

## Four Links in the Chain of Grace

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"These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth."  
Psalm 106:27, 28, 29, 30

Jehovah is the God of nature, the God of providence, and the God of grace. In these three distinct departments, as regards his general government, there exists a striking analogy. The analogy is this: the existence and intermixture of good and evil in each, with general good as the result of the whole. Let me explain my meaning a little in detail.

In *nature* we see darkness and light, winter and summer, seasons barren and fruitful, creatures deformed and beautiful, animals noxious and useful; and yet good evolved out of creation as it at present stands. Night and day, winter and summer, sun and storm, all work together to produce as the result a general benefit to the inhabitants of the earth.

In *providence*, we see sickness, health; adversity, prosperity; poverty, wealth, continually intermixed, and often succeeding each other; and yet, out of this strange intermixture good evolved to the objects of God's mercy.

And when we come to the department of *grace*, we view the same analogy. We see sorrow, joy; darkness, light; death,

life; conviction, consolation; hidings of God's face, manifestations of mercy; despondency, hope, unbelief, faith; enmity, love—*good* and *evil* in the department of grace, as well as that of nature and of providence; and yet, all in a mysterious manner working together for good to those who love God.

Living, as we do, in a fallen world, there exists a necessity that there should be this good and evil. If there were no evil, it would not be a fallen world; if there were no good, God would cease to be the governor of it. But if evil so prevailed as to overcome good, God would be thrust out of his own sovereignty, and Satan would successfully usurp his throne.

These remarks may perhaps throw some little light upon the passage before us, inasmuch as the words taken literally seem rather to refer to the works of creation and providence than to the work of grace. For the Psalm dwells much upon the glory of God in *creation*; and immediately preceding the words of our text, speaks of "the great and wide sea wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan whom thou hast made to play therein." Then, turning to the great Creator and Preserver of all, the Psalmist bursts forth in the words of our text, extolling his *providence*, "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season," &c.

But, viewing the analogy which I have been endeavouring to shew, may we not apply these words in a spiritual, experimental sense to the work of grace upon the soul? I think, if the Lord enable me to open up the words as I see them, we shall find that there is in them a sweet applicability, not only to the departments of creation and providence, but also in a special manner to the department

of grace.

We may observe in the words before us four distinct features, corresponding with the four verses of which the text consists; and those I shall briefly name.

I. *Waiting*. II. *Giving*. III. *Withdrawing*. IV. *Renewing*.

I.—*Waiting*. "*These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.*" It is true, literally, that all the created beings of God's hand wait upon him. Upon him they are dependent for life and breath, and all things. But do they wait upon him in a way of intellect or consciousness? Is not their waiting a mute waiting? Must we not, then, rather adapt the words to the state, posture, and experience of the children of God? "*These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.*" How true of, how applicable unto, the experience of God's family! For you will see, if the Lord enable me to draw out the words of our text, a chain running through the whole. You will find the work traced out from the beginning, and carried on through its successive changes, so as to embrace and comprise the whole work of grace upon a saved sinner's conscience.

"*These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.*" Until the Lord is pleased to begin a work of grace upon the soul, we know nothing of what spiritual "meat" is. Having no spiritual appetite, we cannot long after spiritual food. The things of time and sense, the charms of sin, the occupations of life—these are the food of our natural mind. We have no sight to see, nor taste to relish the food that God has in reserve for his hungry and thirsty people. The Lord, therefore, in the opening up of his ministry laid this down as one of the first marks of spiritual life; "*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness;*" implying that to hunger and thirst after

righteousness is one of the first things that God bestows upon the soul. Now until this spiritual appetite is given, till the eyes are opened to see, till the heart is divinely wrought upon to feel, we have no spiritual hungering and thirsting after the provisions of God's house. But it is with the quickened soul as with the awakened and returning prodigal; "a famine arose in that land, and he began to be in want;" and when the famine came, and he began to be in want, "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine ate." Yet he could not do so; a new appetite was given him; he hungered after solid food; and he remembered there was "bread in his father's house and to spare," whilst he was "perishing with hunger." Thus one of the first marks and evidences of spiritual life, one of the first effects of a divine work upon the soul is to hunger after heavenly food. This food is Christ, for he is "the bread of life;" and the soul really convinced of sin, stripped of all righteousness, brought down into the dust, and made to long, hunger, and thirst after the manifestations of Jesus, is waiting upon God for "meat" which he alone can give. This the text expresses, pointing out thereby the first work of grace upon the soul: "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season."

