

*Waiting on God for Rain.*

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

*ON A TIME OF*

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## WAITING ON GOD FOR RAIN.

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### JEREMIAH XIV. 22.

*Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait on thee; for thou hast made all these things.*

**T**HIS chapter is called 'the word of the Lord, which came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth,' or concerning the drought, as the seventy Greek interpreters render the word. This drought, and the distresses which ensued, the prophet thus describes; "Judah mourneth, and the cities thereof languish; the people are black with famine; they cast themselves on the ground, and their cry is gone up to heaven. Their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters; they came to the pits and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty. They were ashamed and confounded; they covered their heads, because the ground is chapt, for there is no rain on the earth. The plowmen were ashamed and covered their heads. The hind also calved in the field, and forsook her young, because there was no grass; and the wild asses stood in the high places; they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes also failed because there was no grass."

The distresses of the famine were increased by the terrors of the sword; for it was a time of war; the country was invaded and Jerusalem besieged by the Assyrian army. Hence the prophet says "If I go

into the field, then behold the slain with the sword; and if I go into the city, then behold them, who are sick with famine."

This dreadful and complicated calamity was the occasion of that humble and fervent prayer, which the prophet makes in the latter part of the chapter. "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing? We looked for peace, and there is no good; for a time of health, and behold trouble. We acknowledge, O God, our wickedness and the iniquities of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us for thy name's sake. Remember; break not thy covenant with us."

Why he thus applies to God for relief, he in the text assigns two reasons; one is that relief could come from no other source; the other is that God could easily grant it. "Are there any among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou He, O Lord God? Therefore we wait on thee, for thou hast made all these things."

The words of our text present us with these two observations, That God is the only author of rain; and that for this blessing we must wait on him.

That the agency of God is the cause of rain the prophet proves by two arguments. 1st, the insufficiency of all other supposed causes; and 2dly, the sufficiency of God's power manifested in the creation of all things.

1st. The insufficiency of all other causes.

The pretended divinities of the heathens were insufficient to cause rain.

The objects to which the heathens paid their devotions, and which they regarded as the authors of all good, the prophet calls *vanities*, to express their utter inability to perform any of those things, which were ascribed to them.

The worshipping of stocks and stones, and images

graven by art and man's device indicates a degree of ignorance and stupidity, into which we never should have supposed men capable of falling, had there not been undeniable proofs of its reality. The ridiculous folly of this species of idolatry the prophet exposes with all the force of sacred satire ; for it is too palpably absurd to deserve a grave and sober confutation. " The customs of the people are vain ; for one cutteth a tree out of the forest with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold ; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not. They must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them, for they cannot do evil ; neither is it in them to do good. The people are altogether brutish. The stock is a doctrine of vanities. The gods which have not made the earth and the heavens, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens."

Nor was there less absurdity in paying adoration to particular animals, or to the ~~inanimate~~ bodies ; for tho' these are not the works of ~~the hands~~, yet they are in themselves as remote from a power to bestow blessings on men, as the most despicable piece of inanimate matter.

There was, however, a species of idolatry practised among the heathens, a little more refined, tho' not at all more pious and rational. This was the worship of *demons*, or of the *souls* of departed *heroes*. These were the *Baalim*, so often mentioned in scripture, as the gods of the heathens. These, as well as images and animals, the prophet rejects, as having no share in the government of nature ; for he says, " There are not ANY among the vanities of the gentiles, that can cause rain."

It appears, indeed, from the book of Job, that satan, when God gave him permission, had power to disturb the atmosphere and raise storms ; but as he is only a creature, all his power must be depend-

ent on the will, and subject to the controul of the Creator. And from the wisdom and goodness of God we may be assured, that he never has, and never will put into the hands of such a malevolent spirit so important a branch of his providence, as the government of the seasons.

That created spirits, as well as men, may be made instruments of God's providential designs, and may, according to their superior capacities, be employed in a higher sphere, than mortals, there is no reason to doubt. But to suppose, that the regulation of the seasons, or the management of any part of the general government of the world, is committed to their hands, and left to their direction, without the superintendence of God's wisdom, power and goodness, is to suppose, that he has quitted his throne, and laid aside his sovereignty.

That evil spirits, as well as good, are absolutely under God's controul, we are abundantly taught in scripture, and particularly in the book of Job, in which we see that Satan could do nothing to afflict that good man, without particular permission was given him. We may, therefore, justly wonder at the easy credulity of some Christians in giving credit to the fabulous and romantic stories, which they hear, concerning the works of evil spirits; such as their granting favorable winds to seamen on certain conditions; and their watching over hidden treasures, and raising storms to defend them. If such relations were founded in facts, they would prove, that evil spirits have the government of the elements in their hands. The prophet expressly teaches us, that the vanities of the heathens cannot give rain, and consequently, that they cannot raise winds and storms, except when they are specially empowered and permitted by the great author and governor of nature. On the same ground we must reject many idle reports relating to astrology and witchcraft; such as the prediction of men's fortunes,

and other events, which have no connection with the settled course of nature, but depend on human liberty and the superintending providence of God ; and least of all should we give credence to such strange works, as not only surpass created power, but are impossible in their nature. By this superstitious credulity we make too near approaches to the most impious part of pagan idolatry, and give an honor to evil spirits which they do not deserve.

