



# Six Sermons on the Olive

## 4. Gathering without Planting

**Joshua 24:13**

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***“Of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat” Joshua 24:13.***

The Israelites, when they came into Canaan, entered into possession of a country which was thoroughly prepared for their occupation. There were cities walled, and houses exactly adapted for their use, and in habitable repair. The vineyards were in full bearing, and the hills terraced ready for cultivation. They were not like emigrants to the wild west, who have to clear forests and turn over prairies. They had not even to take possession of ruined cities, and to rebuild them; but, for the most part, everything stood waiting for them, “houses full of all good things,” and even “the old corn of the land” stored up for their immediate use. Moses had promised them that it should be so, and Joshua reminded them of the promise when it had become a fact.

As the Holy Spirit shall help us, *let us first learn from the text as it referred to Israel;* and then, taking the general principle here mentioned, *let us learn from their case to consider our own,* for we also enjoy that, which we have neither produced nor earned.

First, then, LET US LEARN FROM THE TEXT AS IT REFERRED TO ISRAEL. They entered into possession of wells which they had not digged, cities which they had not built, olive trees and vineyards which they had not planted.

In the first place, *this was a fulfilment of the ancient covenant.* Although all the details of these blessings to Israel were not mentioned in to covenant made with Abraham, yet they were virtually included; and Moses mentioned them very particularly in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, when he told to the people to beware lest they should forget the Lord who brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. So that, every time an Israelite walked out into his olive garden, and especially when he beat the tree to bring down its fruit, he could say to himself, “Here is the fulfilment of the promise made to our fathers.” If he

was a truly devout Jew, he would never gather the grapes from his vineyard, nor drink of the milk nor taste the honey which abounded in the land without recognizing that, as the Lord had spoken, so the Lord had done. Jehovah had not fallen short of his promise in any respect, but he had brought his people into just such a country as he had aforetime covenanted to bestow upon them.

Now, beloved, are not we also in very much the same position as Israel was with regard to many things around us? Why, even in temporals it is so. No good thing have we lacked, though we have sometimes feared that we should. As our days, our strength has been; and we can truly say that the Lord hath been mindful of his covenant, and that not one of his promises has failed. This is especially the case as we recollect the answers God has given to our prayers. He long ago gave the promise, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear;" and I, for one, have proved its truthfulness, and desire to bear my testimony to the faithfulness of the covenant-keeping God. Cannot you do the same, dear friends? Why, methinks you can hardly go into any room in your house, you cannot go to your beds, you cannot sit down at the table, you cannot walk along the street, and I know that many of you cannot come to your pews in this place without thinking, "Here are the tokens of my Lord's faithfulness, goodness, and truth." You who have lived to see sixty or seventy summers have witnessed great varieties of weather, but you can bear your testimony that, according to God's covenant, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night have not ceased. The outside world is hung with testimonies to the faithfulness of God.

***"His covenant with the earth he keeps;  
My tongue, his goodness sing;  
Summer and winter know their time,  
His harvest crowns the spring."***

But, dear brethren and sisters in Christ, when, we come to think of what the Lord has done within us, can we look anywhere in our hearts, or to any faculty of our minds without perceiving

evidences that the Lord is keeping his covenant? He said, “A new heart also will I give you;” has he not given it to us? What is that heart that sorrows over conscious imperfection, — what is that heart, that longs after fellowship, with God, — what is it but that new heart that he had given to us? The Lord also said, “A new spirit, will I put within you;” and what is that spirit of adoption whereby we cry, “Abba, Father,” what is that spirit which exults with delight, in the presence of God but that new spirit which he has put within us? Has he not kept his promise? Has he not given to us a sense of pardon, a consciousness of justification through faith in his dear Son? All the work of the Holy Ghost within the heart, if I were to speak upon it in detail, would only be a testimony that the Lord keepeth the covenant of his grace which he made with us in the person of Jesus Christ his Son even as he kept with Israel that ancient covenant which he made with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

***“Firm as the lasting hills,  
This covenant shall endure,  
Whose potent shalls and wills  
Make every blessing sure:  
When ruin shakes all nature’s frame,  
Its jots and tittles stand the same.”***

But, secondly, *these blessings were to Israel pledges of all the rest of the words of God.* In that sixth chapter Deuteronomy, where Moses speaks of the people having houses full of all good things which they did not fill, and wells which they did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees which they did not plant, he also commanded them to keep the words of the Lord in their hearts, to teach them to their children, to talk of them as they sat in the house or walked by the way, to bind them upon their hands and as frontlets between their eyes, and to write them upon the posts and gates of their houses. Do you see what was the drift of the argument of Moses? Was it not just this, — If God’s words of promise have been so rich and so weighty that they have brought Israel into the possession of the land flowing with milk and honey, should not Israel now guard most jealously *all* the words of God? I

know how the children of God learn to prize his promises. Their soul has lived by the month together upon a single promise, and it has been enough to feast their spirits; in another time of distress they have rested upon another promise, and in this way, through their experience, the promises have become exceedingly precious to them.

This kind of experience should teach us the preciousness of the Word of God as a whole so that we would not part with a single letter of it, and would not give up even the dot of an i or the cross of a t. I always deprecate the spirit which tries to tamper with the Word of God. I admire them who have sufficient knowledge of the ancient manuscripts of the Scriptures to tell us, as nearly as they can ascertain them, what were the original Hebrew and Greek words, but I dearly deplore that kind of spirit which, after the style of a destructive parrot, seeks to tear the Scriptures to pieces, and to rob the children of God of their priceless possession. Why, even a solitary divine precept is so precious that, if all the saints in the world were burnt at one stake, for the defence of it, it would be well worth the holocaust. If the whole of us went to prison and to death for the preservation of a single sentence of Scripture, we should be fully justified in making such a sacrifice. If I were to ask some of the broad school of the present day whether there is any doctrine in the Bible that would justify a person in being a martyr for it, I believe they would be compelled to answer, "No; the whole thing is a mere matter of opinion to us." But it is not a matter of opinion to us. The Word of God is to us an infallible revelation of eternal truth, and that part of it which has been already proved to be true to us is the seal and pledge that the whole of it is true and precious. When the Israelite walked in the olive garden and vineyard that he had not himself planted, and when he ate the olives and grapes, he would see in them pledges that all the words of God would be fulfilled as surely as that one promise had been.

Thirdly, these people, in entering into possession of vineyards and oliveyards which they had not planted, must naturally have regarded them as "*reminders of God's judgments upon sin.*" "I sit under this olive tree," mused the devout Israelite, "and I eat of its

fruit; I walk in this vineyard, and gather the grapes, and eat them. I did not plant these trees and vines, yet they are mine; how came I by them, Where are their original owners? They were slain by Joshua, at the command of God, because of the shameful abominations with which they filled the land.” And the lesson that a gracious man would learn from this would be, “I must, therefore, cleave closely to the one living and true God, and must not set up idols in his place; and I must diligently seek to know his will, and to do it, so that I may not offend the great Jehovah whose wrath is so terrible against evil of every kind.”

There is something, dear friends, in your position and mine, which is analogous to this. We live in a land of many privileges, yet we must not forget that other inhabitants were here before us, and that druidic and other abominations were swept away; and even since we have flourished as a nation, other nations have been destroyed. Let them be warnings to us, and let us not continue to grieve the Most High by national sins which might well bring down upon us the, righteous judgments of God. Especially do we need to be on our guard against the Popery that is seeking again to enslave and degrade this fair land of ours, and at all costs to defend that faith for which our forefathers suffered and died.

