there to germinate in a favorable environment.

We all know that there are conditions required for germination and growth. We need to have a certain temperature, certain amount of moisture.

We need to have soil nutrients, absence of toxic materials. All the human heart needs all that preparation by the Holy Ghost, and how many toxic materials are in our hearts that would not permit and will not permit the word of God to germinate.

[24 : 30] We have prejudice, we have bias, we have unbelief, we have the fleshly mind, our tenacity to hold on to the things of this world. God can remove all these things and create the favorable conditions and the tilt, the softness of soil, the cultivable soil where the seed can be harrowed in and where it can be hidden in the air.

These are the conditions. He will remove the prejudice, he will remove the enmity, he will remove all the baneful influences that we are exposed to at presence, indifference and complacency.

All these things are removed, and when favorable conditions exist, that seed of life will germinate. It is a great mystery how the germ remains there inside the seed.

We look on the outside and all we see is a rough brown exterior that gives no indication of the life that lies hidden within. And that was, I believe, what the Lord Jesus had in mind when he said that he describes himself as a corn of wheat.

Externally there was no indication of his Godhood. The men that saw him mostly looked upon him as a carpenter of Nazareth.

[25 : 56] But he was the one who was to die and in his death he was to bring forth an abundant harvest as we shall see.

Oh friend, it is incumbent upon us to sow this seed even as the Lord has given us commission and commandment and to do so in hope.

There is no farmer who sows seed and who has seed of a certain percentage of germination doubts that the Lord will, according to his promise, give a seed time and harvest.

Should we doubt the Lord's promise when he tells us right here that this is so, there shall be an handful of corn and the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.

It shall indeed. Well, let us see in the third place, the blessed harvest that is promised here that will be produced. Now, for our encouragement, our Lord himself gave us this addition in the New Testament in the Gospel according to John and at verse 12, I have mentioned it already.

[27 : 15] At verse 24, Verily, verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. These are most pregnant words. They are full of meaning and we can use them as a reference to what we have here.

If our Lord had not suffered the humiliation and the death of the cross, no souls would ever have been saved.

But there were. And in the Old Testament there were those who were saved, retroactively from the time of his death and resurrection, from the very first redeemed soul that entered heaven, who was of course Abel, as we understand it in any case.

From Abel onwards, these were saved by virtue of the Saviour's death that was to come. The corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died.

[28 : 28] Now he tells us, it shall bear much fruit. If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. This is a reference to his own death and the abundant harvest, the death of our Saviour brought forth, that is being even today, ingathered into God's garden.

There are those here who rose with him federally on the morning of his resurrection. And how much then? Well as much we believe as was told Abraham.

Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them, so shall thy seed be. That was the promise that was given in the covenant of grace in its very early and embryonic form.

And John the Divine tells us in the last book of the Bible that he had a glimpse of the great thin gathered harvest when he saw a great multitude which no man could number out of all kindreds and peoples and nations and towns.

Showing us that the great commission that was initially given to the disciples has been fulfilled or will be fulfilled. Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

[29 : 54] There shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains. Very inhospitable and very unlikely environment for any seed to grow.

And yet it is for you and for me to be labourers. And after all that is what we are. We are not craftsmen. It is not methods of sowing that will bring a harvest.

And the harvest will be brought forth not when we think but when God says, because we have to wait with patience for the precious fruits of the earth, so also must we wait with patience when we have faithfully done what God has commissioned us to do.

When we sow by hand tools, when we sow in the earth. John saw this great vision and that is a much fruit that the Savior speaks of when he himself spoke of his death using that figure of speech, the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying.

And as you know yourself friends, the actual grain itself must die before it can produce a root and a shoot upwards.

[31 : 16] The analogy is so exact and accurate that we are here and that we have in the New Testament. Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures and he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures.

And indeed, may we not look on this part of scripture as being exclusively messianic and referring to the death of our Lord Jesus. Jesus, it certainly has. The fruit of his resurrection, a magnificent harvest that would shake like the trees of Lebanon.

You have seen, I am sure, a field of oats or barley or wheat, but not until it is completely ripe and hardened will it rustle.

Not until then will it bend its head because of the weight of grain that it carries. It will then rustle in the wind and here the harvest is of such magnitude that the writer speaks of it as shaking like the great cedars of Lebanon as they sway in the wind and as they make that rustling noise.

What a tremendous harvest is expected here and yet to come, although much has already been achieved. And our Lord uses this same figure when he says the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.

[32 : 42] And he speaks of the disciples when they were reaping the harvest in Samaria. The Samaritans were coming to Christ. Other men have labored, but ye are entered into their labor.