As the vanities of the gentiles cannot cause rain, so “neither can the heavens give showers.” The prophet here teaches us, that showers depend not merely on *natural* causes, but primarily on a divine agency.

That natural causes have an operation in the production of droughts, rains, and changes of weather, there is no doubt. But these causes cannot possess an independent power to produce the effects.—The same divine hand which gave them existence, gives them their efficacy. Nature is not an independent agent : It is only the manner in which God governs the world. “Fire, air, water, and other substances have their distinct qualities ; but it is the great Author and Creator of these substances, which impresses these qualities upon them. God warms us with his fires, enlivens the earth with his sun, moistens it with his rains, moves the atmosphere with his winds and purges it with his lightnings.

The virtues of all natural causes are as much the work of God, as the causes themselves. They have no more power to put themselves in motion, than to originate their existence. When and where the winds shall blow, the rains shall fall, the lightnings shall blaze and the thunders roar, and in what measure these and other natural causes shall operate, God only can direct. Hear the Almighty’s challenge to Job ; “Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven ? Hast thou set the dominion thereof in the earth ? Canst thou lift up thy voice in the clouds,

that abundance of waters may cover thee ? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are ?" These are all under God's command. "Fire and hail, snow and vapour and stormy winds fulfil his word." "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened. By watering he wearieth his thick cloud ; he scattereth his bright cloud. And it is turned about by his counsels, that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. Hearken unto this ; stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God."

Rain is so common and familiar a phenomenon, that we see it with little attention, and receive it with little gratitude ; but when we contemplate it seriously, we cannot but be filled with wonder.

Who invented this expedient for watering the earth ? Could it have entered into the human mind—or into any created mind ? Had the expedient been suggested, who would have thought it practicable ? By what power in nature are the waters detached from seas, lakes, fountains and rivers ? How are they raised into the air, and then suspended and condensed ? How are they wafted from the places of their exhalation, and spread over vast tracts of territory ? What prevents their immediate descent in the spot from whence they arose ? How are they sifted down in small drops to refresh the fields ? Why fall they not in cataracts to deluge the ground ? When a drought has continued in one place, until the moisture is exhaled, why does it not continue still ? Rains must be brought hither by the winds. But when the winds have run long in a particular current, what natural cause can divert them into a new current, that they should bring to the parched soil supplies of water from distant regions ? Who

provided the vegetables with orifices to receive, and with tubes to convey the waters into all their parts? Who bade the leaves expand to catch the refreshing dews and showers? By what contrivance do the waters, imbibed by the roots, mount upwards, and spread themselves through all the branches? Are these the operations of blind chance—the works of mere mechanism? No; they plainly indicate the hand of an intelligent Being.

As the agency of God in causing rain is manifest from the insufficiency of all other causes; so,

2d. It is summarily deducible from this single consideration, and self evident truth, that he is the Creator of all things. “Art not thou He, O Lord God, for thou hast made all these things.”

The world bears plain marks of a temporary existence. Every thing relating to it shows, that it is not eternal. If it ever had a beginning, there must be a Creator. And this Creator must be an eternal, self existent, all perfect Being. “The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” If God made the world, he made all things, which belong to it. We can no more conceive, that any one thing, than that every thing, should exist independently of God. If God created all things, then he gave them their qualities, disposed them to their places, and impressed on them their motions. If he made the world, he governs it; and if he governs the world in general he inspects every part of it, and superintends and directs every event which takes place, so that not a shower falls to the ground without him. “He has not left himself without witness, in that he does good, gives rain and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness.”

If rain is one of those good gifts, which come down from God; then, as the prophet teaches us,

II. We must wait on him to obtain it. “We will wait on thee, for thou hast made all these things.”

Waiting on God implies *trust* in him. If in any cases we are to trust in God, it must be especially



in those cases, in which we can do nothing ourselves. For the accomplishment of some of our designs, there are means, which God has put into our hands, and which, according to his constitution, have a tendency to effect the designs in view. Here we are to apply the means, trusting in God for their success. But for obtaining the showers of heaven, there are no natural means in our power. The causes of rain are absolutely beyond our reach. We must therefore, for this important blessing, trust wholly in that Being, who made the world, commands the elements, and directs all the motions of nature.