But God has appointed to give this "meat" at a due season; that season cannot be hurried nor delayed; no human power can bring it forward, and no human power can keep it back. Knowing this, and not being able to bring food into his own mouth, to make Christ precious to his own soul, or feed upon the manna till God brings it into his heart, a convinced sinner is one that waits upon God. "These wait all upon thee." And they wait upon him, knowing that he is able to give them that "meat" which their souls hunger after. They wait in secret prayer; they wait with many a sigh and cry at the footstool of mercy. They wait with many longings,

breathings, and supplications; and they wait until often their eyes seem to fail with weariness. The Lord has declared these "blessed;" but the blessing seems so long before it reaches them, that despondency will often work in their minds whether the blessing will ever come to their souls. But knowing that nothing short of the blessing can really satisfy or save, that God must be the sole giver of it, and being encouraged by the promises, and by the blessed Spirit in their heart as "the Spirit of grace and supplications," to pour out their soul before God, they are brought to wait, to look, long, beg, and supplicate till the Lord graciously appear.

Now these early dawnings of grace upon the soul; these waitings upon God for him to be gracious; these hungerings, thirstings, pantings, and desires, seem, to my mind, set forth in the first words of our text: "These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season."

And in what a gracious posture does it represent the children of God—*waiting upon him!* If they wait upon him, they must have *faith*; because without faith they cannot believe he is a God able to bestow this food upon them. If they wait, they must have *perseverance*; for they have to endure repeated and heart-oppressing disappointments. If they wait, they must have *patience*; for patience in this, as in other respects, must have its perfect work. If they wait, they must have *the spirit of prayer*; for only by a spirit of prayer are they enabled to wait. If they wait, they must have some *hope* that in due season God will confer the very blessing upon them; though "hope deferred maketh the heart sick." They must also have a measure of *love* for the food they are longing after, or else they would not desire that God Himself would put that food into their mouth. And thus, though not themselves able to trace out the work of grace in a clear, definite manner, yet we see—as in the case of an infant, all

the members of a man—so in these infants, these babes of grace, all the members of the new man, which are afterwards more completely developed.

II.—I pass on to our second point, which is *Giving*: "*That thou givest them they gather. Then openest thine hand, they are filled with good.*" This is true in providence. The beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, all have food appointed for them. None die of hunger; and what God gives them, in that sense they gather. But how much more true is this of the spiritual and experimental food given to and gathered by a child of God?

Two things, I think, may be seen as connected with this *giving*: *first*, the first droppings of mercy, favour, and love upon them: "*That thou givest them they gather.*" And *secondly*, the more open hand of God, when the blessing comes into their soul in a fuller, more blessed, and wider sense: "*Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.*"

1. "That thou givest them they gather." There is some allusion perhaps to the manna in the wilderness as descriptive of the way in which he drops tokens, favours, smiles, glances, and glimpses on his waiting people. "That thou givest they gather." Nothing else: they cannot take any consolation from man; they cannot feed upon anything that the creature produces: their long famine has completely famished them out of house and home. Gifts, abilities, creature righteousness and native strength, human wisdom, fleshly holiness, these are the husks which they cannot feed upon. Christ alone in his sweet manifestations, in his dying love, in his beauty, and blessedness, in his rich suitability, is the food God has provided for them; and as they wait upon God, from time to time he lets fall out of his eternal bounty crumbs and drops, sips and tastes of the mercy that he has

stored up in Jesus. Thus sometimes a sweet promise comes into their heart; sometimes their case is described in a sermon; sometimes at the throne of grace they find liberty and unexpected access; the word of God is opened up in some special manner; or some melting feelings are produced in their soul, perhaps on a sudden, by a discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this God "gives." His truth falls; a word drops; a blessing comes with it; there is a sweetness in it to their taste; a reality, a light, a life, a power, a blessedness, a heart-melting, soul-softening suitability accompany God's truth. This they "gather" reverentially, believingly, humbly, affectionately, hopefully, lovingly; they store it up in their heart; they ponder over it; they feel a blessedness in it; they take it home with them; it goes to sleep with them; it rises in the morning with them; it takes them through the day; they have got, felt, enjoyed something; some liberty, some love, some assurance, some manifestation, some testimony, something which has come from God into their souls, something really felt as a blessing in their hearts. This God has given perhaps when they least expected it: when almost worn out with waiting, despairing and fearing the blessing would never come; but it comes unexpectedly, overwhelmingly; and being given, they "gather" it gratefully and happily, and their hearts are softened, blessed, and melted by the goodness and felt mercy of God to them.

2. But this is not all. "*Thou openest thine hand.*" What the Lord has yet given (if I may use the figure) he gives but with his fingers; he drops a little here and there; but the great blessing is in his hand, lodged and locked up there; and they unable to obtain it. Yet they try hard; they say, 'I am not satisfied; these sips, these tastes, drops, glimpses, glances, breakings in, meltings down, are not sufficient.' 'O,' they say, 'this is not a complete deliverance; this does not break off all my legal chains; this does not fully assure me that I am one

of the Lord's people; it is so soon gone off; the feeling did not last; it was too transient; I want something greater, more powerful, more abiding, more heart-assuring, something of which I can say more certainly, This is indeed of God.'

"Thou openest thine hand." And when at last the Lord opens his hand, gives largely out of it, and blesses the soul fully, completely, and perfectly, he pours out of his hand all that is contained there, which is, Christ in his blessedness, in his fulness, blood, righteousness, and love. When God opens his hand, and gives thus fully, liberally, largely, and blessedly, then they are "filled with good;" they seem to want no more; the Lord has filled and blest their souls; they are overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness; they feel they have all they want; enjoy, if possible as much as they can enjoy; and their souls are exceedingly happy and blessed in the Lord.

III.—But is this to last? Are they to swim down this sea of prosperity? Does the Lord mean this to be their happy lot unto the end? Now comes the change. I observed in my outset that in the ways of grace, as well as in nature and of providence, there were changes. Good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, and these intermixed and blended. So there is a withdrawing, our third point. *"Thou hidest thy face."* The Lord withdraws himself; he suspends his favours; he does not manifest himself as in times past; he withholds the light of his countenance. And what is the consequence? *"They are troubled."* The soul has lost its God, lost its Christ, lost its happiness and blessedness; therefore no wonder that it is troubled. If God hide his face, a soul must needs be troubled that knows his presence and smiles.

1. But what makes God hide his face? He does not always



give us the reason of these matters; but, generally speaking, it is the intervention of some sin twixt God and us. I do not mean open sin. God forbid; but some backsliding of heart, some idol set up in the chambers of imagery, some departing from the fountain of living waters to hew out the broken cisterns that hold no water. At any rate, whether it arise from this or not, whether it be the exercise of pure sovereignty on the part of God, or traceable to anything provoking in us—whatever be the cause, the change does come; he does hide his face. And when God hides his face, the soul is troubled, because it has lost everything that makes life happy and blessed; it has lost everything that really made life worth living for, and death worth dying for.

It is a good thing that the soul is "troubled;" it shews the reality of the work of grace upon the heart, that the hidings of God's face, and the withdrawals of his favour, do give trouble. It shows a tenderness of conscience, a singleness of eye to God's glory, and that the visitations of God's favour make up the soul's only happiness. One cannot understand a man's religion who feels no trouble when God hides his face, when he has no access to his throne. If he can be as happy without God as with him, as happy in God's absence as in his presence, in darkness as in light, it does not seem as if he knew much of a present God—a God of light, and liberty, and love—as though he knew much of communion with God, access unto him, intercourse with him, making him his all in all. Where money is a man's god, he does not part with that so readily. Disappointments in worldly things are not taken so coolly. If a clerk go to a merchant or stockbroker, and tell him of a heavy loss, he does not take it as a matter of indifference, as a professor would take the loss of God. "Where the treasure is, the heart must be." If the soul is really healthy to God, thirsting after him, or has ever enjoyed him, it must needs feel the withdrawing of his presence, the

hiding of his countenance. Thus, when the Lord hides his face, they are "troubled."

2. But there is another expression, which at first sight seems scarcely applicable to the work of grace; and yet I do not see how we can carry out the chain without taking this too into consideration. And I can myself, I think, see a light in it in which the dealings of God seem reflected. *"Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust."* Is not God our life? Is he not the author of our spiritual breath, as well as of our natural breath? But when he takes away the spirit of prayer, when he removes the enjoyment of his presence in the heart, when he takes away himself who is the breath of our very life, then we die; the soul sinks in its own feelings, into sensible death; it dies as to any enjoyment of God's presence, as to any feeling realization of his favour. Compared with its former lively feeling, its feelings are now those of death. "Free among the dead," the Psalmist says, "like the slain that lie in the grave." If God's presence be life, his absence is death. If the enjoyment of God's favour be the breath of the soul, the denial of God's favour is the death of the soul. If he take away our breath, in taking away himself—if he take away our life, in taking away his presence—if he take away our enjoyment, in taking away the source of the enjoyment, we die. And, in a state of death, we are no longer living and lively as before. There is not that going out of living desires from the soul; there is not that living communion with God; there is not that breathing in his presence; there is not that moving in the enjoyment of his mercy. "We die" in that sense, and "return unto our dust." This is true of man, naturally and spiritually, returning in death to his dusty nature, his corruptible material. When the soul then dies down, there is an opening up of its corruptions before unknown, of its dusty nature before unfelt; of the dryness, hardness, barrenness, and wilderness state of the

human heart before unseen. This is a returning to its dust, a falling back upon nature, a sinking into the dust of death; "a putting our mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope;" an acquaintance with our base original; a sight and sense that if there be any good, it is wrought by God in the soul; if there be anything heavenly, it must come direct from heaven. Thus, in grace as in nature, when God withdraws our breath, "we die, and return unto our dust;" and there we lie as unable to revive and renew our own souls as we were unable in the first instance to quicken or regenerate them.

But what a close and thorough dependence upon God does the text bring out! How it casts the creature into that position where God is everything! How it makes the soul hang upon God as the needle hangs upon the magnet! How every movement of the heart is here referred to God! If it have food, it must be by "waiting" upon God; if it gather food, it is by the "giving" of God; if it be filled with food, it is by the "opening of God's hand." It is wholly a pensioner upon him! the creature is nothing, and meant to be nothing; it is dependent upon him, in whom it lives, moves, and has its being. So he that gives the breath, takes away the breath; he that grants the life, withdraws the life—not fully, not finally, but in a spiritual, experimental sense, in the feelings of the soul, in the exercises of the mind, in the conclusions we draw, in the workings of our heart. We die not actually (for God is unchanging and unchangeable; his love fails not, and the work of grace upon the soul fails not; the ebbings and flowings are in us, not in him); but as regards our feelings, and the experience of the saints, there is that death in the soul, that sinking into the dust of carnality and corruption as if all grace had perished within. This made Heman feelingly cry, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?"

Thus, though this view may appear at first sight rather a wresting of the passage, as though the taking away of the breath could only refer to the withdrawal of the natural breath, and the dying spoken of could only be the death of the body; yet, when you view the whole in a spiritual sense, when you see in it the links of one extended chain, you will observe (I can; and if I do not convey the meaning of it, the failure is in me) how they are connected. But if we do not apply these words in an experimental manner to the withdrawing of life and feeling, and of that breath of God whereby the soul living under the power of the Spirit lives upon him, this passage seems to come into the text in a manner utterly isolated from the rest, and to have no reference to the work of God upon the soul.

IV.—We pass, then, to our *fourth* point, which is, the *Renewing*: "*Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth.*" This does not bear a literal meaning. Take these words as applicable to God's dealings in nature, can you make them tally with the preceding verse? "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created." Have you seen that in creation? When you have lost a son, a daughter, a wife, a husband; when God has taken away their breath, and they have died, and returned to their dust, have you seen God send forth his spirit and recreate them? No: you commit their mortal remains to the earth in the hope one day of a better resurrection. But, taking the passage spiritually, viewing the whole in an experimental light as descriptive of the work of grace upon the soul, as one extended chain, we then see the revival of the soul out of that state of death into which it has fallen.

Bear with me a few moments while I trace out these links; it

is the harmony of the links that makes the beauty of the chain. First, the soul is wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and "waits" upon him. Next, there is "the giving of food" to that waiting soul; and the blessed feelings that spring up in the heart when God "opens his hand." The third link in our chain is God's hiding his face, "withdrawing" his presence, removing his favour, taking away the sense of his love, with its effect upon the soul, which is to make it die away, to feel all life and happiness gone, and return to the dust of corruption in which to lie, putting its mouth there, and feeling little else but the workings of an earthly, dusty nature. But we cannot leave the soul there; therefore comes in the fourth link, which completes the chain, "the revival" of that soul from which the breath has thus been withdrawn. In experience, it is one consistent chain: we see the separate links. Viewed naturally, the chain is broken: viewed providentially, there is at present little connection. But view it spiritually, as descriptive of the work of grace upon the soul, we then see the four beautiful links—the *waiting*, the *giving*, the *withdrawing*, the *renewing*—these all forming one consistent chain. I am compelled, therefore, by the necessity of the case, as well as by the beauty I see in the passage, by the blessedness of it, and the striking description it gives of the work of grace upon the soul, to view it in this experimental light, though not utterly rejecting all other.

1. "Thou sendest forth thy spirit." The word translated "spirit" and "breath" is the same. It was the withdrawal of the "spirit" or of the "breath," that caused the soul to sink into death and dust. The soul in itself had no strength or power to rekindle the flame; it could only die when God withdrew his "spirit;" it could only return to its dust when the creating hand ceased to maintain its life. Inability and helplessness are stamped upon the creature; but they are only learnt in experience, and they never are effectually learned until we

know both sides of the question. It is having gathered what God has given; having received what he has bestowed; having had access unto God, that makes the soul feel the contrary. It is enjoying the pure breath of God that makes it feel the withdrawing of that breath; it is the actings of life that make it feel the sinkings of death; it is the heavenly-mindedness, the sweet spirituality, the holy affections, the tender breathings, that live in the soul when God is breathing into it his favour and mercy, that make it feel sensibly the change when he withdraws his breath, and it dies at his feet, when all its comeliness is turned into corruption, and it drops into its native dust.

But the Lord does not leave the soul there. He withdraws his breath that it may learn it lives *in* him, and lives *to* him. But he "sends forth his spirit," and breathes once more into the heart. It comes into the soul, generally speaking, first as "the Spirit of grace and supplications." This, I think, is sweetly pointed out in the Pilgrim's Progress. Christian and Hopeful are in the castle of Giant Despair; but before they got hold of the key of promise, they continued in prayer and supplication the greater part of the night. Here was the first inspiration, as it were, of the breath of God. Where the breath of praise was taken away, the breath of prayer was much taken away with it. The breath of faith, the breath of hope, the breath of love, the breath of desire, of enjoyment, and of feeling—all these were taken away when God withdrew his breath; and deadness, coldness, barrenness, and carnality took their place. Now the Lord has to revive this work; and as the withdrawing of his breath made the soul die in a spiritual sense, it is the sending forth into it of that spirit again which alone can make it revive.

"Thou sendest forth thy spirit." How free, and yet how sovereign! Until the "Spirit" comes, it is powerless; it lies in

its dust, unable to live, to act, to feel. But, as a free sovereign act of grace, God "sends forth his spirit." And what follows? "They are renewed." There is a renewal of everything in the soul; there is a blessed revival of the life, power, grace, and favour of God in the heart; and this by his "Spirit." Not by their own works, not by creature doings, duties, or merits, fastings, tears, or prayers, nor anything that the creature can do or has done, but as a free sovereign act of God—as free and as sovereign an act as when he called the world into being, or as when the Spirit brooded upon the face of the waters in original creation—as free and sovereign as the first work of grace upon the soul—as all the acts of God are in nature or grace.

"Thou sendest forth thy spirit." Where does the creature here put in his finger? Nature is silent here. The Spirit of God has put nature into its true place. "Thou sendest forth thy spirit" as a free sovereign act; and when the spirit comes into the soul, then they are "created," or "recreated." Indeed it seems to be altogether a creation; for the work of God upon the soul is a creation; "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature," or 'creation.' And after a long death in the soul, when the Lord "sends forth his spirit," is it not a creation? a work so wholly of God, a work so wrought by his own hand, a work so thoroughly distinct from that of the creature, that it is felt and known to be a creation? But how at times the soul is almost hopeless that this will ever take place! Say that you, in times past, have enjoyed somewhat or much of the presence of God; but you have lost that presence; your soul does not now enjoy what it once enjoyed; you are often dark, very dark—dead, very dead—barren, very barren; and your religion as to life, feeling, power, seems much to have sunk away. Yet, at times, there is a sighing and a murmuring in your soul that things should be so. You want God again to appear; you cannot rest in this spot; you cannot be satisfied

to be as you are; and though shut up in much darkness, unbelief, and deadness, yet every now and then there is a breaking forth, a sigh, or a cry, 'Lord, appear for me; revive my soul, and bring me out of this state; do not let me be what I am, and where I am; bring me into some clearer, sweeter, nearer access, into some closer communion with thyself; and let me not be such a cumberer of the ground, such a mass of sin and death before thee!' Have you not some such breathing of soul? Now the Lord "sends forth his spirit," and effects this creation; a "returning," as Job speaks of it, "to the days of their youth," a revival of the old flame, a renewing (as we read, "thou renewest the face of the earth") of the soul. It has been winter; frost has chilled it; snow has covered it; all vegetation has been frozen up; dark gloomy days above, and icy scenes below. But the Lord "sends forth his spirit, and they are created." Every grace rises up under his creating hand; and "he renews the face of the earth." There is a renewal of the soul, a revival of former feelings, a bringing back of things long forgotten, a restoration, a resurrection, a recreation of every blessed feeling of the heart.

And this, perhaps, is delayed till the close of life. The experience of many of God's people seem to be this. Called in early days, they waited under conviction till the Lord appeared; the Lord, then appearing, blessed their soul, and gave them striking testimonies, in which they walked, sang his praises, and spake to the glory of his name. But as they grew up into middle life, worldly cares, family anxieties, business, and many other things seem to bring a damp upon their souls; God took away their "breath;" he suspended the operations of the Spirit; they were not favoured as in times past with the sweet manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love. And they died. Their heavenly life which they formerly enjoyed—the praises and thanksgivings—with all



their lively, vigorous, active feelings seemed to die down to a stump and wither away in the soul, nipped by the frost, cut off like an herbaceous plant, with scarcely anything but the root left, and that covered perhaps by snow and ice. Thus they were little comfort to themselves, little honour to the church to which they belonged, and though generally believed to be good people, and in time past to have had an experience, yet, as far as any outward usefulness or inward comfort was concerned, there was little of one or the other. Are there not many like this—members of churches, advanced in life perhaps, or in middle age? But at the close of life, perhaps, they may have an affliction which brings them to a death-bed; in mercy God sends forth his spirit; then they are "created;" all their past coldness and deadness, all their carnality and barrenness are removed; they become to themselves and they become to others new creatures; there seems to be a pouring in of new life; and, like the plants I have been speaking of, they spring up from the old root with increased strength and beauty. Thus, the Lord "sends forth spirit;" they are created; he renews the face of the earth; he blesses their soul; they leave a sweet witness behind, and their happy spirits leave their poor crumbling tabernacles of clay for mansions of eternal joy.

Thus, our text, if I have given it a right interpretation, may embrace in its folds many, if not most of God's living family, taking them from the very beginning of the work of grace upon their hearts, and closing them up in the last manifestations of God's mercy, whereby he lands them safe in a happy eternity. Thus it corresponds in some measure with the "early and the latter rain"—the "early rain," which is in the autumn in Eastern countries, corresponding to "that which thou givest then they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good;" "the latter rain," in spring, corresponding with "thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are

created, and thou renewest the face of the earth."

Thus, we find in these four verses four links of a Christian experience. Which link is in our hand? which link in our heart? If you are a child of God you will be found in one of these four verses; and that is the reason why this evening I took so long a text. I would not break the chain; I would not take one link; but I wished to take the whole comprehensive chain that I might wind it around living souls here present, and find some link to hang on each individual neck. Which link hangs upon you?

Let me, just by way of recapitulation, point out the four links. In the first dealings of God upon the soul, there is a "waiting" upon God: "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season." Do you think that God has made you a waiting soul? Is the work of grace thus far begun as to make you know that Christ alone is the food of the soul? Has it taught and brought you to wait upon God to give you Christ, to manifest him, to bring a sweet sense of his love and blood into your soul? If you have this first link, you will in time have the whole chain; for he that has one link in this divine chain has all.

But there may be those who can go beyond this, who are now "gathering" what God gives. And this is one of the sweetest spots the soul can be in, to be gathering what God gives. O, those early days, that spring-time of the soul, when we are gathering all that God gives, when there is scarcely a sermon in which and out of which we do not gather something! O, blessed days, when we can scarcely open God's book without gathering manna from it, scarcely go upon our knees without getting some access to God, scarcely speak to a Christian friend without feeling love burning in our bosom. Happy days! "the day of espousals," the spring of the

soul, the time when the Lord is first gracious, gives freely, opens his hand, and satisfies the soul with his mercy! Perhaps some few here may thus now be favoured. May the Lord keep you, if it be his will, as long as possible in this state! You cannot have a happier; you may have a state more profitable, but not more blessed. May the Lord keep you long there, gathering what he gives; he opening his hand, filling you with goodness, and blessing your soul; and you thanking him for his mercy. This is one of the sweetest spots the soul can be in till it lands in heaven.

But, prepare yourselves for a change. The whole analogy of God is change. We should always like to have it beautiful summer, but winter will come. We should like the day to be always long, and the sun bright; but the short dark days will come, and the sun remain behind the cloud. We should always like prosperity, but we shall have it not. We should prefer an unmingled cup, but it will not be so. God will see good to withdraw his presence, hide his face, and not shine upon your soul as before. Then you will die in your feelings, sink at his feet, and as one dead return to your dust, be a miserable wretch, having nothing but gloomy feelings working in your mind, and little else than the dust of corruption in your heart. There perhaps you may be muddling for years. God in mercy keep you from that.

But, in due time, if the three links are of God, you will have the fourth. God will not leave you there. He will bless your soul again; for his love is from everlasting to everlasting; and he that began the work will carry it on. He will "send forth his spirit," as an act of his free, sovereign grace, and recreate as it were every sweet feeling, every blessed affection, and every sense of enjoyment. He will banish the dark clouds of winter, thaw the ice and snow that has covered your bosom, make a second spring, and renew the face of your soul, as in

nature he renews the face of the earth.

Now, among our Aged Pilgrims, whose cause I am to plead this evening, we may have some of those who have passed through the three successive stages, and are waiting for the fourth, or are now enjoying it. This is often delayed perhaps to the closing scene of life; but yet it will come at last. What a mercy that God will not leave the work of his hands, will never give up Ephraim, and will never abandon Judah! Whom he loves, he loves unto the end, and saves with an everlasting salvation.

To be enclosed, then, within these links is to be enclosed in the chain of eternal love. To know anything of them is a mercy. If we are God's children, we shall be able to say, 'I have experienced this one; in this spot at least I am.' And if we can say this with a feeling heart, we may believe God will go on to work in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure."