

“NO ROOT IN THEMSELVES”

“And have no root in themselves.”

Mark 4:17

THESE rocky-ground hearers have occupied our thoughts twice recently. [Sermon #2844, Volume 49—THE SEED UPON A ROCK, and Sermon #2845, Volume 49—LACKING MOISTURE—Read/download the entire sermons, free of charge at <http://www.spurgeons.org>.] You remember that the first sermon concerning them was upon the text, “They had no deepness of earth” and that, in it, I tried to show the shallowness of some men’s religious character, how the pan of rock below the thin layer of earth had never been broken, so the Seed could not really enter into them, but lay, for a little while, in the soil, rapidly springing up and just as rapidly perishing. The other discourse was upon the words, “It lacked moisture,” a very instructive little sentence full of meaning. Only Luke tells us that the rocky-ground hearers “lacked moisture.” This, you probably remember, I explained as meaning dry doctrine without gracious feeling, experience without humiliation, practice without heart-love, belief without repentance, confidence without self-diffidence, action without spirituality and zeal without communion. I went somewhat deeply into that part of the subject and I think that there must have been some who trembled as they thought that, possibly, they were among the number of those who have no deepness of earth and who lack moisture.

Now, my dear Hearers, I do feel intensely concerned that every work of Grace supposed to be worked in this house should be real and, therefore, permanent. We are thankful that we are constantly having conversions, but we are very grieved that we also have some perversions. It is a comparatively easy thing to increase the Church roll, but it is only God’s almighty Grace that can preserve to the end those whose names are written in our Church records. Oh, for sure work! It is better to have only one convert who will endure to the end than 20 who only endure for a while and in time of trial fall away. We have so much of the superficial, the merely topsoil work, in these days, that I feel that I am not laying too much stress upon one point if, three times in succession, I preach on this same subject, taking these three forms of expression indicating different phases of the same evil—no depth of earth, no moisture and no root in themselves. According to our Savior’s interpretation, this is what happens to people of this sort—“Afterward, when affliction or persecution arises for the Word’s sake, immediately they are offended.”

1. Notice, first, that THEY WERE DEPENDENT UPON EXTERNALS. They had “no root in themselves.” Their religion did not spring from within and was not fostered from within.

This reminds us of a class of persons who cause us much grief of heart, though at the first they give us cause for much hope. I mean those whose religion depends upon their parents. What a fearful calamity it often seems to a family when the father is taken away just when the boys are growing up! We have seen, in our own royal family, an example of it. Wherever it happens, it is always a cause of very terrible danger to the children. But do you not also think that there are many lads and lasses who are, in the main, favorable to the things of God simply because their father is an eminently devout man? Where that is the case and where there is no true work of Grace in their hearts, the death of their father will give them such a measure of liberty and release from restraint as will afford them an opportunity of showing that their religion was not real.

In another case it may be the influence the almost boundless influence of a godly mother over her sons and daughters. Some women are queens at home—they reign with a kind of imperial sway over their children and those gracious matrons, by God’s Grace, often lead their sons and

daughters in the way of Truth and righteousness. Yet sometimes it is not so much a work of Grace within, as the work of the mother upon the surface—and so, if the dear mother falls asleep—the family is never again quite what it used to be. There is no longer that deep devotion, that intense earnestness that there used to be in the religion of the household, and one reason is that its members have no root in themselves. Their root was in their mother, or their father.

Now, dear young Friends, any of you who are making a profession of religion, I say nothing against the gracious influence of your parents. God forbid that I should do so! I say everything in praise of it, but I pray you not to let the influence of your parents be substituted for the work of the Holy Spirit upon your own heart. The message to you, as to all others, is, “You must be born-again.” He only is the true Christian who can say, “If my father and my mother were gone, it would greatly grieve me and I would feel it to be a serious loss. Yet, if it should happen, I would, by God’s Grace, hold on to Christ with no less intensity, but rather with even more, for I should feel it to be my duty to help fill the great void which the loss of my parents had occasioned. I should think that I heard them speaking to me from the skies and bidding their son, their daughter, follow them even as they followed Christ.”

So, dear Friends, there are other cases in which the religious life is very much dependent upon Christian association. That young lady was governess in a pious family and she seemed to be everything that we could wish and declared herself a Christian. But is she the same, now that she has taken a position in a worldly household, perhaps in a distant land where she never gets to hear the Word of God at all? If she has root in herself, she will grow and be fruitful even in that unkindly soil. That working man, when he was apprenticed, and when he was a journeyman, had a godly employer and he worked with those who feared the Lord and he became, confessedly, a Christian. I am not speaking against the gracious influence of masters and of workmates. God grant that it may always be exercised in the right way! But, still, if any of you have a form of religion which is dependent upon the position in which you live, you are without root in yourselves and it will soon wither away. You must so know Christ, trust Him and love Him, that you would be true to Him even if you were carried off into a Muslim country, or if you were called to live in the midst of blasphemy and infidelity! Do not rely upon somebody else’s example! Be not dependent upon external associations, but have root in yourselves.

I fear that in the case of a great many, their religion is dependent upon externals in respect of a faithful and earnest ministry. I have noticed, several times, that God has raised up different men to carry on His cause in the earth. Just now, it appears to me to be the age of the Judges, for God appears to call, first one Judge and then another to deliver Israel. But we long for the time when King David will reign on His Throne. It may be that we shall have antichrist first and Saul will rule before David comes. But when Samuel is gone, where will the people go? In many a place I have seen a good man raised up and he has gathered a large congregation around him. Many of them seemed to be truly converted and while he lived, their lives seemed to be all that one could desire. But he died and then where were they? At this present moment, I could put my finger upon many of the followers of dear Joseph Irons. They are very aged people, but the Lord has preserved them faithful until now. I could pick out, here and there, those who were educated in Divine things under Harrington Evans. What a gracious man of God he was! What sweet Christian people were fed at his table! If I were to make further enquiry, I could find a very large number of those who used to hear William Carey at the Victoria Theatre, but where are they now? A large number of them had no root in themselves while, happily, still a large number of them had root in themselves and are here with us, or in other Churches of Christ to this very day.

I could name other equally good men who used to labor in London and of whom I could say that when they were taken away, a considerable part of their work seemed to go with them. It was no fault of theirs that their hearers seemed to depend upon them and that their influence over them was very great. I do not doubt that it is the same in my own case and that, when I sleep with my fathers, there are some here who have been unwise enough to hang upon me, who will go back again to the world which they have never really left! And if so, when the man goes, their religion will go, too. But, dear Friends, if you are vitally united to the Lord, then, even if the scythe of death should cut off every minister who now preaches in God’s name—if every candle in the Lord’s house were put out—you would still cleave to your God with full purpose of heart and cry to Him

in the cloudy and dark day, to return to bless His Beloved Zion. But, alas, there are many professors who have no root in themselves—parents, associates, and ministers supply them with all the root they have.

Then there are many more whose religion must be sustained by enthusiastic surroundings. They seem to have been baptized in boiling water and unless the temperature around them is kept up to that point, they wither away. There are some persons, who, when they get thoroughly excited so that they do not know what they are doing, generally do right, but that is a poor kind of religion which always needs to have the drums beating and the trumpets sounding—for the religion that is born of mere excitement will die when the excitement is over. I am not saying a word against genuine revivals, or even against excitement—and I do not think that it is any argument against revivals that some of those who profess to be converted at them go back to the world.

I am reminded of that very good story—a somewhat amusing one, which Mr. Fullerton told us. He said that some persons find fault with revivals because all the converts do not stay. “Why,” he said, “they remind me of the tale that is told of a countryman of mine who picked up a sovereign. When he went to change it, they said that it was light weight, and he only got 18 shillings for it. Still, you see, that was all clear gain to him. However, another day, seeing a sovereign lying on the ground, he said, ‘No, I will not pick up another sovereign, for I lost two shillings by the last one.’” That was very unwise, if it ever happened. So, suppose that we do lose some of the converts of a revival, suppose that we even lose two out of twenty, a very large percentage, yet, still, the rest are all clear gain! Let us pick up another sovereign, even though there may be a discount upon its value. Yet I am sorry for those lost two shillings. I grudge the sovereign being light weight—I would like to have the whole twenty shillings and to have all those who profess to be converted—really converted to the living God. So I speak to those of you who, after a while, go back. When the cyclone of the revival is over, you drop to the earth like dead things. May God renew you, by His Grace, and work a work in your heart that will not be dependent upon any surroundings! May you have root in yourselves!

For you see that this class of persons who were dependent upon their surroundings, changed when their surroundings changed. Their parents were gone, they were placed in ungodly families and they became ungodly. They simply floated with the tide. It was said, a long while ago, that someone was asking whether such-and-such a person, who was a Quaker, was bathing in the Thames and the reply was, “How am I to know a Quaker when he is in the river? He would not have his broad-brimmed hat on, would he?” “No,” said the other, “but you can distinguish him without that, for he is sure to be swimming against the stream.” That is the way that we know a Christian—he is sure to be swimming against the stream. Live fish always do that, but dead fish go floating down the stream and are carried away with it. Dead fish just drift with the tide. If the tide goes up, they go up, but if the tide goes out, they go out. Whatever others do, they do. “Anything for an easy life,” is their motto. They profess to be Christians while they are with Christians, but they are ungodly as soon as they are with the ungodly. This will never do.

According to our Lord’s parable, this is especially the case when they have to endure affliction or persecution because of the Word. They fear that they will be losers if they are Christians and they cannot afford to suffer so. Somebody points the finger of scorn at them and laughs at them, and they cannot stand that. They do not mind being thought respectable for going to Chapel and taking a seat, but to be shouted at in the streets, and to be made the subject of jest at private parties—they cannot endure that, so away they go! Poor things, dependent upon externals! God deliver you from that evil, that it may be no more said of you, “They have no root in themselves!” May you be straight, distinct, direct, thorough, true, solid, substantial, enduring, rooted, grounded, settled, by the Grace of God!

II. Notice, next, that THEY WERE DEFICIENT IN ESSENTIALS. These grains of wheat, when they fell upon the loose soil lying upon that pan of rock, grew very fast. They grew all the faster because the soil was so shallow and the sun so soon caused the seed to sprout—but it was only, “for a time.” Listen to the sad note in my text—“They have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time.” They joined the Church “but for a time.” They taught in the Sunday school “but for a time.” They were zealous about religious matters “but for a time.” These words seem to me to

sound like the tolling of a knell, the knell of all our hope concerning them and of all their hope, too. Oh, what sorrow is hidden in those words! How terrible it is to be converted “but for a time”—to make a profession of religion “but for a time”! What innumerable curses seem to hiss out of every syllable, “but for a time”!

The pity is that they were deficient in the essentials of vitality. They were not deficient in blade, for they sprang up, but they were deficient in root—and that was a fatal deficiency. For a plant to have no root is much the same as for a man to have no heart. There cannot be life in a plant, for any length of time, at any rate, where such an essential thing as a root is lacking.

What is meant by a root in such a case as this? First, it means hidden Graces. You cannot see the roots, for they are underground. The best part of the plant is out of sight. It does not strike every casual observer, but I suppose that, as a rule, there is as much of a tree underground as there is aboveground and that, in many cases, it needs to be so in order that it may keep its hold upon the earth. Now, mark this, with a genuine Christian, there is always as much underground as there is aboveground. That underground work is often very much neglected, but it is exceedingly important. Indeed, it is essential. One of the roots of a true Christian is secret repentance—and secret prayer is another—those are roots that run down far into the soil. He who has not got them has no root. Secret communion with God, the talking of the heart with the great Father. Secret love pouring itself out in fervent fellowship and praise. The inside life, of which none of our neighbors can see anything—all that is the most important part of us. If you are a tradesman and have all your goods in your shop window, you will fail before long. If you can show all your piety to anybody, you have not much to show. Underground work is, however, absolutely necessary. How many builders have had to prove this? They have “run up” houses in a hurry without a good foundation and, by-and-by, down they have come! Foundation-work is all-important, though nobody can see it and, therefore, nobody will praise it and, perhaps, for a long time nobody may discover that it is not there. O my dear Hearers, let us lay a good foundation! Let our souls be really built in secret upon the living Christ by a true and genuine faith, the faith of God’s elect. That is what a root is, then, a hidden thing. These rocky-ground hearers had no root, that is, no hidden Graces.

In the next place, a root is a holdfast. When the winds of March come tearing through the woods, the trees will fall if they have no roots. Even the mighty oaks will be torn away from their places in the forest if they have no roots. These are the anchors of those great vegetable ships by which they are held fast in the earth! And it is essential to a Christian to have a holdfast, to have hold of something that he is sure of, something that he no longer questions, or, if he does question it, he battles with the question and holds fast by the Truth! A religion that may be true, or may not be true, is irreligion! The only real religion is that of which you are absolutely sure, that which you have tried, tested and proved in your very soul and know to be as true as your own existence. Doubts yield nothing to you but continual fear and trembling, starvation to your strength and restlessness to your soul. Christ bids you come and believe in Him with a child-like faith, for so will He give you rest.

Oh, how many Christians lack roots! Just look at them. They hear a certain form of doctrine taught one day; and they say, “That is not quite what I have been accustomed to hear, but still, it was prettily put.” They go and hear another kind of doctrine and the preacher is such a clever man, as he had need to be to make that sort of stuff go down, that they take in all he says just because he is so clever! I believe that the devil is clever and if these people could only hear him preach, I expect they would receive all he said, for they do not know anything, they do not understand anything, they have no holdfast of anything! They are like ships drifting at sea with no chart, no compass, no captain, no rudder. They will probably end as derelicts—a menace to all ships that sail over the seas—or they will strike on a rock, or founder at sea. Only God knows what their end will be, but a bad end it must be, for certain. O dear Friends, I want all of you to have roots!

Truth understood is a grand holdfast. Resolution deliberately formed—that is another root, another holdfast. Communion with God continually enjoyed—that is another holdfast. A lady was once asked why she was so sure that the Bible was true and she replied, “Because I know the

Author of it." And when you, Beloved, know the Author and know how true He is, then your doubts concerning His Truth will fly away. Confirmations continually experienced, such as answers to your prayers, Providential deliverances and the like—these things become Infallible proofs to you till you are as sure of your position as a mathematician is about the rules of geometry. He cannot be convinced that they are false, for he has tested, tried and proved them. When anybody says to me, "God does not hear prayer," I never answer him. I laugh! The remark is as false and as foolish as if he had said that I did not hear! Do you say that God does not hear prayer, or that there is no God? Of course there is no God to you who have no God and who never go to Him! If He does not hear your prayers, how can you expect Him to hear such prayers as yours, seeing that you do not "believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"? He never said that He would hear such prayers as yours! But if you believe in Him and know Him, and come to Him as a child comes to his father, He will as certainly hear your prayers as that you, being evil, give good gifts unto your children! This is not a matter of supposition with us. It has become a matter of fact because we have these holdfasts, these roots in ourselves. If you do not have these, you will certainly wither.

A root, again, implies a means of continuance. The child who plucks the flowers from his father's garden and sticksthem in his own little flowerbed, says, "Father, see how the dahlias have come up? My garden is pretty." Yes, but in a couple of days they are all gone because they had no roots in themselves. So, if you want to continue to be a Christian, there is a secret something which only God can put into the soul which ensures continuance—and where it once is, it will abide forever! You remember how our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"? He also said to the Jews, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." That is what is meant by the root—the root implies continuance.

And, once more, a root means living assimilation. A plant might be tied to a stick that was stuck in the soil and it might continue there and yet wither. But you know what a root does, it goes travelling about until it finds the nourishment it needs. It is beautiful to take the case of a fir tree, to see it growing high up upon a bare rock. I have often seen, among the Alps, a huge rock standing all by itself with a fine pine growing right up the rock—one root comes down this side and another down the other side—till it looks as if it were a colossal eagle's claws that had grasped the big rock! What are these great roots doing? Why, there is some good soil down there and the roots have gone travelling down that great rock till they have reached the earth! By-and-by, these roots go to another rock, but, as there is nothing to be got out of it, they turn deliberately to the right, and to the left, and go in search of good soil and water just as if they had a kind of intelligence, as I suppose they really have! It is wonderful how they will wind and twist about for long distances. I have seen the roots of some trees in the South of France, running along almost as far as the entire length of the Tabernacle galleries—perhaps even further—right on until they have found water and then they have brought it up to an insignificant-looking tree, which was thus nourished. Such is the power of a root.

For what purpose do we need roots? To be able to go after spiritual food, to be feeling after it all through the Word of God, sending roots into every text of Scripture that is likely to afford us spiritual nutriment! What do the roots do for the trees and plants to which they belong? They begin to suck up the materials by some strange living chemistry which I cannot explain—and they convert it into the life-blood of the plant or tree, selecting out of the soil this or that, and rejecting the other and enabling the plant or tree to make its leaves and its fruits with wondrous skill. No chemist could perform this feat, but the chemistry of God accomplishes it by means of these little roots. What you need is to have roots in yourselves, to be constantly going after spiritual food and especially laying hold of Christ to whom you are rooted, seeking from Him the nourishment of the spiritual life that He has imparted to you—living because He lives, feeding on Him and understanding these words of His, which, if you do truly understand them, will assure you that you shall live forever—"Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."

III. My time has gone, yet I must briefly tell you HOW THESE PEOPLE WERE DESTROYED BY UNAVOIDABLE INFLUENCES. The sun shone—they could not help that, the sun was made to shine. The sun was hot. It could not help that, it was made to be hot. And this was quite sufficient to put an end to all the greenness of these poor dwindling things. So the common trials of life, the afflictions, the persecutions which are inevitable to the Christian life, scorch those who are mere professors and they, having no root in themselves, wither away.

First, they lost their original stamina. A seed, unless it is absolutely dead, has some nutriment within itself. Almost every seed contains a measure of nourishment for the life-germ. So, at first, this seed that was sown sprang up by itself through the influence of the heat. Thus do some people seem to begin to be religious with a few right notions and a little good feeling—but they soon use all this up.

Next, when that stamina was all used up, they had no means of taking in a fresh supply. A plant cannot live without roots, any more than you and I can live without mouths with which to eat. These people, having no root, could not go for anything more—they already had all they could get. They had no Christ to go to, they had no eternal life, no covenant purpose, no principle of the Holy Spirit to fall back upon. And when their little was all gone, they could not come to the great All-in-All for more—they had no connection with Him.

To drop the figure and speak plainly, what does actually happen in the case of such people? Sometimes there is holy conduct, which is just as great an evil in the sight of God. In others, there is the losing of all their former zeal the perishing altogether.

I have upon my memory many cases of this sort, but some of the friends of those persons are still alive—perhaps some of the persons, themselves, are living, so that if I were to tell you about them, I might do harm instead of good. I remember, however, a man who was the terror of the village in which I preached in my early days. If ever there was a bad fellow on the earth, it was Tom _____. One afternoon, after I had been preaching, I was told that he was in the right-hand gallery of the Chapel. It was more than I could believe till my friends described to me a man whom I had noticed during the service—and then I was obliged to believe the evidence of my own eyes. He was a big rough navy and oh, such a terribly bad fellow! He came to hear me preach again and again—and he became to me very much what a faithful dog is to his master. There was nothing that he would not have done to please me if he could. He was broken down with deep repentance, as it seemed, for just a very short time, indeed. And then he became boisterously happy.

I often wished that his sorrow had lasted longer. Whenever I went out to preach, no matter how far off it might be, he was always there. I have seen him pull a barge, loaded with people, up the river Cam, that they might go to hear me at an open-air service. He was full of zeal and earnestness for a while, but, by-and-by, information reached me that Tom was drunk—and when he was drunk, he was capable of any evil. He remained drunk for months and we never saw anything of him all that time. Then he came slinking back and professed repentance. We hoped it was really so, but I never could make anything out of him. I think that he was just one of those who have “no root in themselves.” If I could have lived with him in the house, always, he might have been as right as possible, but when he went out into the field to work, and met with other men, he was as wrong as possible, for he had no root in himself.

Strong as Samson, he was also as weak as Samson. I wonder if I am addressing anyone here who is like he? Dear Friends, do not be satisfied with following a minister and being earnestly in love with any Christian man, but get to God and ask Him to give you a new heart and a right spirit, or else it will only be a temporary reformation and, good as that may be, it will never land you in Heaven!

There came to this House of Prayer a working-man whose father had induced him to come. I will not indicate where he sat. He was in the habit of wasting his week's wages on a Saturday night and his family was, in consequence, miserable and poor. But he was brought here and the change in him was very amazing. He had not been attending with us long before there was an alteration, even in the rooms in which he lived, and in the appearance of his wife and children. We all felt

glad, and his good old father, whom I know right well, was very happy about his boy. He said, "Surely, he will be converted." He was such a hopeful character that it was even arranged for him to come to see me about joining the Church.

But, alas, he never comes now! Saturday night is just the same as it used to be in his worst days and his family is just as unhappy. He had no root in himself—and he is just a picture of so many who come in here and get impressed—and are only benefited "for a time." They take the pledge, but only to break it. God grant that they may not go so far as to be baptized and yet go back to their sin, as the sow that was washed goes again to wallow in the mire! Not long ago I was asked for alms by one who begged me to help him to get a meal. I looked at him and wanted to know who he was. And he said, at last, "Don't you know me?" "No, I do not know you." He mentioned his name, but I did not remember him. Then he told me some things about himself that brought him to my recollection, how he had sat among us here and we had esteemed and respected him, and he had been very zealous in all good things, but, after a while, that "sipping and nipping," which is so common among businessmen nowadays, led him astray—till he lost his position and could not get another situation. He has gone down, down, down, till, as he spoke to me and his breath reeked with spirits, I could only say, "I could not recommend you to a situation. Nobody could take you, you are not fit for it."

I gave him a little something to eat, but I could do no more for him. It is an awful thing to think of the many of that sort, who have no root in themselves and so, presently, wither away. Bad company in one case, a wicked woman in another case, the wine cup in a third case—all these things help to spoil the work which we had hoped had been a true work of Grace. What, then, is to be done? Why, come along to Jesus Christ and really trust Him! If you give yourselves to Him, He will change you and you shall be truly changed. If you commit your souls into His keeping, He will keep you forever and ever. Try to save yourselves and you will surely be lost—but come to Christ that He may save you, and you will be certainly and eternally saved! Oh, that His Grace might lead you thoroughly to quit yourselves and wholly to rest in Him, now and forevermore! And unto His name shall be all the praise and glory. Amen and Amen.