

Depth

"And others fell upon the rocky places where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away" (Matt. 13:5).

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).

We immediately recognise that contrast; those three statements in the Matthew portion - 'not much earth', 'no deepness of earth', 'no root'; and then "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"

It may seem just a little out of place today not to speak on the season, but spiritual is always in season, and that is always with us. And I have it on my heart just to say a brief and simple word on this matter of depth. *"Oh the depth ... !"*

In this parable of our Lord, with which we are so familiar, called 'the parable of the sower', in this second phase of the sowing, and its result, the Lord puts his finger upon something that is nothing less than a tragedy, when the tremendous potentialities of the Word of God are remembered. You come to the end of the parable and you see in what way the Word was sown. It was no different Word sown among the thorns, or on the rocky ground from that sown on good ground. In every case and instance, the potentialities were the same; mighty, wonderful things are possible from the Word of God in the heart. And yet, with all those great potentialities and possibilities, there is a receiving — it comes to them just as it came to the others — and all that was possible was missed.

The Tragedy of Shallowness

The tragedy of shallowness! What a tragedy. So the Lord puts His finger on that which is so contrary to His own nature and His own thought, so contrary to God. Oh, the depth of God! How deep God is! How deep God goes. Here perhaps there is a link with the present remembrance to what depth the Lord Jesus came down and went! How deep God has gone. 'The breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the knowledge' — surpassing love of God! How profound is the love of God! How deep God is! 'The depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!' That is God. That is his nature. And over against that is this tragic shallowness, contrary to Him, missing all that could have been.

Shallowness is always unsubstantial; it never stands the test and goes through. Always unenduring; for a time ... and then ... it has all gone. Always unprofitable; missing what God intended. Now you see, if God is like this, and if there is something in what the Lord Jesus says and meant in the parable, of condemnation, deploring such a state, what should we expect of God? We should expect nothing other than, if God really gets a chance, and has a way to His end, that He will go very deep, and He will take us very deep.

And it does prove to be like that. I am quite sure that there are many here now who know that that is true. It is a word not only that is true to experience, but it is a word that explains so much. The Psalmist cried: *"Thy way was in the deep"*! And it always is. God's way is always in the deep! God will always seek to take us down into the depths in order that He might reproduce in us the things that are true of Himself. We have said just now that shallowness is that which is not substantial. Now the one thing that that Psalmist was always saying about the Lord was that He was 'his Rock'. What a lot the Psalmist owed to the fact that he had discovered the Lord to be his Rock: something that

could not be moved, could not be shaken; to be relied upon; to be dependable; always there — *"Thou art my Rock!"* That is the Lord.

The Lord wants to reproduce His character in us, to make us dependable, reliable, substantial; that we are there, and always there, and can always be found there — not moved! In order to do that, He has to take us into the depths. He is that Himself, because He is so deep. He is the eternal God; He abides for ever. There is a word that brings us right into touch with that: *"He that does the will of God shall abide for ever."* We are easily moved away, unabiding! The Lord Jesus was ever stressing this: *"Abide in me", abide*, keep settled down. And you don't if you live on the surface, you know that quite well. Nothing that lives on the surface abides; it is carried away so easily by whatever comes along. It is only those who, to use the words of a prophet twice employed: *"Dwell deep ... dwell deep ... "*. Only so shall we endure and abide.

The things of greatest value are not found on the surface at all. The real treasures are in the deep. You have to go deep for the pearl and the jewels. The things that really are of value are not just superficial things found strewn anywhere and everywhere, you have to search deeply for them. When the Lord was describing the Land for His people, the Land of Promise, the Land of their inheritance. He told them that there were treasures there, but they would have to dig for them: *"Out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass"*. Nothing that really is of value comes easily. Well, we know that is true in every sphere of life. The Lord, then, is always seeking to deepen; He is in quest of depth. And because of the importance to the Lord of all these features of depth, depth is always a costly thing. The fact is, and we know it so well, that we only make deeper discoveries of the Lord through very deep trial, very deep testing, very deep suffering. These treasures are 'treasures of darkness'; there are always treasures somewhere in the darkness; there are always precious things somewhere down in the depths where the Lord leads us; it is like that. This essential of God in His people, all that it means of real depth, unto the abiding, and unto full fruitfulness, only comes by way of deep trial and suffering. That explains the ways of the Lord with us; we wonder why the Lord ploughs so deep, and does not allow us to abide in our superficiality.

Now here is Paul, a great example always of every kind of divine truth and divine way and working and method. Here is this man, out of very deep ways with God, and God's very deep way with him crying, *"Oh the depth of the riches ... !"* Oh the depth of the riches! How unsearchable! Past finding out! There is reality, though sometimes we think we have touched the bottom, there is nearly no touching bottom in this matter; there is always something more to discover, but every time, something more of deepening in us.

Now, the way of man and the way of the world is the shallow way. To get things as cheaply, as easily, and as quickly as possible, with as little cost as possible — that is the way of our nature. We want it like that, and we don't like the other way. But that is a mark of a lack of divine character; it just shows how devoid of the character of God human nature is, and this world is. And all God's ways of enrichment demand the countering of our natural desires, inclinations and propensities to have it all easy. That is our way; it is the way of man.

This matter of depth and of deepening into God and by God constitutes a feature of the great battle that the Lord's people are always in.

As an illustration and an instance of this, remember the Lord Jesus, as He stepped across that line from His thirty years of private, hidden life, into the public vocation and mission for which He had come, and the enemy clearly discerning with that intuition common to spirits, recognised quite well why He had come, and for what He had stepped across that line that day, to become the Lord of Creation, the Prince of this world, the Ruler of the kingdoms. Satan recognised that, and offered that prize to Him along superficial lines, compromise. 'Take this easier way, and you can have it; you can have it all if you will

only take this way that I suggest. You are going the hard way: you are going the deep way; you are going the costly way; you can have it all without that.' He suggested the superficial way for a kingdom. What a Kingdom it would have been! It would not have lasted; it would not have endured; it would not have been of that substantial order of eternity. And that is what the enemy wanted, to rob of that deep reality that God meant. And the Lord Jesus saw the snare and accepted the deep way — and oh, how deep it was! That way of the cross, to the very depths! But what a Kingdom! An everlasting kingdom; an enduring kingdom; He has it; it will endure throughout all generations, for ever and ever. The deep way is the real way. The enemy is always trying to rob of depth, that is the point; to make things easier. He is always trying to make things superficial; all so happy and pleasant; so nice, all on the surface; it all looks so lovely and enjoyable, and seems to be so good. But the point is: At what cost has it been secured? And is there a peril that something of the depth is being surrendered? For that is the realm of value and conflict — depth!

For this reason, and it is striking what I know sounds like a melancholy note, the Lord does have to bring His own things, His own divine, sacred things, into a realm of tremendous suffering, in order to preserve and increase their depth — make no mistake about it! The question will always arise: At what cost did you come by that? That determines whether it is real with you.

I was thinking much about that incident — and with this I will close — in the life of Elisha. We know and have heard many things about it. One thing has impressed me as I have been thinking over it again recently. When the Lord sent him to the woman, you remember, and the child was given by divine act. And the prophet went away; and it fell upon a day, the child was stricken and died. The woman asked her husband to saddle the ass for her to go and fetch the prophet, and off she went. She found him, told him her trouble, and he sent his servant Gehazi with his rod back.. And I never can help my imagination from getting to work as I see Gehazi — a man for which I have the utmost contempt for all I know of him in the Scripture — taking that rod and ... in some professional, conceited way, going to the situation, and entering the death chamber, putting the rod upon the child and nothing happens. Perhaps Gehazi tries at some other angle, and still nothing happens. But the woman saw through Gehazi, and she said: I am not going with Gehazi; I am not going without you! *You* are to come; she had come to Elisha; he went. And you know how he entered in, and stretched himself upon that child, hands to his hands, eyes to his eyes, and lips to his lips. Now, you know the whole story, but what has impressed me is this: the Lord in this scene was sovereignly at work. The principle there undoubtedly, was this, that here in this child was represented the very fruit, meaning and value of that woman's life. If you will allow her to represent the church, and the child, the very meaning of her life, the fruit of her life, the very testimony of her life; the only thing for which now she had to live; something that was a matter of life or death with her. And the Lord touched that, in order to bring out this great, wonderful and profound truth that everything in the church has got to become a matter of life and death. No play-acting by any Gehazi's; no merely formal, professional conduct with the rod; no mere words; no mere performances. Only the man, the man who is brought right into the thing in heart, so that this matter is with him a matter of his own ministry, his own life, his own testimony brought into the agony and the anguish of this thing. He is not standing aside like a Gehazi, and acting objectively, but this thing involves his very life, ministry, testimony and anointing. If God does not do this, then Elisha had better give up everything. He is brought into the agony and anguish of this situation. God has touched something that is not just a matter of his professional ministry, it is a matter of the justification of his life; he is brought into it like that. God is going deep. God does that, make no mistake about it.

In the church, that is, in the church that is according to God, God will touch something in the individual life. He may touch a husband; he may touch a wife; he may touch a child — a beloved child — in order to get us out of this merely formal, detached kind of

association with His things, and make everything an agony. And if the church does not come in on our behalf now, well you see, the dearest thing in life is threatened. God has wonderful ways of making things real, of destroying superficiality. Do you follow? I feel it is a very solemn word from the Lord, but a word that we all need to recognise. The Lord is not going to have shallowness and superficiality; He is going to touch the depth until it is a matter of anguish. Everything is in the balances in this issue, whatever it may be, — business situation or home situation, personal situation or church situation — everything is in the balances now, how this will go. And the Lord simply draws us in. And I have a feeling that the Lord is going to do things like that, to deviate from the matter of course kind of things in order to bring about a more deadly, solemn reality with us all. It will be by deep ways, but it will be worthwhile afterwards. That lad in the story of Elisha became the embodiment of the power of His resurrection. It is something, you know, to have that testimony enshrined and embodied, something indestructible and abiding; the power of His resurrection, who can undo that? That is for ever. But it comes by this way. *"Thy way, O God was in the depths"*; *"Oh, the depths of the riches ... "* — that is the point — the riches. Listen to the word; it will explain things that are going to happen to you, perhaps soon! And it may be a saving word.