This Is Our Story

On the Sower, the Stone Cut Without Hands, and the Holy Seed in the Stump

Rob Massie

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Not an Individual Story

When we sing a song like *this is my story, this is my song*, we should understand that the message of the kingdom of God is *not first an individual message*. It applies to us individually, of course it does, but it is *first a story of a people that God wants to deliver and save and help*. The gospel is a community-shaped thing before it is a personal-shaped thing. And the moment we lose sight of that, our salvation collapses into something private and self-referential that the Bible itself never quite imagined.

The commission was given to Israel through Abraham. And the promise to Abraham, in Genesis 12, was *not* that *Abraham would be saved*. The promise was much larger:

> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2–3)

In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That is the size of the original promise. *The seventy nations* of Genesis 10, all of them, are in view. Abraham is being chosen *not as the end of God's blessing but as its channel*. He is going to be blessed *so that, through him, the nations may be blessed*. The mission to the nations was original. The mission was never tribal.

The Health-Check Prophets

And then God spent centuries sending prophet after prophet after prophet to *check on the nation of Israel*. A health check, you could call it. Israel kept drifting from what it had been called to. Egypt kept getting into the people God had brought out of Egypt. The promised land kept being treated like Canaan rather than like the inheritance of Abraham. So God sent Moses to check on a people who needed deliverance. He sent the judges to check on a people who needed to remember. He sent Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, on and on, *to try to encourage health and strength and peace into a nation that kept gravitating to power and wealth and the methods of kingdoms that surrounded it*.

The prophets would show up and say, *a little correction here, a little correction there*. And the New Testament summarizes what Israel did with the prophets in one shocking line:

"Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city" (Matthew 23:34).

Some you beat. Some you stoned. Some you killed. And all of them you treated with disdain. That was the historical record of what Israel had done with the men God kept sending to check on them.

The Parable of the Tenants

And it is precisely this history that Jesus puts into a single haunting parable in the final week of his life:

> There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one,

> and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matthew 21:33–39)

Look at the structure. The landowner builds the *vineyard*: Israel. He sets a *hedge*: the laws, the prophets, the protections of the covenant. He builds a *tower*: the temple, the city walls of Jerusalem. He leases the whole arrangement to tenants, the leaders of Israel, and goes away. He sends servants to collect the fruit. The servants are *beaten, killed, stoned*. *The history of the prophets in one parabolic image.* And finally, in desperation, he sends his son: *surely they will respect my son*.

And the tenants' response is the line that should stop every reader cold. *This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.* That is what Jesus says the tenants of Israel were *actually thinking* in his own day. He is telling them this parable *to their faces*, and they recognize themselves in it (Matthew 21:45). And then he asks the question that contains the entire judgment:

> "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." (Matthew 21:40–41)

Lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who will produce the fruit. That is the announcement of the next chapter of the story. The vineyard is being transferred. And the *new tenants*, the ones who will actually produce what the landowner has been asking for all along, are

about to be unveiled. *Surprise: a bunch of fishermen from Galilee. Rejects of Capernaum. The poor, the lame, the leprous, the unclean.* These are going to be the new tenants. *The vineyard goes to them.*

The Stone and the Son

> And then Jesus quotes a Psalm that gathers the whole parable into a single image:
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> Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (Matthew 21:42–44, quoting Psalm 118:22–23)

Now here is something exquisite that almost any reader who knows the Hebrew will catch. *The word for stone in Hebrew is* even. *The word for son is* ben. *They sound nearly identical.* In the parable Jesus has just told, *the son is rejected by the tenants*. In the Psalm Jesus immediately quotes, *the stone is rejected by the builders*. And the wordplay, *son / stone*, is exact. *Surely they will respect my son. The stone the builders rejected.* The rejected son *is* the rejected stone. And the rejected stone becomes *the chief cornerstone* of the new building God is constructing. The very thing the builders threw away becomes the cornerstone of the new house.

And then mercy and judgment together in a single image. *Whoever falls on this stone will be broken*. That is mercy: the brokenness of repentance, the breaking that softens a hard heart. *But on whomever it falls, it will grind to powder*. That is judgment, the crushing of the stone that has fallen finally on those who refused to be broken by it. *Same stone. Same Christ.* Mercy and judgment, depending on the posture of the heart that encounters him.

This is the paradox of the kingdom of God: the kingdom does not do business the way the Gentiles do business. When the disciples were rejected from a Samaritan village and asked Jesus, Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?, Jesus rebuked them and said, you do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them (Luke 9:54–56). Elijah was a venerated prophet, and yet even Elijah's calling-down-of-fire got a quiet censure from Jesus. That spirit is not the Spirit of the Son of Man. The kingdom of God advances through the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone, not through fire from heaven on the village that closes the door.

Hear Him

And this is exactly what the Father announced from the cloud on the mountain. Matthew 17. Peter, James, and John are taken up to a high mountain. Jesus is transfigured. *Elijah*, the fire-breather of the previous paragraph, and *Moses*, the lawgiver, appear standing alongside Jesus. And Peter, still in his sleepy stupor and still imagining the story of Israel along the old triumphalist lines, blurts out a plan:

"Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'" (Matthew 17:4).

Three tabernacles. One for each. Peter wants to equalize them, to put Jesus and Moses and Elijah on the same shelf of the museum he plans to build. And the Father interrupts him before the sentence is finished:

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matthew 17:5).

Hear Him. When the thunder stopped rattling through the cracks and crevices of the mountainous place, Peter looked up, and *there was no Moses. There was no Elijah. There was only Jesus.* Moses had declared the law. The law was a *shadow of good things to come* (Hebrews 10:1). The prophets had rattled out what they were feeling from God, but they kept *missing the full picture* because they did not have a big enough vision of what God was going to do, although at moments they did get a glimpse. The Lawgiver and the Prophet had both been pointing forward to *the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father; He has declared Him* (John 1:18). *Hear Him.* That was the verdict on the mountain. That is still the verdict.

On That Day He Went Out

Now let me take you to the parable that opens Matthew 13, because it forms with the parable of the tenants a kind of bookend. The tenants parable is told in the last week of Jesus' life. The sower parable is told in the middle of his Galilean ministry. *And both parables tell the same story, from opposite ends of his ministry, with the same theological substance.*

Listen to how Matthew 13 opens:

> On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow." (Matthew 13:1–3)

Catch that verbal parallel. *Jesus went out of the house* to teach by the sea. *The sower went out to sow.* The verbal echo is deliberate. *Jesus is the Sower.* He does not need to spell it out in

this first parable, and indeed, in his explanation of this parable, he does not yet name himself as the sower (he will, in the parable of the wheat and the tares immediately following, name *the Son of Man* as the sower of good seed in 13:37). But Matthew arranges the language carefully. *The Sower has just gone out. The kingdom is being sown. The same Son who is the rejected Stone is the Sower who has now gone out from the house.*

And here is the structure of the entire parable section, because the structure itself is the key to its interpretation:

First, in verses 3–9, Jesus *tells the parable* of the sower: four soils, four outcomes. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear*.

Second, in verses 10–17, Jesus *explains why he speaks in parables at all*. The disciples ask, and Jesus answers with a substantive theological framing that includes one phrase that ought to make every careful reader sit up, *to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 13:11). *The mysteries of the kingdom.* Hold that phrase. It is a direct quotation of the language Daniel uses in Daniel 2 when he describes God as *the revealer of mysteries* (Daniel 2:47).

Third, in verses 18–23, Jesus *gives the interpretation* of the parable to his disciples.

Tell the parable. Explain the mystery. Give the interpretation. That three-step structure is not random. It is exactly the structure of Daniel 2.

Daniel 2 and the Method of Mystery

Recall Daniel 2. King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He calls his soothsayers and magicians and demands not only the *interpretation* but the *content* of the dream itself, because he does not want to be duped by court flatterers. They protest that no king has ever asked his wise

men to do such a thing (which is probably true, and probably also why so many kings had been so easily duped). Nebuchadnezzar threatens to kill them all.

And Daniel asks for time. He goes home. He gathers his three friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) and they pray. *Let's pray. There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.* Daniel comes back to Nebuchadnezzar and gives him the dream:

> You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:31–35)

Look carefully at the structure. *Daniel tells the dream.* Then he interjects:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His . . . He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him" (Daniel 2:20, 22).

That is the *mystery* interjection. And then Daniel *gives the interpretation*: the gold head is Nebuchadnezzar's own kingdom, the silver chest a kingdom to follow, then bronze, then iron, then the iron-clay feet. *Four successive Gentile kingdoms across the ancient Near East.* And then comes the climactic interpretation:

> And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure. (Daniel 2:44–45)

Notice the phrase: in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. That is the prophecy. And the mechanism is a stone cut out of the mountain without hands. Not without hands, meaning not by human hands. This is not human ingenuity. This is not a graven image. This is the act of God himself. And it strikes the most vulnerable place of the imperial image, the feet of iron and clay, and brings the whole thing down. And then the little stone fills the whole earth.

Then Nebuchadnezzar's response captures the moment:

"The king answered Daniel, and said, 'Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret'" (Daniel 2:47).

A revealer of mysteries. That is the phrase Jesus picks up in Matthew 13:11. *To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.* Jesus is announcing that he is doing in the parable of the sower *what Daniel did with Nebuchadnezzar*. The God who reveals mysteries is once again revealing one. The kingdom Daniel saw rising, *the stone cut without hands that becomes the mountain filling the earth*, is the very kingdom Jesus is now sowing into the field. *The parable of the sower is the New Testament installment of Daniel 2.* Jesus is using Daniel's method, with Daniel's language, on Daniel's promised theme.

Three Bad Soils, One Good

Now look at what the parable actually describes. The Sower goes out. He sows. Four kinds of soil receive the seed.

The seed by the wayside: the hard-packed path. The birds come and eat it up. Jesus says: when anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart (Matthew 13:19).

The seed on rocky places, thin soil over rock. It springs up immediately, but has no root system. The sun scorches it, and it withers. Jesus says: he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles (Matthew 13:20–21).

The seed among thorns. The thorns grow up and choke it out. Jesus says: he also who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

And the seed on good ground. It bears fruit: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13:23).

Now here is the move that I think Jesus is making and that the church often misses. The four soils are not four kinds of individuals. The four soils are the entire history of Israel. Jesus is telling the history of Israel as the parable of the four soils. God kept sending the seed (through Abraham, through Moses, through David, through every prophet) and Israel kept being one of the bad soils. Hard hearts. Shallow soil that springs up at signs and wonders but withers when tribulation comes. Choked by the thorns of wealth and the cares of empire-imitation. And finally, at last, in the days of Jesus himself, some seed is at last falling on good ground. The disciples

around Jesus are the good ground who finally receive the word of the kingdom and let it root and bear thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

This is the parable of the tenants told from the other angle. The tenants parable asks who is producing the fruit the landowner has been seeking; the sower parable asks who is the soil that produces it. Both parables answer with the same group of people: the new tenants, the good ground, the remnant who finally receives what every Israelite generation before them refused.

Isaiah 6: The Stump and the Holy Seed

And right in the middle of the parable's explanation, Jesus quotes a passage of Isaiah that ought to be read in full to feel its weight. He says:

> And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' (Matthew 13:14–15, quoting Isaiah 6:9–10)

Now go back to Isaiah 6, because the original context is crucial. Isaiah has just seen the throne of God in the year King Uzziah died. The seraphim are crying *holy, holy, holy*. The train of God's robe is filling the temple. Isaiah, undone, cries out: *Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips* (Isaiah 6:5). A seraph touches a live coal from the altar to Isaiah's lips. Iniquity taken away. Sin purged. And then the Lord asks: *Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?* And Isaiah answers: *Here am I! Send me* (Isaiah 6:8).

And then comes the commission. Go tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive (Isaiah 6:9). It is a hard commission. The prophet is being sent to deliver a word that will harden the very hearts it is given to. And Isaiah, like any honest prophet, asks the question every preacher eventually asks:

> Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. But yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump." (Isaiah 6:11–13)

Read those last two lines again, because Jesus knows them by heart and is quoting their context. A tenth will remain. Like a terebinth or an oak that is cut down, but the stump remains. And the very last clause: the holy seed shall be its stump.

That last image is one of the most important in the entire Hebrew Bible. *The holy seed is the stump.* Israel will be cut down. The forest of the nation will be felled. Cities will be devastated, houses left without people, the land laid waste, the population scattered into Babylon and beyond. *But a stump will remain.* And inside the stump: *a holy seed*. A seed that looks dead. A seed that looks finished. *And out of that seed, a new tree will grow.* That is the seed Jesus has just been talking about in his parable. *The seed of the sower is the holy seed of the Isaianic stump.*

And if you look at the Western world today and think the stump of Christendom has been cut down so far, so secularly, that it can never again be the people God called it to be, *think again*. *There is a holy seed in the stump.* The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead can quicken

even mortal bodies, even mortal minds. *Something transformational can occur among the simplest people*. You think you are cut off? *Think again*. *There is something God wants to do among us, and the stump is exactly where he does it.*

Restored Israel

And now bring the whole arc home. *Why did Jesus pick twelve disciples?* He could have picked seven. He could have picked seventy. He picked *twelve*, *because twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel*. Jesus, with twelve gathered around him, *is Israel in nucleus*. He is *Immanuel, God with us*, standing at the center of the twelve tribes the way the tabernacle once stood at the center of the wilderness camp.

And on the day of Pentecost, Acts 1:15 tells us that *one hundred and twenty* were gathered in the upper room. *Twelve times ten.* The Jewish *minyan* tradition required ten adult men for a complete synagogue gathering. Ten was the quorum number. *Twelve tribes times ten quorum equals one hundred and twenty.* The upper room at Pentecost was *the completed Israel of God in seed form, gathered for the new Sinai*. And what came down upon them, *the fire on the tongues* of Acts 2:3, was the new-covenant counterpart to *the fire on the mountain at Sinai*. Same God. Same fire. Different inscription surface. At Sinai the fire wrote on stone. At Pentecost the fire wrote on hearts. *Exactly the new covenant Jeremiah had promised* (Jeremiah 31:33).

And Peter, standing up on that morning, quotes the prophet Joel:

> But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.’ (Acts 2:16–18, quoting Joel 2:28–29)

This is that. That is the phrase Peter uses. What you are seeing right now is the fulfillment of Joel's last-days prophecy. And who receives the prophetic Spirit? Sons. Daughters. Old men. Young men. Servants. Handmaidens. The most insignificant people in society. The categories that did not receive the prophetic Spirit in the old covenant (women, the young, slaves) are explicitly named as recipients in the new. The Spirit is being poured out on the people who had no claim to it under the old arrangement. That is what Pentecost looked like. That is what restored Israel looked like.

And here is the truth I want you to take with you. Do not look for restored Israel in the future. The restoration has already happened. Israel was restored two thousand years ago. The Twelve, then the Hundred-and-Twenty, then the three thousand added at Pentecost (Acts 2:41); that was restored Israel. And from that moment forward, restored Israel has been expanding outward into the seventy nations of Genesis 10, exactly as Abraham was promised in Genesis 12:3. The mission was always cosmic. The blessing was always meant to flow outward. And in the days of these kings, the iron-and-clay kings of the imperial age that has been crumbling at the feet for two thousand years, the God of heaven has set up a kingdom that shall not be destroyed.

Peter Naming Us

And Peter, writing later to Gentile believers scattered through Asia Minor (believers who had once been *no people* in the language of Hosea, now made *the people of God*) pulls together the entire Old Testament vocabulary of Israel's vocation and *applies it to them*:

> But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9–10)

Read that very carefully. A chosen generation; that was Israel at Sinai. A royal priesthood; that was the Exodus 19:6 vocation. A holy nation: same passage. His own special people: a peculiar treasure, the language of Deuteronomy 7:6. Every category that defined Israel's vocation is here being applied to a scattered Gentile church. And then the punch line: who once were not a people but are now the people of God. You and I, if you will receive it, are Israel. Not a replacement Israel. Not a substitute Israel. We are the Israel that was restored at Pentecost and that has been expanding into the Gentile nations ever since.

And Peter is not done. You are also as lively stones, being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Lively stones. A spiritual house. A holy priesthood. Spiritual sacrifices. You are the temple. You are the priesthood. You are the sacrifices. You are the whole arrangement. The Old Testament temple was a shadow of what the people of God have become in Christ. Get into the story Jesus has for you.

A Story of Abundance

And here is what I want you to feel about this story. *It is not a story of a beleaguered few who finally peter out into nothing.* It is *a story of abundance*. The Sower goes out, and the seed lands on hard soil, and rocky soil, and thorny soil, *and yet the seed that finally lands on good ground produces thirty, sixty, a hundredfold*. The kingdom does not peter out. *It multiplies*. The stump remains, and the holy seed grows back into a tree, and the tree fills the earth. The little stone cut without hands strikes the imperial image at its iron-clay feet, and *the stone becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth*. *That* is the trajectory of the story we are in.

Israel did not like that this story would begin with a *rejected stone*. The leaders of Jerusalem did not like that the cornerstone of the new temple would be the very stone they had

thrown away. *But the rejected son becomes the king of the universe, not just of Israel*. The prophets needed a bigger horizon. If they had remembered Genesis 12:3, *in you and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*, they would have seen it coming. *That seed is Christ* (Galatians 3:16). And we, the nations who have been brought near in Christ, are the *fruit of the seed*: the families of the earth blessed in Abraham, exactly as promised.

And the people who will most surprise us, when the harvest comes, will be the people we least expected to see. There are men coming out of long prison sentences in this country whose hearts have been so transformed by the presence of God in their cells that they fear release more than they fear another year of bars, because the presence of God they share daily with a cellmate has become more precious than physical freedom. *I have heard such a man speak.* Not because he loved bondage, but because he loved Christ, and he had learned that *Christ inside the cell is a richer companion than half-formed Christ on the outside*. There are men and women bound right now in our prisons who are freer than some of us walking around in church. *Let us live in the deliverance that Christ has actually declared.* Let us throw off the language that has shackled us. *That is the Irish in me. That is the genetic proclivity. That is the family I grew up in. That is the trauma in my past.* All of that is real, *and none of it is more powerful than the Spirit of the God of the universe who has taken up residence inside us*.

That is what makes the story a story of abundance. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in us. He is more powerful than your grandparents' patterns. He is more powerful than your parents' nurturing environment. He is more powerful than the zeitgeist of the present age and the peer group that surrounds you. *And he gives you the power and potential to get outside of yourself and be the person he has called you to be*.

Birds, Stones, Thorns, and Good Ground

So let us return at the end to the parable. Around us, the birds of Satan want to snatch the word away the moment it lands. The algorithms that scroll past our eyes are exactly such birds. The pressures of the present cultural moment want to scorch the shallow-rooted plant before it has time to put down a root system. The cares of the age want to choke the word out before it can bear fruit.

And in the midst of all of that; *let us be the good ground*. Let us prove that the God of heaven has set up a kingdom that shall not be destroyed, that the holy seed is still in the stump, that the rejected stone has become the cornerstone, that the Sower has gone out from the house and is still sowing. *We are the soil he sows into.* And whether we receive his word with thirty, or sixty, or a hundredfold yield, we receive it as the people of restored Israel: *grafted into the seed who is Christ, blessed by Abraham's promise, walking forward into the rest of the seventy nations*.

This is our story. This is our song. And the story does not peter out. It fills the earth.