

**TEACHING WITH PARABLES**

Lessons: *Mark 4*

When the Lord spoke to people, His words often caused them to pay more attention to their surroundings. He invited people to consider the lilies of the field, the trees and the birds who nest in their branches. As He spoke to people, pictures flashed in their minds. And with the pictures came reflective thoughts. People could think to themselves, "Yes, if God so clothes the fields and feeds the birds, surely He will care for me, too."

Yes, the Lord could make people think from the things they already saw and knew, but He also wanted to present to them things they had not seen or did not know. What is heaven like? The Lord said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?" (Mark 4:30). Things on earth correspond to things in heaven, and things that happen on earth can picture to us things that happen in the kingdom within us. For example, we plant a seed one day, and at night we sleep, and things start happening with the seed while we slumber and are unaware. And as the days pass and we see the plant sprout and develop, we confess that we don't really know how it happens.

*"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how" (Mark 4:26, 27). The Writings say this is about "the Lord's work" (Apocalypse Explained 911).*

For a person to become an angel, changes have to take place within while the process of rebirth or regeneration is taking place. This is the Lord Himself building the kingdom of God within us. We have our part to play while we realize so much of it is done secretly while we sleep and rise night and day, hoping to lead the life that leads to heaven.

Speaking of heaven, there are three heavens and the highest heaven is called the celestial heaven in which love to the Lord and conjugal love are at the heart of angel lives. You might think of the three heavens when you hear of the Lord's saying, "Some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (Mark 4:8).

This is from the first of a series of parables the Lord told. When He talked of a sower whose seeds fell on different kinds of ground, some people may have only listened to the story, but the disciples felt that there was something valuable within the story, and so they went to the Lord and asked Him about it. This led, as you know, to His teaching them such things as that "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things" are like thorns that choke good things that should grow in our lives.

The Lord at that time said to His disciples, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11). And to those who want to be disciples of His New Church, He has said, "Now it is permitted to enter with understanding into the arcana of faith" (*True Christian Religion* 508).