God gave the increase, O to him alone be the glory. Paul planting, Apollos watering, but God giving the increase, causing the germination, the growth, development and the hardening of the grain.

Consider the great increase of the early church. How when men went forth and preached the word, this is what the word that is used, they went everywhere preaching the word.

That word everywhere is a very comprehensive term. There was no word that they excluded. They did not say there is no point in going to these poor Samaritans, they won't believe anyway.

We should never adopt this attitude. We are to sow by all waters. We are to speak the word to all and sundry in the expectation that God will cause the seed to grow in his own time.

[33 : 55] And so, so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. And consider the great harvest that was reaped at Pentecost, when Peter and the other apostles preached these simple doctrinal sermons of which we have an outline in the book of Acts.

God gave the increase. The Holy Spirit was at work. The great husbandman who prepares the soil and who creates the favourable conditions that when the seed is sown, it immediately germinates.

And these people received the word immediately, they received it with gladness. Because the Holy Spirit was at work among them. And that then is what we must long for, look for, pray for and expect in the Lord's time.

The precious fruit of the Holy Spirit, the fruits that he brings about, he brings it to Germany. The harvest of Pentecost, when three thousand souls at least were gathered into the church.

And see the barriers that were superseded. Linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, prejudice, national barriers, racial barriers. There was nothing to the Holy Spirit. There were men there from every nation under heaven, devout Jews.

[35 : 21] And they received the word with gladness. There was a confluence of them into the kingdom. They flowed together when they heard the word and they received it. What a thrilling experience to these apostles to actually see and understand what was happening.

The great harvest that our Lord promised them was now being reaped. Seasons of great harvests have been since then in different parts of the world.

And this is what we long for again. Extraordinary effusions of the Holy Ghost that will prepare the hearts of men. And give germination to the world when he applies it to our hearts.

And think of the apostle, the great apostle wherever he went. The opposition, the satanic hindrances that were there.

The riots that were created, the insurrections because he came with the gospel. And yet churches were planted despite all the opposition of the enemy. It would seem that he was casting handfuls of corn upon the tops of the mountains.

[36 : 34] That God gave the increase. And the increase was like the shaking of the trees of Lebanon. These must have been thrilling times then.

And it is days like this that we long to see again. Think of all the idolaters at Ephesus that for hours chanted great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And yet Paul with his meekness and with the gospel that God gave and planted a church there that flourished and grew and produced office bearers.

And a great harvest to the glory of God. Well, that is a harvest produced. The fruit thereof shall shake Lebanon. What encouragement there is for us all in these words.

It is there for us in black and white. The Lord has given the word and he has promised it. Of course, we are only laborers together with God. Paul makes this very clear.

[37 : 38] He belittles himself. He abases himself. He takes a very low profile. As though he were on looking, an onlooker, watching what God was doing.

What God has brought. The Lord has done great things for us, the psalmist could say. No glory to ourselves. Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto thee.

Alone be the glory. We have seen this in the New Testament at various times. Reviving has come and God has given the increase.

And all from this one seed. The one grain. Him of whom he himself speaks. The grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died.

There was life there. The inner life. The life of God in his soul that he communicates to those who are his children. The life of God that flows into the souls of men and women.

[38 : 44] Everlasting life. The words that I speak unto you, he says, they are spirit and they are life. And so is the word of God. It can make us wise unto salvation.

And we know not. This is the romance of preaching. It is the romance of reaching out to others. We know not what the Lord may do.

When he will make his word to Germany. And as I said in conclusion, it is not the method of sowing. It is not the way that the seed is sown.

It is the preparation that is necessary. The preparation of the Holy Spirit in creating the till. The temperature. The moisture.

And taking away the toxic materials out of our hearts. So that it is congenial soil to bring forth an abundant harvest. That is why we would say to ourselves and to us all here this evening.

[39 : 45] Be he steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Inasmuch as we know that your labor is not in vain and alone.

We shall reap if we faint not. Let us pray. O Lord, we pray that thou will bless thy word to our souls.

The word that is spirit and life. It is the spirit that quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing. O Lord, help us to continue laboring for thee.

Looking to thee, thou who art the great husbandman. Thou hast promised that there shall be seed time and harvest. O grant that we may experience such in the spiritual realm.

In our own lives and in the lives of others. Grant, we pray thee, that thy word may take root in our lives. Individually and collectively in our congregations and churches.

[40 : 52] To bear good to thy glory. O Lord, bless the people. Part is in thy fear. Let thy blessing be upon us. For Christ's sake. Amen.