We must wait on God with *prayer*. For nothing is more obviously reasonable, than that impotent and dependent mortals, in all their wants, should make known their requests to Him, who is infinite in wisdom, power and goodness.

But if God is good, of what use is prayer? It is useful as a mean to prepare us for the reception of needed favors. It makes no change in God; but it may make a change in us. Prayer is the desire of the heart directed to God. And if it is reasonable, that we should desire the things which we need, and that we should direct our desires to Him on whom we depend, then it is reasonable, that we should pray. God has commanded us to pray always, to call upon him in times of trouble, and particularly to seek the blessing of rain in a time of drought. And he has encouraged us to hope, that if we pray to him, confess his name, and turn from our sins, he will hear and forgive and send rain on the land.

“Trust in the Lord, and *do good*, says the Psalmist, and verily thou shalt be fed.” Sincere prayers are accompanied with a penitent sense of unworthiness, and humble resolutions of obedience. “If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.” The prophet makes his prayer for rain with a humble confession of sin. “We acknowledge our wickedness and the iniquities of our fathers; do not abhor us for thy name’s sake.” God promises this blessing on condition, that his people

return to him ; and it was only on this condition, that Solomon presumed to ask it. " When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because the people have sinned against thee, if they turn from their sin, then give rain upon thy land."

We must seek rain in a way of *justice* and *charity* to one another ; for to implore God's blessing on our labors, while we withhold from our fellow men their dues, is adding impiety to unrighteousness.— God threatens his ancient vineyard, that he would command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it, because he looked for justice, but behold oppression ; for righteousness, and behold a cry."

And we must do justice, not only to one another by rendering to all their dues, but to God also by attending on his instituted worship, and by imparting our substance to maintain it. " Honor the Lord with thy substance, then shall thy barns be filled with plenty." Many, while they are solicitous to obtain the showers of heaven on their fields, defraud God of the small share of their property, which he demands for himself. " Will a man rob God ?" says he to his ancient people, " yet ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." They ask, " Wherein have we robbed thee ?" God answers, " Ye have robbed me in tithes and offerings ; therefore ye are cursed with a curse. Bring ye now all the tithes into the store house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

We must wait on God with patience and submission. Droughts may answer important purposes in the *natural* world, which we cannot foresee. We are incompetent to judge, what proportion of moisture and drought, heat and cold, is best for our own fields ; and more incompetent to determine what measure of each is most suitable on the general scale. We should rejoice that the government of nature is in the hands of unerring wisdom.— Droughts may be important in a *moral* view, to re-

mind us of our dependence on God, of our duty to him, and of our obligations to one another, which, while the course of nature is uniform and unvaried, we are exceedingly prone to forget.

We must wait with *hope*. If the world was governed by fate, or by mechanical causes, without a superintending providence, we might despair of rain, whenever we found that nature had fallen into a course, which diverted the clouds and waters from us; for what counter cause could reverse this course? But since there is, at the head of the universe, a good and wise Being, who suspends, directs and countermands the motions of nature, as he pleases, we may, in the most unpromising seasons, hope for the return of his smiles, and trust him to give us showers, or provide for us in such other ways as his wisdom sees best; and we may proceed in the regular line of our duty, committing ourselves to him, as a faithful Creator.

We must wait on God with hearts prepared *thankfully* to receive returning favors. If every good gift comes from him, in every gift we must acknowledge him. Rains and fruitful seasons are such common favors, that we are apt to view them as coming of course, to calculate upon them as certain events and to ascribe more to our own prudence and industry, than to the providence of God. Droughts teach us how impotent are all our powers and how vain are all our labors, without the blessing of God. While we seek rain by prayer, we should prepare our hearts to receive it with gratitude. And God grant, that we may soon hear this call to thanksgiving and praise.

The present drought is much the most severe, that we, in this vicinity, have known for more than forty years. It is now almost even weeks, since there has been a shower. It is a happy circumstance, that the commencement of the drought was not at such a period as to cut short our early mowing and our former harvest. The latter mowing and harvest, how soon soever rains may be sent, will doubtless be exceedingly diminished. God grant, they may not

be totally destroyed, nor the seeding of our fields for the coming year be entirely prevented.

We certainly ought to view this drought as a great calamity. But if we apply it to awaken those pious sentiments and virtuous resolutions which are too easily lost in times of plenty, it will then become a blessing. For many years past, our husbandry has been remarkably successful, and our wealth has abundantly increased. It becomes us to enquire, whether our gratitude to God, our zeal for his worship, our charity to one another, our liberality to the needy, have been answerable to the blessings which we have received.

When we see our fields parched with thirst, our pastures drying up, our corn and grass withering away, let us enquire, whether Religion is not declining around us, and the fruits of holiness decaying in our souls. We think it time to call on God to send rain on the earth: Is it not time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon us? The prophet Hosea speaks of some in his day, who, in a time of drought, not only prayed in God's house, but also howled on their beds and in their private apartments; but, he says, tho' they cried, they cried not to God with their hearts, and tho' they returned, they returned not to the Most High; for they assembled themselves only for corn and wine, and they rebelled against him. In such a time as this it becomes us to call on God for his kind and refreshing showers. But if we have nothing higher in view, than to obtain the fruits of the earth, that we may eat and drink, enjoy the pleasures of sense, and accumulate worldly property, there is no more piety in our praying for rain, than in our going to market with our corn. While we pray for earthly goods, we must seek the grace of God to dispose us to a just and charitable use of them, to awaken in us pious and thankful affections, and to enliven our souls in all the duties of religion. We must pray, that God would not only revive our fields with his showers, but revive his

work by his heavenly influences, and in wrath remember mercy.

We see our dependence on God for the success of our literal husbandry, and we implore his blessing. We are as dependent on him for the success of the spiritual husbandry. "Paul may plant and Apollos water; but it is God who gives the increase." Do we also pray, that he would multiply the seed sown, increase the fruits of our righteousness, and make all grace abound toward them who sow the seed, and toward those who receive it?

My brethren, the seed of God's word is sown among you, and though with a feeble, I hope, not with a sparing or negligent hand. Does it enter deep in the soil, take root and bear fruit? I fear, that some seeds fall by the way side—some among thorns, and some in rocky places; and there is some ground on which none appears to fall. Is there much ground so well prepared, that the seeds sown, take root and bring forth fruits in plenty?—Let all take heed how they hear, and take heed that they do hear. Though God has withheld the rain, he has not withheld the word. But some withhold themselves from it. Though he has not sent a famine of the word, yet some create a famine to themselves by neglecting the word. If men starve in the midst of plenty, who makes the famine? Man, it is true, cannot live by bread alone; there must be a heavenly influence to render it nourishing. Is this influence withheld? It is because men seek it not, or improve it not when it is sent. The promise of the Spirit is more full and explicit, than the promise of rain; if we seek the latter rather than the former, it is because we have the latter chiefly at heart. A spiritual is more calamitous than a natural drought. The showers of grace are more important, than showers of rain. Seek those with earnestness, and prepare yourselves with diligence to receive them. 'Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. It is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness.' 'Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.

His going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come to you as the rain ; as the latter and the former rain on the earth.'

Act with the same wisdom in your religious, as in your literal husbandry. "The husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be patient therefore, brethren, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

You think, perhaps, that in the religious life you are under great disadvantages, because the promised blessings are distant and out of sight, and are wholly objects of faith ; and you imagine, that if these, like the blessings of your husbandry, were near and visible, you should more sensibly feel their influence, and be more actively engaged to obtain them.

But in this matter you reason erroneously. Look around on the men of the world. They are industrious in their callings, patient in their labours, cheerful in their self-denials, persevering in the most unpromising seasons ; and yet they walk by faith as really as you do ; for the object which they pursue is as really future and invisible, as that which you are pursuing.

The man who sows his grain, sees not the harvest but waits in hope of seeing it. The merchant who commits his treasure to the ocean, has not an immediate return, but he expects future gain. So it is in almost all secular labors. The object which prompts men to undertake, and encourages them to endure them, is as really distant and out of sight as your object is. And you have this advantage above the men of the world ; your object is more certain, more important, and perhaps more near. Worldly good is small, temporary, and transient : Heavenly happiness is infinite, permanent and eternal. Earthly designs are subject to a thousand disappointments, which human prudence and power cannot foresee or prevent. Who could foresee the present drought, or prevent it, if it had been foreseen ? How greatly will this derange our worldly schemes : But it need not at all disconcert your

spiritual designs. In the pursuit of your eternal interest there is no hazard, no uncertainty, but what arises from your own negligence and inattention. You think it difficult to walk by faith in the religious course; but in your secular business you walk by faith every day. Were it not for that faith, which looks forward and realizes things, at present, unseen, all your worldly labours would immediately cease. The gospel in requiring you to live by faith, requires no more than what you find necessary, and think reasonable with regard to this world. However difficult a life of faith may seem, you never make a difficulty of it in any thing but religion. What man ever thought of complaining, that seed time and harvest did not come together—that when he had sowed his grain, he could not immediately turn about and reap back? Here every man has long patience, and waits, till he receives the former and the latter rain. Exercise equal faith and patience in religion, and you will inherit the promises. It is natural to ~~man~~ to look forward, and seek future good: The fault is, that with the eye of natural faith we look not far enough, nor at the right objects. Let us live by that faith, which looks above and beyond this world to the heavenly state. There we shall behold better things than we can find here. And to obtain those we have surer means, than we have to obtain the riches of the world. It is the direction of the Apostle, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth; seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory. Look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal."