
A time to cast away of stones, and a time to gather stones:

Ecclesiastes 3:5

What is Solomon referring to? What time and season is this? What is God teaching us in casting away stones and gathering stones? Remember that these times and seasons are appointed to each of us by God.

This morning we will see the actual casting away and gathering of stones in the time and culture when it was written, and then what this means for us today as Christians to cast away and gather stones.

Casting away stones:

If you were a farmer in Israel in Solomon's day, and you began to prepare and cultivate a new piece of ground to plant crops or a vineyard, the first thing that you had to do was clear all of the brush and weeds from it; but then there was the long and arduous work of removing all of the rocks and stones from the field; the casting away of the stones.

For the crops or vineyard to flourish, grow, and bring forth fruit, the rocks and stones HAD to be removed from the field before planting. If they were NOT removed and cast away, the ground would continue to be stony ground; too hard and not prepared for planting. If you tried to plant wheat, corn, barley, or a grape vine, it would not have enough depth to establish or strongly root itself and draw moisture from the ground; therefore, it could never mature and bear fruit.

In the Book of Isaiah, God likened the land of Canaan; Israel's Promised Land to a very fruitful hill where He would plant His vineyard. God's people, Israel, were likened to a choice vine; the type that would bring forth the best and sweetest grapes. God personally prepared the land of Canaan to be His vineyard, and He planted His choice vine there to flourish. Isaiah 5:1-7

The LORD fenced it, (or put a hedge about it), He gathered the stones out of it, that is, He drove out the Canaanites; (cast them out of land that was His vineyard); so that His choice vine might take deep root and flourish. He built a tower to keep watch over it, and a winepress to press the grapes.

The LORD cast out the Canaanites and GAVE Canaan to the children of Israel. They should have flourished under the good government and watch care of God, but they didn't.

Consider the work of preparing a piece of ground that has never been farmed;

This is NOT easy work; there were often very large stones in the ground, some that were not even visible to the eye until you would put a pick ax into the ground and hit them; or ran against them with a plow; stones deep enough to prevent you from turning up the soil and keeping good crops from taking root; these stones had to be dug up and pried out of the ground; cast out of the field if the land would be good for

farming.

After the stones were removed, the farmer would often have to bring in good soil to fill in the places where the stones were removed. Think about long and arduous work of preparing and cultivating a field so that it might be a piece of good ground.

Consider the work of the Lord in gospel preaching and ministering, much of which is preparing the stony ground of the heart to receive the Word!

Psalm 80:8-19, 78:51-59

In Matthew 13, in the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus likened the hearts of people to (4) types of ground into which the good seed of the Word might fall. Mark 4:5-6, 16-17, Luke 8:6, 13

Three of these grounds were not prepared or cultivated to receive seed; one of these pieces of unprepared and uncultivated ground (as we just read in Mark/Luke) was full of ROCKS, BOULDERS, and STONES. Called stony ground.

Only one piece of ground IS prepared and cultivated to receive the good seed of the Word. The briars have been cleared, the weeds uprooted, the soil turned up, and the stones have been dug up and cast out of it.

The first three (3) grounds (the wayside, stony ground, and the ground full of thorns) COULD BE cultivated and made ready for the good seed of the Word, but as they are, they are NOT ready to receive the Word.

In stony ground, or, in a field full of stones, the seed has not much earth or not enough depth or deepness of earth to take root and get moisture.

The heart of a stony ground hearer still possesses too much hardness in it! Sin, likened to stones, has NOT been cast out and repented of out the heart and life. Some stones (or sins) are right on top and visible, and some are buried beneath the surface and need to be dug out.

In last week's message we learned that the Christian life is a time for breaking down and demolishing sin out of our lives; so the Christian life is also a time when our stony hearts must be broken to pieces, the stones of sin must be removed and cast out of our lives so that we might receive the good seed of the Word, and that it might take DEEP ROOT and bring forth fruit!

Remember the scriptures that we just read, the Canaanites were the stones that the Lord removed and cast out of the Promised Land; so, we must expel and cast away the Canaanites out of our lives!

Ezekiel 18:31-32, 36:26-28

If once upon a time you received the Word with joy and gladness, but now your heart is hardened toward and against the Word of God & the commands of Christ, you might be suffering from a stony heart.

You gladly received the good seed of the Word, it sprouted up quickly, because it was not deep; but NOW your heart is full of hardness; there are stony places in your heart and the Word has not been established; your heart is like a piece of fallow

ground, fallow means uncultivated.

It's time for you to cast away the stones of sin that are still in firmly entrenched in your field; (in your heart). Matthew 13:15-17

NOW: The Gathering of stones:

There are examples of gathering stones in the OT scriptures. One example would be the rocks and stones that were removed out of a field being made ready for planting which were used to build a border or protective hedge around that piece of ground.

There was the gathering of stones to build an altar or memorial to the LORD. Joshua 4:1-7

And then there was the gathering or harvesting of great and costly stones that were carved out of the earth, which were used to lay the foundation of the House of the LORD. 1 Kings 5:13-18, 6:7

Christ is gathering stones to build His church!

Brethren consider that the church of Christ is made up of lively and precious stones that Christ has gathered together out of the world to build His house.

In the building of Solomon's temple, the stones that were used to build it were quarried, (or excavated); carved out of the earth and removed from it; but before ANY of these stones were brought to the House of the LORD to be fitted into it, they were FIRST made ready by the stonesquarers.

1 Kings 5:18, 6:7

So EVERY STONE that was GATHERED to build the House of the LORD was FIRST, carved out of the earth, cut to fit perfectly in its place, and polished; THIS so that no tool would be put to it in its fitting into the LORD's house.

Proverbs 24:27: Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house

And so, in the church of Jesus Christ, none are fitted into the church until they have been quarried or excavated from the earth and out of the world by the Spirit of God; polished and made ready by the Word of God; only AFTER God's work are they ready to be fitted into the church.

The Spirit of God does His work of fashioning the hearts of His people quietly once they are within.

No hammers and tools are used in their fitting; no force fits into the church; when God removes us from the world, He makes us accepted in the beloved.

1 Peter 2:1-5, 1 Corinthians 3:6-17, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22

A Time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones.

Are you casting away the stones of sin out of your heart and life? Do you have a stony heart? Is your heart like an uncultivated and fallow field that is not ready to receive the good seed of Word with any deepness?

Are you a lively stone, gathered by the divine Stone Quarryman; cut out of the earth and the world and fitted

perfectly into the church of Jesus Christ?