

AND ALSO I HAVE WITHHELD THE RAIN FROM YOU

"And also I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest—and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city—one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered." Amos 4:7

How powerless we are as regards the rain that falls from the sky! Who can go forth when the sun is shining in its brightness and bid the rain to fall? Or when rain is falling, who can go forth and restrain the bottles of heaven? He who gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, also turns a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of those who dwell therein.

Equally sovereign is the blessing that God gives to the preached gospel. He holds the blessing in his own hand; it is his to give, and his to withhold. If he blesses, it is because he has promised it; but when, where, and to whom it shall come, is at his own sovereign disposal.

Yet what do we naturally desire when the earth is parched up for lack of rain? Knowing that there is rain stored up in the clouds above, and that when it does come it will produce beneficial effects, desires, if not prayers, go up that it may fall.

In fact, the earth itself, parched and dried up by heat, the very ground itself, by the fissures and clefts which are made in the soil by a burning sun, silently, mutely, but still imploringly calls upon the rain to fall. Every crack you see in July is a silent mouth asking the rain to come down. The withered herbage, the cattle lowing in the field, the dried-up ponds and brooks, are all imploring, though not a word is

uttered, that rain may fall.

So in grace. The parched, withered, dried-up feelings of the soul are all so many mute mouths imploring God's blessing to come down. No, the very hardness, barrenness, and sterility felt in our heart when the blessing of God does not rest upon the word, are so many mute appeals to the God of all grace that his blessing would attend the word to our conscience.

I say this because you may think sometimes that you are not praying for the blessing of God to rest upon the word, because you may not be using vocal prayer, or are not favored with a spirit of grace and supplications. God sees your needs, and to those needs he has a kind regard. The babe need not, and indeed cannot ask in so many words for food. The cry of hunger is enough. Or even if too weak to cry, the mother knows the child is hungry by its restless movements; and she is as pleased to give the nutritious food as the babe is to receive it.

So you must not always measure the strength of your prayers by the mere vocal utterance you may give to them. The heart-searching God reads your needs, knows your desolate case, and sees your barren condition. As in the kingdom of his providence he views from his holy throne the parched ground, and sends down showers because he sees its need; so in the kingdom of his grace he looks upon the parched condition of his people, and gives the spiritual rain because he knows they need it.