



# SUNDAY READING

## MORNING SERVICE.

### MORNING.

The Eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him. Trust in the Lord and do good. God is love; he that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

#### A Prayer.

Almighty God, Lord of peace and giver of rest, grant unto us at eventide as well as at noonday the light of Thy countenance, that we may see Thy truth, and our duty, as we behold Thy glory, and our way grow into Thy likeness. May we feel Thee to be near, and know Thee to be good, and that Thy mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. Lifting our hearts together, may we find Thee in our seeking, and with Thee all that is best and most abiding.

#### HYMN.

I was a wandering sheep,  
I did not love the fold,  
I did not love my Shepherd's voice,  
I would not be controlled,  
I was a wayward child,  
I did not love my home,  
I did not love my Father's voice,  
I loved afar to roam.

The Shepherd sought His sheep;  
The Father sought His child;  
He followed me o'er vale and hill,  
O'er desert waste and wild;  
He sought me nigh to death,  
Famished and faint and lone;  
He found me with the bands of love,  
He saved the wandering one.

Jesus my Shepherd is:  
'Twas He that loved my soul,  
'Twas He that washed me in His blood,  
'Twas He that made me whole;  
'Twas He that sought the lost,  
That found the wandering sheep;  
'Twas He that brought me to the fold,  
That still doth keep.

I was a wandering sheep,  
I would not be controlled;  
But now I love my Shepherd's voice,  
I love, I love the fold;  
I was a wayward child,  
I once preferred to roam;  
But now I love my Shepherd's voice,  
I love, I love His name.

Rev. Horatius Bonar, D. D.

#### Beatitudes.

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth in His commandments.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord, and in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord, they will be still praising Thee.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Blessed are they that are upright in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night.

Blessed are they that keep the testimonies of the Lord, and that seek Him with a whole heart.

Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.

#### SERMON.

##### Showers of Blessing.

By Rev. James Stalker, D. D.

Preached in Free St. Matthew's, Glasgow, Scotland.

"There shall be showers of blessing."—Ezekiel xxxiv., 26.

The word "blessing" is one which belongs to the vocabulary of religion. Irreligious people do not speak about blessing; but the people of God speak about it often. They say that by the blessing of God they have achieved this or that, or that with God's blessing they may be able to do so-and-so. In prayer there is no petition which a Christian man so naturally offers for himself as that God should bless him; and when he is thinking affectionately of others, he naturally asks God to bless them. Even as he takes his daily bread, he invokes on it a blessing. What does it mean? Take the simplest case of all—that to which I have just alluded, Whv, when we are about to partake of food, do we ask a blessing on it? It is an acknowledgment that, in addition to the natural property of food to sustain the bodily strength, there is needed a certain superintendence and favor of heaven, to maintain the health of the body, and that divine wisdom and strength are necessary to make a good use of health when we have it. In the same way when, in the morning, we ask God to bless the work of our hands during the day, as in scripture He often promises to do to those who ask Him, it is an acknowledgment that, along with our skillful planning, and our conscientious performance, there is necessary something else which we cannot define, but which we refer to God, to give us good success.

Men of the world call it good luck, but men of God and the word of God call it God's blessing. Thus Laban acknowledged to Jacob, in whose hands his flocks had multiplied so amazingly, "I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake;" and, when Joseph was administering the affairs of Potiphar, it is said, "the blessing of the Lord was on all that his master had in the house and in the field." There is a felicity in the way in which effort produces effect, and obstacles give way and circumstances co-operate with our wishes, which is beyond our reach, and in granting which the activity of God comes in. The farmer may faithfully discharge all the duties of the circling year, breaking up the ground, putting in the

seed, gathering up the weeds; but, when all is done, he is absolutely dependent on the influences of the skies: the frost and the wind, the rain and the sunshine, are as absolutely necessary co-operators, if he is to have a crop, as the workers whom he pays; yet for their aid he is absolutely dependent on heaven. And something similar to those unpaid gifts enters into all forms of human welfare and success. It is the blessing of God which maketh rich. The smaller prizes of life we may seek to win by our own exertions; but the golden and the crowning things are in the most literal sense gifts. We take them in silent awe, wondering why they have been given to us. Why did genius, or the intellectual power, which makes the solution of the problems of your daily life a continual triumph and delight, or beauty, or the charm of a ravishing voice, come to you and not to others? Why did love cast into your lap its priceless boon when others were passed by? Why did the tide of opportunity rise to your feet just when you were ready to take advantage of it? Even in temporal things there is a large element of unsearchable value for which there is no true and reverent name except the blessing of God.

But it is in the spiritual domain that this word has its true scope. If in religion there is any reality at all, then it is the grandest of realities. It is not only an existence which can sweeten and enhance all the elements of life, but it is in itself so valuable that he who possesses it is rich though he be stripped of all the other possessions which are the accepted badges of happiness. It is the pearl of great price, which a man may well sell all he has to buy. With what price would you buy it? It is like the sunshine, like the dew, like genius, like love. It is the blessing of God, and we have only in silence and lowly awe to take it when it comes. It is this that true religion begins, as St. Paul said to his hearers on the first day of Pentecost: "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." And it is this that religion grows from stage to stage, and from attainment to attainment, as St. Paul says to the Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Thus in both the temporal and the spiritual spheres, the true and the highest felicity of man depends on the blessing of God. Keeping this in mind, let us try to take fully in this great and precious promise about it, and let us consider first the copiousness of the blessing as brought out in the words, "There shall be showers of blessing."

secondly, its timeliness, expressed in the words, "I will cause the showers to come down in its season;" and thirdly, in its diffusiveness, expressed in the words, "I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing."

1.—The Copiousness of God's Blessing.

"There shall be showers of blessing."

If the blessing of God is so essential to human welfare, it may be asked why so few are possessors of a thing so precious? It is not because it is difficult to get at. It is not because God is penurious in granting His blessing. He has a blessing for every one of His children, and He is willing to give it bountifully. If the will and love of God could have free course there would be showers of blessing. The obstacle which hinders is in ourselves. Have you never, when enjoying any of the simple pleasures of nature, reflected with surprise on how little they are taken advantage of? You wander beside a stream on a summer's day, and its lullaby soothes your mind to rest. Strength goes up your sinews as you step among the grass or bracken; health fills your lungs as you inhale the caller air, scented with the breath of the honeysuckle or the hawthorn; the cark and care of business are forgotten as you watch the leaping trout and listen to the lilt of the song, and you say to yourself, Why is it that so few ever come to taste this fountain of pleasure? They are crying out for happiness, and here it is running to waste, and none come to visit it. You feel inclined to shout:

Come hither, brothers, come and drink,  
Drink sisters, and forget your woes,  
The stream of life with joy o'erflows,  
Why stand with parched lips on the brink.

There is not in nature a sublimer sight than the rising of the sun. There is no other which can suffuse the mind with deeper peace. Yet multitudes live and die without ever seeing this great sight once and the average man does not see it a score of times in a lifetime. The blessing of God is like this. It is so near, and yet it is so far on account of its negligenc.

What a peace, for example, is bred, and what a cool, firm grasp on life is given by the practice of spending a short time with God in prayer, and in the study of His word before beginning the work of the day. Yet, how few cultivate this source of blessing. We go blundering on in a continual heat of excitement, disappointment, and bad temper; and the blessing of a quiet mind is within our reach if we would take the trouble to lay hold of it. There are many who linger all their days outside the gates of salvation. They are never far from the kingdom, they know much about religion and they even appreciate it in a way; but they are never entering in earnest to push open the door and at all hazards enter in. They are near the greatest blessing of life, yet they come short of it. And there are those of us who really know the Saviour not aware that there is a blessing in His hand for us which we have not yet appreciated—a more perfect peace, a deeper joy, a whiter holiness? There may be only a step between being a commonplace and comparatively useless christian and being a spiritual power; yet we do not take the step. If today all who pass their days without any communion with God would begin this habit,

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**W. H. Fairall, Direct Kid Glove Agency,**  
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if all who were near the kingdom would press on, if all who are a step from full conversion and surrender would take that step, then today there would be showers of blessing. We are not straitened in God: we are straitened in our hearts.

#### II.—Its Timeliness.

"I will cause the showers to come down in his season." This refers to the well known fact that in Palestine rain fell only at certain seasons of the year. In our climate it falls at very uncertain intervals, some people might be inclined to say that it is falling always, and in other countries I found the idea quite current that it rains in Scotland every day. But in Palestine what was called the early rain fell in autumn, and what was called the later rain fell in spring. It was of the utmost consequence that at these seasons it should not fail.

If it did not come, the drought meant loss or even ruin to the husbandman: but if it came copiously it caused the fields to rejoice with abundant crops and made glad the hearts of the husbandman. No doubt our text refers, in the first place, to this temporal blessing, but it has also a wider scope; blessing of every kind may be said to come in its season. God is not, indeed, bound to times and seasons, and sometimes His blessings come when they are least expected, resembling in this respect the sudden showers of rain to which we are accustomed in our own variable climate.

But, as a rule, the blessing comes in the time of need, when the hearts of men are sighing and crying for it. This is God's season for which he waits. His blessings would not be appreciated if it fell on hearts unprepared to receive it. The rain might fall and do more good than a shower on the burning sands of Sahara. This is the use of special seasons, like the Sabbath or the sacrament. Men's attention is drawn away from world's things and their desires after divine blessing are stirred up. Are you expecting a blessing today? Is your heart longing for it? Then this is a promise for you: "I will cause the shower to come down in his season." You may be very near a great blessing, which would change your spiritual existence from an invalid, backsliding condition into a life of joy, of power, of unfaltering progress. In ordinary life, it is the little extra which makes all the difference between the weak and the strong man. It is to have health enough, and a little over, which ensures a happy physical existence. In business, there is all the difference in the world between having just enough capital and having enough and a little over. In art, there is necessary not only the perfect training which all can attain, but over and above it, the one ravishing note which subdues and intoxicates the audience. One such note makes a mutual friend of ours, though a success of many accomplishments, did not succeed in the pulpit. "Well," said he, giving a slight crack of finger and thumb, "the just wants that." Yes, that was exactly it. It is this something extra, this little more, that makes everything exceptional and excellent. And many of us are just needing this to make us holy, happy, creditable christians. It is very near at hand; it is just hovering above your head; one touch of faith, one act of surrender, one earnest prayer to God, and it is yours. Why should you not be saved? Why should you not be baptised with power? "Now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation."

III.—The Diffusiveness of God's Blessing.

"I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing." Those on whom God's blessing descends are made blessed thereby. They live in a state of blessedness. This is more than happiness. Happiness is a comparatively shallow thing, and it is liable to a thousand accidents. But blessedness is a state of deep satisfaction which the changes and chances of fortune cannot disturb. The happiness of some people is rather to be pitted than envied, because they are made happy by such questionable things. But blessedness is derived from a pure as well as an inexhaustible source. Yet this is not the best result of the blessing of God—that those on whom it falls are themselves blessed. It is a far nobler thing which is promised in our text: "I will make them a blessing"—they shall be the means of making others blessed.

From of old this has been the noble prerogative of the people of God. When God gave Abraham His blessing, this was distinctly predicted as the result of it: "In thee and in thy seed shall the families of the earth be blessed;" and the blessing of Abraham descended from age to age, from father to son, this high ambition was kept alive in the hearts of all who inherited the faith of Abraham. In christianity this element has come to the very front. What is it to be a christian? Is it to be blessed? Is it to be filled with peace, the joy, the life, the power of God? No, it is to be so filled with these that the vessel runs over, and all that are round about get the benefit. As our text says, "I will make the place round about My hill a blessing."

This is a text to try our christianity by. Has the sound of the gospel not only reached us, but sounded out from us, and a testimony which has arrested and awakened others? Has the candle of God not only been lighted within us; but do its rays cast their kindly gleam across the waters to assist those who were wrestling with the dark and troubled sea? Is a severe test. But some can stand it. There are christian souls which move through the world surrounded with a halo of blessing; wherever they go the places round about are brightened with their presence. There are christian homes which radiate happiness. To enter them casually is to obtain a higher conception of what home might be. There are christian congregations which you cannot enter without feeling that the power of God is there, and streams of blessing flow out from them over the city, the country, and the world.

#### HYMN.

Oh for a desert place, "with only the Master's smile;"  
Oh for the "coming apart," with only His "rest awhile;"  
Many are "coming and going" with busy feet,  
And the soul is hungering now, with "no leisure so much as to eat."

Not that I lightly prize the treasure of valued friends,  
Not that I turn aside from the work the Master sends;  
Yet I have longed for a pause in the rush and whirl of time,  
Longed for silence to fall instead of its merriest chime.

Longed for a calm to let the circles die away  
That tremble over the heart, breaking the heavenly ray,  
And to leave its wavering mirror true to the Star above,  
Brightened and stilled to its depths with the quiet of "perfect love."

Longed for a sabbath of life, a time of renewing of soul,  
For a full-orbed leisure to shine on the fountains of holy truth,  
And to fill my chalice anew with its waters fresh and sweet,  
While resting in silent love at the Master's glorious feet.

—Frances Ridley Havergal.

#### Benediction.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

#### FRAGMENTS OF THOUGHT.

He who thinks for himself, and imitates rarely, is a freeman.—Klopstock.

The greatest truths are the simplest; so likewise are the greatest men.—Hegel.

O Lord, let me have anything but Thy crown, and anything with Thy smile.—Cecil.

The greatest pleasure that I know is to do a good action by stealth, and to have it found out by accident.—Lamb.

If the arrow of prayer is to enter heaven we must draw it from a soul full before. Prayer is nothing without earnestness and resolution.

Usually the greatest boasters are the smallest workers. The deep rivers pay a larger tribute to the sea than shallow brooks, and yet empty themselves with less noise.—Secker.

We shall have two wonders in heaven—the one, how many come to be absent whom we expected to find there; the other, how many are there whom we had no hope of meeting.—Tillotson.

A higher end no creature in any world, however exalted, can propose to itself than the glory of God; and a lower one, the humblest believer in all God's family should never seek.—J. A. James.

There is a moral dumbness, and the Saviour heals this when He makes us new creatures. The man had a tongue before, but not a religious one. Now he speaks—of God, for God, and to God.—Jay.

As to the value of conversions, God alone can judge. God alone can know how wide are the steps which the soul has to take before it can approach to a community with Him, to the dwelling of the perfect, or to the intercourse and friendship of higher natures.—Goethe.

Mother and child—what more beautiful sight is there in the world? What more beautiful sight, and what more wonderful sight? What more beautiful? The man must be very far from the kingdom of God—he is not worthy to be called a man at all—whose heart has not been touched by the sight of his first child in its mother's bosom? The greatest painters who have ever lived have tried to paint the beauty of that simple thing—a mother with her babe—and have failed. One of them, Raffaele by name, to whom God gave the spirit of beauty in a measure in which he never gave it, perhaps, to any other man, tried again and again for years, painting over and over that simple subject, the mother and her babe, and could not satisfy himself. Each of his pictures is most beautiful—each in a different way, and yet none of them is perfect. There is more beauty in that simple, every day sight than he or any man could express by his pencil and his colors. And yet it is a sight which we see every day.

Religion is exemplified not by books, nor by the gospel. It is not in Matthew, nor Mark, nor Luke, nor John. It is in you. It is not in my sermons. It is in such holy living as makes men say, "Let me come among you." Is that the effect of churches? Do you live among your children, among your men, among society, among those that hate and abuse you, with such a sweet, smiling faith that when they have testified you in every way they will say that that is the genuine stuff? "I thought it was pyrites, but I see it is gold. Give me some." When men pray for inspiration to preach the gospel, and God undertakes to give it to you, do you strike Him in the face? Do you turn about and fight Him? "Why," you say, "has my child been taken? Why has my property been taken?"

A petition comes from the old neglected pasture land that is all surrounded by cultivated fields. It asks the husbandman, "Why am I neglected? Make me fruitful." He first hauls out the noisome dung and spreads it over the field. The field turns up its nose and says, "Fugh! that wasn't what I prayed for. I prayed for flowers and received dung." The husbandman takes oxen and his plough, and rips and tears in all directions. The field gives it up and cries out, "Miserable field that I am!" Nevertheless, out of that comes corn and wheat and flowers. But by that time the field forgets them. You ask God to increase His graces, and when He puts on the dung you turn up your noses. You pray to Him to open your hearts to the miseries of the world. It that means lying on a sofa in a parlor and reading sentimental stories of misery, all right; but are you willing to crucify yourself, to take misery, not as a pinch of salt to make something else taste better, but are you willing to be made nobler, more patient, burden-bearing, self-denying, counting every loss here as bearing compound interest there?—Becher.

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