

A Time Of Refreshing By Robert Murray McCheyne

Classic Christian Writings:

"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses" (Isa. 44:3,4).

The above words describe a time of refreshing. There are no words in the whole Bible that have been oftener in my heart and oftener on my tongue than these, since I began my ministry among you. And yet, although God has never, from the very first day, left us without some tokens of His presence, He has never fulfilled this promise; and I have taken it up today, in order that we may consider it more fully, and plead it more anxiously with God.

For, as Rutherford said, "My record is on high, that your heaven would be like two heavens to me; and the salvation of you all, like two salvations to me."

Who Is the Author of A Work of Grace?

It is God: He says, "I will pour...." It is God who begins a work of anxiety in dead souls. So it is in Zechariah 12: "I will pour out...the Spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." And so the promise is in John 16: "When He is come, He will convince the world of sin...because they believe not on Me." And so is the passage of Ezekiel 37: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

If any of you have been awakened, and made to beat upon the breast, it is God, and God alone, who has done it. If ever we are to see a time of widespread concern among your families--children asking their parents--parents asking their children--people asking their ministers, "What must I do to be saved?"--if ever we are to see such a time as Edwards speaks of, when there was scarcely a single person in the whole town left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world--God must pour out the Spirit: "I will pour...."

It is God who carries on the work--leading awakened persons to Christ. "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh...and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 2:28,32) and again in John 16: "He shall convince the world of righteousness."

If ever we are to see souls flying like a cloud, and like doves, to Jesus Christ--if ever we are to see multitudes of you fleeing to that city of refuge--if ever we are to see parents rejoicing over their children as newborn--husbands rejoicing over their wives, and wives over their husbands--God must pour out the Spirit. He is the author and finisher of a work of grace: "I will pour...."

It is God who enlarges His people. You remember, in Zechariah 4 how the olive trees supplied the golden candlesticks with oil--they emptied the golden oil out of themselves. If there is little oil, the lamps burn dim; if much oil, the lamps begin to blaze.

Ah! if ever we are to see you who are children of God greatly enlarged, your hearts filled with joy, your lips filled with praises--if ever we are to see you growing like willows beside the watercourses, filled with all the fullness of God--God must pour down His Spirit--He must fulfill His word; for He is the Alpha and Omega, the Author and Finisher of a work of grace: "I will pour...."

First Lesson

Learn to look beyond ministers for a work of grace. God has given much honor to His ministers, but not the pouring out of the Spirit. He keeps that in His own hand: "I will pour...." "It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Alas! we would have little hope, if it depended upon ministers; for where are our men of might now? God is as able to do it today as He was at the day of Pentecost; but men are taken up with ministers, and not with God. As long as you look to ministers, God cannot pour; for you would say it came from man.

Ah, cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. One would think we would be humbled in the dust by this time. In how many parishes of Scotland has God raised up faithful men, who cease not day and night to warn every one with tears, and yet still the heavens are like brass, and the earth like iron.

Why? Just because your eye is on man, and not on God. Oh, look off man to Him, and He will pour; and His shall be all the glory!

Second Lesson

Learn good hope of revival in our day.

Third Lesson

Learn that we should pray for it. We are often for preaching to awaken others; but we should be more upon praying for it. Prayer is more powerful than preaching. It is prayer that gives preaching all its power.

I observe that some Christians are very ready to censure ministers, and to complain of their preaching--of their coldness--their unfaithfulness. God forbid that I should ever defend unfaithful preaching, or coldness, or deadness, in the ambassador of Christ! May my right hand sooner forget its cunning!

But I do say, where lies the blame of unfaithfulness but in the want of faithful praying? Why, the very hands of Moses would have fallen down, had they not been held up by his faithful people.

Come, then, you wrestlers with God--you who climb Jacob's ladder--you who wrestle Jacob's wrestling--strive you with God, that He may fulfill His word: "I will pour...."

God Begins with Thirsty Souls

"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty."

Awakened persons -- There are often souls that have been a long time under the awakening hand of God. God has led them into trouble, but not into peace. He has taken them down into the wilderness, and there they wander about in search of refreshing waters; but they find none.

They wander from mountain to hill seeking rest, and finding none; they go from well to well, seeking a drop of water to cool their tongue; they go from minister to minister, from sacrament to sacrament, opening their mouth, and panting earnestly; yet they find no peace. These are thirsty souls.

Now, it is a sweet thought that God begins with such: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." The whole Bible shows that God has a peculiar tenderness for such as are thirsty. Christ, who is the express image of God, had a peculiar tenderness for them:

"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isa. 50:4). "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John 7:37).

Many of His cures were intended to win the hearts of these burdened souls. The woman that had spent all upon other physicians, and was nothing better, but rather worse, no sooner touched the hem of His garment than she was made whole.

Another cried after Him: "Lord, help me!" Yet He answered not a word, but at last said: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Another was bowed down 18 years, but Jesus laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight.

Weary sinner! This is Jesus; this is what He wants to do for you: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." Only believe that He is willing and able and it shall be done.

Learn that it must come from His hand. In vain you go to other physicians; you will be nothing better, but rather worse. Wait on Him; kneel and worship Him, saying: "Lord, help me!"

Oh, long for a time of refreshing, that weary souls may be brought into peace. If we go on in this everyday way, these burdened souls may perish--may sink uncomforted into the grave. Arise, and plead with God that He may arise and fulfill His word: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty."

Thirsty believers. All believers should be thirsty; alas! few are. Signs:

(1) Much thirst after the Word. When two travellers are going through the wilderness, you may know which of them is thirsty, by his always looking out for wells. How gladly Israel came to Elim, where were 12 wells of water, and 70 palm trees!

So it is with thirsty believers; they love the Word, read and preached--they thirst for it more and more. Is it so with you, dear believing brethren? In Scotland, long ago, it used to be so. Often, after the blessing was pronounced, the people would not go away till they heard more.

Ah, children of God, it is a fearful sign to see little thirst in you! I do not wonder much when the world stays away from our meetings for the Word and prayer; but, ah! when you do, I am dumb--my soul will weep in secret places for your pride. I say, God grant that we may not have a famine of the Word ere long.

(2) Much prayer. When a little child is thirsty for its mother's breast, it will not keep silence; no more will a child of God who is thirsty. Thirst will lead you to the secret well, where you may draw unseen the living water. It will lead you to united prayer. If the town were in want of water, and thirst was staring every man in the face, would you not meet one with another, and consult, and help to dig new wells?

Now, the town is in want of grace--souls are perishing for lack of it, and you yourselves are languishing. Oh, meet to pray! "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19).

Desire to grow in grace. Some persons are contented when they come to Christ. They sink back as it were, into an easy chair--they ask no more--they wish no more. This must not be. If you are thirsty believers, you will seek salvation as much after conversion as before it.

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

To thirsty souls. Dear children, I look for the first drops of grace among you, in answer to your prayers, to fill your panting mouths. Oh, yes, He will pour. "A vineyard of red wine, I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" (Isa. 27:2,3). "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3).

God Pours Floods on the Dry Ground

The dry ground represents those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Just as you have seen the ground in a dry summer all parched and dry, cracking and open; yet it speaks not--it asks not the clouds to fall; so it is with most in our parishes. They are all dead and dry--parched and withered--without a prayer for grace--without even a desire for it. Yet what says God? "I will pour floods upon them."

Marks:--

1. They do not pray. I believe there are many in our parishes who do not make the habit of secret prayer--who, neither in their closet nor in the embowering shade, ever pour out their heart to God. I believe there are many who are dropping into hell who never so much as said: "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

Ah, these are the dry ground. Oh, it is sad to think that the souls that are nearest to hell are the souls that pray least to be delivered from it.

2. They do not wish a work of grace in their souls. I believe many of you came to the house of God today who would rather lose house, and home, and friends, than have a work of grace done in your heart. Nothing would terrify you so much as the idea that God might make you a praying Christian. Ah, you are the dry ground; you love death!

3. Those who do not attend to the preached Word. I have heard anxious persons declare that they never heard a sermon in all their life till they were awakened--that they regularly thought about something else all the time. I believe this is the way with many of you. You are the dry ground.

What will God pour out on you? Floods--floods of wrath? No; floods of grace--floods of the Spirit--floods of

blessing. Oh, the mercy of God! It passes all understanding. You deserve the flood that came on the world of the ungodly; but He offers floods of blessing. You deserve the rain of Sodom; but behold, He offers floods of His Spirit.

First Lesson

Learn how much it is in your interests that there should be a work of grace in our day. You are the very persons who do not care about lively preaching--who ridicule prayer-meetings, and put a mock on secret prayer; and yet you are the very persons who are most concerned.

Ah, poor dry-ground souls, you should be the first to cry out for lively ministers. You should go around the Christians, and on your bended knees, entreat them to come out to our prayer-meeting. You more than all the rest, should wait for the fulfillment of this word; for if it come not, oh! what will become of you? Poor dead, dead souls, you cannot pray for yourselves! One by one, you will drop into a sad eternity.

Second Lesson

Learn, Christians, to pray for floods. It is God's word--He puts it into your mouth. Oh, do not ask for drops when God offers floods! "Open thy mouth and I will fill it."

Effects

1. Saved souls will be like grass. They shall spring up as grass. So in Psalm 72: "They of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." Many will be awakened--many saved. At present, Christ's people are like a single lily amongst many thorns; but in a time of grace they shall be like grass. Count the blades of grass that spring in the clear shine after rain; so many shall Christ's people be.

Count the drops of dew that come from the womb of the morning, shine like diamonds in the morning sun; so shall Christ's people be in a day of His power. Count the stars that sparkle in night's black mantle; so shall Abraham's seed be. Count the dust of the earth; so shall Israel be in the day of an outpoured Spirit.

Oh, pray for an outpoured Spirit, ye men of prayer, that there may be many raised up in our day to call Him blessed!

2. Believers shall grow like willows. There is nothing more distressing in our day than the want of growth among the children of God. They do not seem to press forward--they do not seem to be running a race. When I compare this year with last year, alas! Where is the difference? There is the same weakness, the same coldness, nay, I fear, greater languor in divine things.

How different when the Spirit is poured out! They shall be like willows. You have seen the willow, how it grows--ceases not day or night--ever growing--ever shooting out new branches. Cut it down--it springs again.

Ah, so would you be, dear Christians, if there were a flood time of the Spirit--a day of Pentecost. Then there would be less care about your business and your workshop--more of prayer and of sweet praises. There would be more changes in your heart--victory over the world, the devil, and the flesh. You would come out, and be separate.

In affliction, you would grow in sweet submission--humility--meekness.

3. Self-dedication. "One shall say, I am the Lord's." Oh, there is no greater joy than for a believing soul to give himself all to God. This has always been the way in times of refreshing. It was so at Pentecost. First they gave their own selves unto the Lord. It was so with Boston, and Doddridge, and Edwards, and all the holy men of old.

"I have this day been before God," says Edwards, "and I have given myself--all that I am and have--to God; so that I am in no respect my own. I can challenge no right in myself--in this understanding, this will, these affections. Neither have I right to this body, or any of its members--no right to this tongue, these hands, these feet, these eyes, these ears. I have given myself clean away."

Oh, would that you knew the joy of giving yourself away! You cannot keep yourself. Oh, this day try and give all to Him! Lie in His hand. Little children, oh that you would become like him who said: "I am God's boy

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altogether, Mother!" Write on your hand: "I am the Lord's."

St. Peter's, July 1, 1838. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843), was a beloved Scottish Presbyterian preacher known for his godly character and effective ministry.