Then, next, these vineyards and oliveyards, possessed by those who had not planted them, were *claims upon them for service*. They were commanded by Moses to love with all their heart, and soul, and might that God who had given them the land flowing with milk and honey, and all the blessings that they found in it. All he asked of them was that they should worship him alone, dedicate to him the tenth of all their substance, and seek to make the whole land to be holiness unto the Lord. Because he had brought them up out of Egypt, and settled them, in Canaan, they were bound to be his' faithful servants; and, beloved, how many voices are calling upon us, who have been spiritually brought up out of Egypt, into the place of covenant privileges, to serve the living God! Let others serve whomsoever they will, we are bound to the Lord by the cords of a man and the bands of love. If you, my brother, forsook the service of the Most High, whose service could you enter where could you find a king or prince worthy of your

homage and devotion? There are some of us here to whom it is our very life to serve our God; his love hath won us, and will hold us fast for ever. If the Israelite, sitting under his olives and vines, felt that he was so deeply indebted to God that he must serve him, much more should you and I, sitting under the tree of life which beareth all manner of fruits, feel that we are not our own, but are bought with a price; and that, therefore, we will henceforth serve him who has given to us such priceless blessings. Do you not feel thus, beloved? I trust that the Holy Spirit will press this truth home upon your hearts, that it may be wrought out in your lives.

Now lastly, having spoken thus concerning the children of Israel, and somewhat also concerning ourselves, I want to bring out THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE AND ITS LESSONS FOR OURSELVES.

First as the Israelites ate the fruit of the tree which they had not planted, *we have many similar blessings which impose corresponding obligations upon us.* It would be impossible for me to go over the full list of the things which we have which are like cities which we did not build, like houses which we did not furnish, like trees which we did not plant, and garden plots which we did not till. The great bulk of the things that we have, and certainly all the best things, are pure gifts of God's grace, bestowed upon us freely out of his goodness and love of his heart.

In the very forefront we must put the great blessings of the covenant. We had nothing to do with our own election unto eternal life. He who chose us, chose us according to his own good pleasure. He knows why he chose us, but that reason is not known to us, and certainly cannot be found in ourselves. I never met with anybody who ever thought that he deserved to be chosen unto salvation; the very fact of the choice proves that it must have been all of grace. Then as to the blessed redemption which is in Christ Jesus, we have been washed in a fountain that we never filled, and we are this day clothed in a righteousness that we did not weave; nay, we did not even arrange one thread of that spotless robe. The blood and righteousness of Christ become ours purely by an act of his grace. It would be a most monstrous thing for anybody to say that he deserved that Christ should die for him; such a sacrifice as

he offered on Calvary's cross must have been one of pure unmingled grace. It would be a solecism in language, a contradiction in thought, even to suggest that there was some measure of deserving about any of those sinners for whom Christ died. Oh, no! This good olive tree is one that we did not plant, this vine is of the Lord's own right-hand planting, and the oil and the wine that flow from them are the gifts of God's grace. What I have said about election and redemption applies equally to adoption, sanctification, and all the other blessings of the covenant. These are fruits from a tree that we did not plant; God has given them to us freely of his grace.

This general principle also applies very specially to *the record of these priceless gifts of grace*, that Book of God which has been well called "the God of books." Every leaf of that Book is of more value than a bank-note for millions of pounds, every line is more precious than diamonds, and every letter is worth more than the costliest gems. You know well enough, dear friends, that you and I never wrote even a single letter of that blessed record, it is as much as we can do to understand it, and even that is not possible without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We can scarcely calculate how much we owe to those "holy men of old" who, under the Spirit's guidance, planted this vineyard from which we are continually gathering such rich clusters. Think too how much we are indebted, under God, to those who were the means of preserving this record and handing it down to us, often at the cost of their own lives. Every page of this Bible is, as it were, bespattered with the blood of the martyrs, yet we have not had to pay that price for it; we draw the life-giving water out of wells that we did not dig; and eat the fruit of the sacred tree that we did not plant.

Then, beloved, think of the ministry of the Word by which the Scriptures are opened up to us. How is it that we have the gospel preached to-day in this land without let or hindrance? We owe it largely to the humble men and women, tailors, weavers, and the like, ay, and to faithful ministers and even bishops who would not give up the truth in the dark days of our country's past history. That "candle" of which brave Hugh Latimer spoke to Bishop



Ridley is still alight in England, but we did not light it, nor have we had to suffer as they and thousands of others did to keep it alight. We scarcely realize how much we owe to those true heroes of the faith of whom Foxe tells us in his Martyrology, and to the many others whose names are unknown to us, and whose praises are unsung by men. When we talk of our open Bible, and of this free England of ours, and when we observe the ordinances of our holy religion as they were instituted by Christ himself, let us never forget that these are like the vineyards and oliveyards of Canaan which the Israelites did not plant, but of which they enjoyed the fruit.

Think also how much we owe to those who struggled and suffered to obtain for us the civil and religious liberty which is our heritage to-day. There are some of our old sanctuaries still standing, where our godly ancestors met to worship God five miles away from the nearest market town lest their minister should be fined or imprisoned for daring to speak publicly in God's name. Whenever I visit such places, the tears come into my eyes as I think of those good men still standing fast, in poverty and obloquy, and proclaiming that gospel which they have handed down to us. In the gracious providence of God, we enjoy liberty which I fear we do not value half as much as we ought; so, tonight, as we sit in these olive gardens and vineyards which we did not plant, and as we eat the comforting and refreshing fruit, let us bless the Lord for the happy lot which has been so graciously prepared for us.

I have thus mentioned a few of the many blessings that make up our goodly heritage, and you can each one apply the general principle to your own case. I want, in closing, to remind you *of the obligations imposed upon us by these blessings which have been provided for us*. I think that our first obligation is to humility. What have you there, worthy Israelite? "A good crop of olives." But how did you get those olive trees? You certainly did not plant them, and you did not build that fine house, nor lay out the vines that are growing all round it. Oh, no! you drove out the old owner, and God gave it to you for your own possession. You are living in a city that is enclosed by solid walls composed of massive stones,

but you did not build it, you would not even know how to move the stones, and set them so firmly one upon another. Ah! there were giants or giant-like men in those old days who did all that for you, and you are now virtually living in an almshouse which the great God of Canaan had allowed others to fit up for your reception, and that is very much the condition of every one of us. As for myself, I am a gentleman commoner dependent upon the daily bounty of God, and I suspect that most of you who are now present are in a similar position. Whenever we begin to grow proud because we are getting on in the world, how foolish we are, and the proudest man is the biggest fool; we are all fools when we are proud at all, and as we increase in pride we increase in folly. Have you, my friend, ten talents entrusted to you? What an anxiety it must be to you to use them aright for your Master! I am almost sorry for you that you have such a responsibility. Yet you are proud of it; then I am still more sorry for you. There is nothing to be proud of in being in debt, and you are in debt to your Lord for those ten talents, for he only lent them to you, and he will expect to receive from you an account of how you have put them out to interest on his behalf. The more we have, the more we are indebted to God; so, in proportion as his mercy to us rises, let us sink in our own esteem, and lie at his feet in adoring humility.

Our next obligation is to gratitude. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they brought very little with them. A miracle was continually being wrought, so that their clothes waxed not old during their long wandering in the wilderness; their food dropped daily from heaven, and water to quench their thirst poured out from the smitten rock; they were a company of paupers grandly sustained by their God; and when they entered into possession of the promised land, where were their title-deeds? They could not trace their ownership through a long line of ancestors, but every conveyance contained just one sentence, "The Lord thy God gave thee this land." They owed everything to the goodness of God, and therefore they were bound to be grateful to him; and we, who realize that every good thing that we have received has come to us by the free favour of our God, are bound to be grateful to him. I hope we are in a measure grateful to him; but when we contrast

our gratitude with the blessings which God has given us, we thank him for what we do feel, but we mourn that there is so little of it. May he give us grace to feel far more grateful than we ever yet have been!

*“Oh let my house a temple be,  
That I and mine may sing  
Hosanna to God’s majesty,  
And praise our heavenly King!”*

Our next obligation is to faithfulness. When a man receives an inheritance to which he has contributed nothing whatever, he is at least bound to keep up the estate. I have already reminded you that we have come into the possession of a Bible that we did not write, and a gospel that we could never have invented, and the ministration of the Word has been maintained in this land by those who have gone before us, so that we have come into this glorious inheritance like the heirs to a family estate. Now, the very least thing that we can do is to keep up the estate. Others died to preserve it intact for us, so let us not allow it to suffer so long as we have the care of it. If I had been one of the Israelites in Canaan, I think I should have sold to myself, “I will keep this place with the utmost care, so that it shall not be injured while it is in my charge. I have only a life interest in it, so I will pass it on to my successor in as good a condition as when I entered into possession of it.” So, beloved, let not the gospel suffer any loss by you. The Church of God is put in trust with it, so let not future generations have to say concerning this period in which we are living, “There was a sad degeneration at that particular time. Christians were not steadfast, then; they trifled with truth, they wanted something new. Worldlings called them fools, and they began to think they were. They ran after this philosophy and that, and left the grand old gospel of the grace of God, or adulterated it with the so-called wisdom of men, which is foolishness in the sight of God.” I pray that this may not be the case, but that God will raise up a great host of those who will maintain the truth unsullied, and hand it down to posterity uninjured. You did not plant the vines and olive trees, so do not cut them down. You did

not dig the well from which you are drawing water, so do not let anybody fill it up. Be faithful to God at all times; contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and let it never suffer at your hands.

There is also our obligation of service to coming generations. Who planted those vines and olive trees? Those who came before us; then let us plant more for those who will come after us. Other people maintained the truth in years gone by, and taught it to their children, and their children taught it to us, so let us teach it to our children that in due course they may also teach it to their children. We do not believe in oral tradition as an authority in the Church of God, but we do believe in oral instruction as a most important agency in propagating the truth of God. Books are too often left unread; we want living man to speak the living Word.

Do not any of you imagine, because your children can get good books, that you are exonerated from speaking to them personally about their souls. Mother, you are the best instructor that your child can have. Father, your loving, gracious talk with your boy will have more effect upon him than any book you can give him. Even the Bible itself he may leave unread when he goes from home; but if you have spoken earnestly and affectionately to him, and prayed with him while he was under your roof, he will not be able to forget that. The teaching of the children is the very bulwark of Christianity and Protestantism, and the teaching should be given to them by their own parents if they are Christians, or in our Sunday-schools and Ragged-schools if the parents are not themselves qualified to give it. Why, if we neglect the rising generation, surely our fathers' blessings upon us will curdle into curd. They taught us, and prayed with us; and their sires taught them, and prayed with them, and therefore there is a godly seed still in the land; so shall we now neglect to train our own children, or shall our Sunday-schools lack teachers, as is so often the case? I pray that it may not be so with you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. In whatever part of London or anywhere else that you dwell, search out the schools where teachers are wanted, and offer your service. I speak especially to you who have ripe experience, for it is not right that this important service should be left to boys

and girls. God bless the young people who are doing their part of the work so well; but why should not middle life with its vigour, and even old age with its sweetness and maturity, be found in the Sunday-school?

We have inherited from our ancestry what we are bound to pass on to our posterity; if I could, I would be a blessing to all succeeding ages as well as to the one in which I am living. So, brethren and sisters in Christ, do all the good you can while you live, and leave a gracious memory behind you when you are no longer here. Plant as many vines and olive trees as you can; for, though you may not be spared to gather the fruit from them, somebody will reap the benefit when you have been called to higher service. I like that kind of benevolence which does not always ask to see those whom it blesses, but which finds satisfaction in doing good simply for the glory of God. Try to be disinterested; do not say, "I must see something for my money." Oh, no, no! Your wondrous inheritance of innumerable blessings, for which you never toiled, came to you from the unseen source of divine, eternal beneficence, so seek to catch something of that same spirit by building cities, digging wells, furnishing houses, and planting vineyards and oliveyards for those whom you will never see until, by grace, you meet them in the general assembly and church of the firstborn in your Father's house on high.

