

THE FALLING RAIN AND THE BUDDING EARTH

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London,
on Lord's Day Evening, July 29, 1849

"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:10, 11

I wish three things this evening. First, that this chapel was larger so as to accommodate the people who have come to hear. Secondly, that the Lord would fill my soul with life, light, liberty, and love, and enable me to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. And thirdly, that he would accompany the word with a divine power to your heart, and seal it with his own living witness on your conscience. My first wish is clearly impossible to be granted, and, therefore, you must put up with a little crowding; but if we have the two last fulfilled, we shall not have met altogether in vain; and if the Lord do not grant them, I shall speak and you will hear to little real purpose. May we then be enabled to lift up our hearts to the Lord, that he would be with us, to bless us indeed, so that good may be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

God has spoken great things in the scripture concerning his *word*. We read, that he has "magnified it above all his name;" that is, he has exalted his truth and faithfulness in revealing and keeping his word above all his other manifested perfections. Upon this word all things depend in nature and in grace. By it came *creation* itself. "Through faith

we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). By the same word comes *preservation*, as Peter tells us, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the *same word* are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7). By the same word is the *supernatural creation* also effected in the regeneration of the soul, and the creating of it anew in Christ Jesus. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). By the same "word," *wounding* comes; for "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). By the "word," too, comes *healing*. "He sent his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."

In our text, we find the Lord still speaking very highly of his word, and illustrating it by a very sweet and blessed figure. This figure, I need hardly remind you, is that of the rain and snow from heaven, with their fertilizing effects on the earth. In endeavouring, then, as the Lord may give me strength and ability to open up the mind and meaning of the Spirit in the words before us, I shall not adopt any formal division of my subject, but shall make as it were a running commentary upon the text, explaining the natural figure, and shewing its accomplishment in the word of his grace.

The figure that the Lord here makes use of is very simple, obvious to the meanest capacity, exceedingly suitable, and, when spiritually realized, above measure sweet and blessed.

He compares his word, whether as revealed in the scriptures, or as spoken by the mouth of his servants, to the *rain* and

snow that fall from heaven; and the *effects* which the rain and the snow produce on the earth, he compares to the effects and fruits that are produced by his word applied to the soul.

I.—The first leading idea of the natural figure is the *descent* of the rain—"it cometh down from heaven."

In this we may well admire the *wisdom* of that wonderful provision whereby rain is stored up in what the Lord himself in Job calls "the bottles of heaven." What tons of water are suspended in the clouds that float over our heads! What were the earth but a dry, parched rock, unless fertility were stored up for it in these floating reservoirs? "Thy paths" (that is, the clouds, the tracks, as it were, of his chariot wheels in the sky) "drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side."

The *sovereignty* of its descent is another marked feature of the natural rain. God challenges Job to stay "the bottles of heaven" when opened, and he might have challenged him to open them when stayed. Whatever juggling tricks "the rain-makers" at the Cape may practise, no magician can lift up his wand to the sky, and command the clouds to break down in showers upon the earth. It falls as God would have it to fall. The sovereignty of God is displayed as much in the weather as in any other way. "And also I have withholden 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). So with the word of God. Just as in the exercise of divine sovereignty he causeth rain to fall, or not to fall; so, in the exercise of the same sovereignty, he blesses the word to one and not to another.

Again; the *suitability* of the rain to the earth is as much a marked feature in the provision of God as the wisdom and the sovereignty of this wonderful contrivance. And we may observe the admirable adaptation of means to end and of end to means. How suitable is rain to the soil, and how suitable the soil to rain! Without rain earth would be a waste. Without a soil to absorb it, rain would bring but a deluge. Without rain earth would be worthless; without earth rain would be useless. So with the word of God and the soul of man. If there were no soul of man to be saved, the word of God would be of no use; if there were no word of God, the soul of man would be of no worth. What the rain is to the soil, what the soil is to the rain, the word of God is to the soul, and the soul to the word of God. This mutual fitness runs through the whole work of grace. Thus there is a suitability between the distressed mind and the promise; between the guilty conscience and the blood of Jesus; between the naked soul and Christ's righteousness; between spiritual hunger and the bread of life.

Again; there is no procuring cause in the earth, *no merit* in it to obtain rain from heaven. The earth does not first fertilize itself, and thus attract the clouds to discharge upon it their treasures. Nay, the longer that rain is suspended, the drier the earth gets, and the farther from fertility. So there is nothing in man to procure or deserve the grace of God; nay, the longer that we are without it, like the parched earth without rain, the less do we deserve it; for increasing age brings increasing hardness, as increasing drought brings increasing sterility.

The rain, too, comes *freely*, copiously, ungrudgingly, neither asking the earth when it should fall, nor when it should stop. It comes down as a free gift from God. It falls when needed, and it stops when needed, preserving an exact balance

between drought and deluge. In all these particulars there is an analogy between the rain from heaven and the word of God's grace.

II.—But the Lord in the text speaks of "*snow*," as well as of rain. Snow is but frozen rain; yet there are certain points of difference which make it a striking emblem of the word of God: It falls in *winter* from a dark and gloomy sky. So there is a *wintry* experience of soul when the heavens are spread with dark and threatening clouds.

Snow *chills* in its fall every living object. So the cutting reproofs and rebukes of the word of God chill with fear and alarm the conscience on which they drop. Did not the word of the Lord by the infant Samuel chill with dread Eli, and that by Nathan chill David, and that by Isaiah the soul of Hezekiah?

And how *penetrating* snow is. So the rebukes of God penetrate into the very vitals. When "he casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?" (Ps. 147:17). But besides these wintry and piercing properties, snow possesses two beneficial effects. It *shields* the earth as with a mantle from the rigorous frosts and piercing winds, and thus preserves vegetation alive. Thus the chilling rebukes of God's word are a real protection to the soul; they preserve the tender life from those awful blasts of eternal displeasure which will one day sweep over the face of the earth. The rebukes of God brought David to repentance, Hezekiah to submission, Peter to weeping bitterly, and the incestuous Corinthian to godly sorrow. The rebuke of the Saviour's look covered Peter with the mantle of repentance. For want of this robe the blast of God's displeasure froze the naked soul of Judas into despair.

But snow is said to *fertilize* the soil on which it falls and lies.

When melted by the genial rays of the sun, it is said to mark its former presence by increased fruitfulness. So spiritually. Hezekiah was chilled by the snow storm that attended the prophet's words, "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live;" but when the snow which had lain heavily on his soul was melted by the rays of returning mercy, a crop of fruit sprang up from the mellowed soil. He would thenceforward walk softly all his years in the bitterness of his soul. The snow had softened and fertilized the soil, and a crop of humility and praise sprang up. In his song of praise he acknowledged the benefit of the snow storm. "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit" (Isa. 38: 16) was his thankful acknowledgment of the benefit and blessing of the wintry sky. Have you never had reason to bless God for every conviction that cut up your creature righteousness? For every reproof, every painful sensation of guilt, every pang of distress that chilled you at the time with horror? People are crying out for *comfort*, as if the word of God contained nothing but promises, and as if they were always in a situation to need cordials and restoratives. *That* were a poor medicine chest which had only tonics and tinctures. He were a poor gardener that could use no tools but the dibber and the waterpot. "Fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind"—all, all are alike "fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8), and all, all conspire to sing his praise.

III.—But, we read, "it returneth not thither," that is, *not* in the same form. It does return by evaporation; but not in the shape of rain and snow. After a copious shower of rain, or heavy fall of snow, the earth in a little time is dry. Where is it all gone? A part has sunk into the soil, but not all; a part is again drawn up, to discharge once more its bounteous blessings upon the earth. But it does not return in the same precise form in which it came down, in the gross material shape of snow and rain. It is exhaled in a subtler, finer form.

So when the Lord is pleased to chill, yet fertilize the soul, with the snow of his rebukes, or water and refresh it with the rain of his promises, his word of conviction or his word of consolation returns not to him in the same form. But does it not in another? Is there not the return of praise, gratitude, love, thanksgiving; a yielding of fruit in heart, lip, and life?

And as the sun draws up these unseen vapours, and calls into being this harvest of fruit, so does the Sun of righteousness draw up the affections of the heart, and bring forth those fruits which are to the praise and glory of God.

But have you not wished sometimes that you could make God some return? I mean, some return in kind. In fact, this is what I may call the natural wish of the mind, which we see issuing in a variety of superstitious forms. Why have men built in popish times our splendid cathedrals? Why have thousands gone on pilgrimage? Why do many men in our day contribute large sums to religious objects? Is not this the secret spring of much of what is called religious service? Its language is, 'We ought to do something for God, as God has done so much for us; if he has given us money, we will give him money back.' This is making the rain and the snow return to heaven as it were in kind, which God does not want, and will not accept, when thus yielded from superstition and self-righteousness. Many will bestow money on tombs, crosses, windows, monuments, churches, and restorations of what is called mediaeval architecture, who abhor the truth and persecute the saints. Thus the pharisees of old, who crucified Christ and stoned Stephen, built the tombs of the prophets. But to come to ourselves. Has it not sometimes tried your mind that you could not do more for God, as it is termed, in the way of active service? But what is the real revenue which God would have you to give him, and which he looks for, if he has blessed your soul? Gratitude,

praise, thanksgiving, faith, hope, love, and patience—the fruits and graces of his Spirit. Love and affection, too, to his saints, kindness and liberality to the poor members of his body, to visit them in sickness, sympathize with them in trouble, pray for them and with them in sorrow, and walk with them in the interchange of every friendly office.

IV.—The next leading feature of the rain and snow mentioned in the text, is, that they "*water* the earth." This is its main object; for this purpose was it specially provided, and to this end it is continually sent. Water is the grand solvent; and as the pores of all vegetable productions are too minute to take in solid matter, it must be dissolved before it can become food for plants. By the rain too, and melted snow, is the soil softened so as to become a seed-bed in which the grain may swell, germinate, and grow. We all know what a hard, barren, useless thing earth would be without rain. Such is the soul of man without the word of God's grace—hard, dry, barren, an unprofitable desert waste. The Lord has promised that the souls of his people shall be "like a watered garden," and that "his word shall drop like the rain and distil like the dew." It is the word of God's grace that softens the heart and dissolves the soul. How in nature the clods get harder and harder the longer that the drought continues! The farmer may break them with clubs, or roll them with heavy rollers but he cannot soften them. Let the showers gently fall; how they penetrate into the pores of these rough and rugged clods, till they crumble to the faintest touch! So with the soul and the word of God's grace. Till that falls, there is no melting of soul, softness of heart, or brokenness of spirit.

V.—But the rain and the snow not only water the earth, they also "*make it bring forth and bud.*" In fact, without this, especially in hot climates, there is no fruit brought forth at all. A man may have a consistent profession of religion, may

have a sound, well-compacted creed, may be a member of a Christian church, may attend to all ordinances and duties, may seek to frame his life and walk according to the precepts of God's word, may have his family and private prayer, may be a good husband, father, and friend, may be liberal and kind to God's cause and people, and yet with all this bear no fruit Godward. This is produced only by the word of God's grace falling into the heart, watering and softening it. Without this there is not one gracious feeling, not one spiritual desire, not one tender thought, not one heavenly affection. But the snow is useful here, as well as the rain. By it the grubs and caterpillars are killed, and the soil made porous and open. By the chilling blasts of God's displeasure, the reproofs of his mouth, the threatenings of his law, and the terrors of a guilty conscience, the grubs and caterpillars of pride and self-righteousness are starved, and a preparation made for the receiving of mercy and peace.

And thus, when the Sun of righteousness begins to shine upon the soul, when the winter is over and gone, when the warm days of spring, and the showers of mercy fall upon the heart, then it brings forth and buds. It brings forth faith whereby the truth is received in the love of it; brings forth hope which clasps around the Lord Jesus Christ, his blood, obedience, and salvation, as the ivy clasps around the oak; brings forth love which cleaves to the Lord with full purpose of heart; brings forth patience to endure afflictions, and contentment under the various dealings of God in providence or in grace. And indeed, real gospel fruit is produced in no other way. A man may be scolded, threatened, tied up, and flogged; but you can never by these means bring forth gospel fruit. You may produce a monkish obedience; you may elicit a kind of starved religion, which withers as soon as born; you may drag out the forced service of a bond slave. But to have the fruits of the Spirit brought forth in the soul;

faith, hope, love; humility, gratitude, resignation, godly sorrow, prayerfulness, and every other God-glorifying grace, you must have the rain and snow to come down from heaven.

How often, perhaps, have we tried by self-culture to bring forth such fruits! We could not do it; with all our best attempts the issue was, as the church complained of old, "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen" (Isa. 26:18). No living progeny was brought forth. We have tried, perhaps, as many have, to make ourselves holy; we have watched our eyes, our ears, our tongues; have read so many chapters every day out of God's word; continued so long upon our knees; read one book on Monday, another on Tuesday, a third on Wednesday; and so tried to work a kind of holiness into our own souls. I used, many years ago, to try to pray for the better part of an hour; and I am ashamed to say, I have been glad to hear the clock strike. What was this but a monkish, self-imposed rule, a rule of St. Benedict, or St. Dominic, to please God by the length of my prayers? And yet I ought to have known better; for when the Lord was pleased to touch my conscience with his finger, he gave me a remarkable spirit of grace and supplication; I wanted no rule of St. Dominic then. But it was all to bring forth out of the heart something of which I could say, 'Now I have religion; now I have something that God is pleased with; now I have made some advance in holiness; now I have got a step nearer to God.'

But what is all this pitiful self-holiness, as I think Bunyan calls it? Why, before we can look at it, it is gone like a dream of the night. It is "as the hasty fruit before the summer; which, when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in

his hand he eateth it up" (Isa. 28:4). As to any real satisfaction, it is "as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or, as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."

But our text speaks of the earth "budding" as well as bringing forth. In grace, as in nature, there are stages of progress; seed, blade, stem, and ear mark degrees of growth. In many the graces of the Spirit are but in bud. In some, faith, for instance, like the crocus out of the snow, is scarcely visible; we can but just discern it peeping out of the chilly mantle of convictions. The Lord himself says, "First, the *blade*," and this may be hidden under the wintry snow. Christians are not made in a day. They are not like Jonah's gourd, which "came up in a night, and perished in a night." In some of the Lord's family grace is but a tender bud just swelling into life. This may be the case with some here this evening. They cannot say positively, "I know in whom I have believed." "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." There is a check in their conscience when they would use the language of assurance. Nor can they firmly say, 'I feel confident that my hope will never fail.' But if they cannot use these words, yet they may have the buddings of heavenly life. The bud, you know, is generally very tender; it can scarcely bear the cold wind: when about to expand its bosom, there comes perhaps a fall of snow, or a frosty sky, and shuts it up at once. Such are the first buddings of divine life in the soul. There is in them a peculiar tenderness; they shut up at the first chilling blast, and only open as the warm rays of the sun beam in upon them. Those who have but faint and feeble marks of grace well know, that it is only at times and seasons that faith, hope, and love peep forth, shew their heads, and lift themselves above the dark soil. Sometimes in secret prayer,

sometimes in hearing the preached word, sometimes in conversation with a Christian friend, there is a coming forth of a sweet confidence in the Lord.

VI.—But what is the grand aim and object of the all-wise Creator in sending rain and snow upon the natural earth? "That it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater." Two objects are here mentioned for which rain and snow are given. We not only want corn to be ground into bread to feed the body, but to provide seed also with which to sow the ground for a future year. Under the fertilizing influences of snow and rain, the earth brings forth so abundantly as to supply not only bread for the present, but seed for the future.

Let us see the spiritual meaning of this. First, we have a distinction made here between the *eater* and the *sower*. The "*eater*" is the child of God, who eats the bread of life; as the Lord said, "He that *eateth* me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:57). His provision is the finest of the wheat, and he is one of those to whom the Lord says, "Eat, ye friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, ye beloved" (Sol. Song 5:1). See the links of this wondrous chain. Rain and snow are sent to fertilize the earth; it is thus made to bring forth and bud; but its produce is employed in two different ways. There is seed for the sower, and bread for the eater. Now see the spiritual analogy. The word falling from its divine Author upon the heart, going, as he says, out of his mouth, either in the snow of conviction, or the rain of consolation, fertilizes the soul. It buds, and brings forth the fruits and graces of the Spirit. "Christ is formed in the heart the hope of glory." He is fed upon by faith as the bread of life.

But not only is there this bread for the eater, there is also seed for the sower. By "the sower," we may understand a

servant of Christ, a minister of the gospel, according to the well-known parable, "A sower went forth to sow" (Matt. 13:3). From this we gather, that as corn in the grain differs from corn in the loaf, so the seed of "the sower" differs from the bread of "the eater." The sower must have bread to eat; but he has seed in the basket as well as the loaf in the pantry. There are many eaters, but few sowers. When the Lord is pleased to raise up a man, and sends him into his vineyard, he not only gives him bread to eat for himself, but he also puts seed into his seed-basket for others. By this "seed" we may understand those portions of divine truth which are applied to his soul, which spring up from time to time in his heart in meditation and prayer, those texts and passages which are specially given him for the benefit of God's people.

This is a point which private Christians ought well to consider. How many there are, who because God has done something for their souls, think they must immediately rush into the ministry, as though, because the Lord has made them Christians, he had also made them ministers. He may have given bread to them as eaters; but has he put a seed-basket around their shoulders, and stored it with seed for them as sowers? Does he open to them the scriptures, raise up spiritual ideas, bring forth out of their hearts life and feeling, give them "acceptable words" (Eccl. 12:10), and enable them to scatter with a skilful and liberal hand the seed of the word? And bear in mind, that *bread* is one thing, and *seed* another. We do not sow bread, but corn.

If you are a minister, you must have something beyond a good experience. You must have a spiritual gift, as Timothy had; and when you put on your seed-basket to step among the furrows, you must have good sound grain put into it by the Lord of the harvest. The same bounteous Benefactor,

who makes "the earth bring forth and bud, so as to give bread to the eater," is not unmindful of the sower. But let no man envy him who carries the seed-basket. It is no slight work, no easy task, to be tramping up and down in the furrows, "to cast abroad the fitches and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rye in their place." To do this aright "his God must instruct him to discretion, and teach him" (Isa. 28:25, 26). No man need wish to carry the seed-basket, to have all eyes fixed on him, all arrows aimed at him. Every one who is appointed to scatter the word of life will have many things to try him, and make him wish again and again that he never had been thrust into such an arduous post. As far as ease and comfort are concerned, it is much more pleasant to eat bread in the pew, than to stand up with the seed-basket in the pulpit. It has been my experience in dark and trying moments, again and again to envy anybody and everybody who has not to stand up and preach. Sometimes a sense of my unworthiness and unfitness, sometimes a natural repugnance to appear in a public capacity, sometimes deadness and darkness of mind, sometimes a feeling of my many wanderings and general unprofitableness, sometimes powerful temptations and fiery darts, and sometimes the persecutions I have endured, have made me feel the lot of a preacher to be of all the most hard. There are but two seasons when I feel any satisfaction in carrying the seed-basket: 1. When I have bread to eat, and corn to sow; and 2. when I hear of instances that I have not carried the seed-basket in vain.

VII.—But we pass on to consider the promise which God has given relative to his own word: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void." What a blessing it is that all success is of God! Sometimes it makes my very heart ache to think—here I am

labouring under an exercised mind and a weak and wearied body, trying to bring forth something that may be made a blessing to God's family. Whether it be a temptation or not, I cannot say; but it seems sometimes as if I laboured in vain. The people look hard and dead; and to judge from present feeling, little real blessing seems to attend the word. I think it must be a temptation; for I have afterwards heard of blessings received, when I have thought there could be none. But what a mercy it is, that we have nothing to do with the matter; that the whole blessing is from God! It is not what *I* may attempt to do, or the work *I* may try to perform. Were I to preach with the eloquence of an angel, if God did not bless the word, all the eloquence I could exert would be in vain! How this takes the load off man, and puts it on those shoulders which support the world! He says, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth." It shall be as sovereign, as free, as suitable as the rain and snow which come down from heaven. A minister can no more command the Lord to bless his word to this or that soul, than he can go abroad, and say, 'Clouds, clouds, drop down rain on this particular field.' He may, and indeed ought to pray for the blessing, but *command* it he cannot. The sovereign good pleasure of God gives it how, when, and where he will.

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." "It shall not return unto me void," that is, destitute of the purpose which I have designed to accomplish by it. Those whose heart is in the work will complain sometimes: 'I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought. I have tried to address myself to people's consciences, but in vain; their hearts are as hard as flints; they will not receive my testimony.' Ministers may so complain, whose soul's desire is the people's good, and as the prophets of old did

before them; nay, hearers too, in a similar fit of unbelief, may say, 'What is the use of my going to hear? No blessing, no power, no life, no feeling attend the words to my soul; why need I go? I may just as well stay at home to-day.' Thus, ministers and hearers often hang down their heads because so little visible good seems doing by the preached word. But the Lord still says, "It shall not return unto me void." There are but few to be saved, and therefore there are but few to be blessed. But some are. The Lord still by his word quickens, delivers, comforts, strengthens, and encourages his own family. It is God's own promise, who cannot lie, that his word shall not return unto him void. It shall return to him here in thankfulness and gratitude, and hereafter in an eternal revenue of praise.

This is an encouragement, then, to ministers to go on preaching, through evil report and through good report, that God's own word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases; and shall prosper in the thing whereto he sends it. The Lord has a certain work to carry on by the preached word in the hearts of his people, and that work he will accomplish by it. Thus, we find, that the preached word is attended with various effects; nay, the very same sermon, or it may be the same sentence in a sermon shall produce opposite effects; and yet both be of God. For instance, there shall be some experience traced out in harmony with the word of God, which shall come with a blessing to one who has passed through it. It shall especially comfort and encourage his soul. But to one sitting side by side with him in the same pew, it shall come with cutting conviction. Rain to the one is snow to the other. The question arises within: 'If that be an experience needful to be known, where is your religion? Have you ever experienced *this*?' Or some sweet manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be spoken of, and various parts of scripture brought forward to

prove it as a thing needful to be experienced. To him who has enjoyed it there shall be a sweet reviving of the work of God, and a kindling up afresh of the mercy, goodness, and love of Christ to his soul. But it shall come with conviction to another: 'This is what you never experienced.' This seems therefore to cut him off, works conviction in his soul, sends him home with a burden, raises a cry in his heart, makes him feel that he comes short, and he is anxious, restless, till Christ is pleased to reveal himself to his soul. Thus, the very same word shall produce what may seem to be opposite effects, yet both be of God, both a blessing.

Or, perhaps, you may be in some secret snare, and hardly know how you got into it; the trap had been laid so craftily, that you fell into it before you were well aware. You shall go to hear, and the minister is led to speak of that very snare in which you have been entangled. It is now opened up to you; you see how Satan laid it, and how you have been entangled in it. Thus the word shall be made use of to bring you out of the snare, make you confess to the Lord how you have been entangled, seek his pardoning mercy, and in due time experience his delivering grace.

Or, you may have had a real work of grace upon your soul; Jesus Christ, the foundation, may have been rightly laid in your conscience; yet wood, hay, and stubble may have been built upon it; you may have gone aside into carnal ease, into vain security, and fallen asleep in Zion. But in this state you may go and hear, as might be thought almost accidentally, a certain minister; you may hear a doctrinal religion exposed, a letter faith described. You begin to tremble; a secret conviction is fastened in your conscience; you can go step by step with the description; you feel it true as he declares, that this letter religion, this doctrinal confidence brought no peace in your conscience, never gave you liberty of access to God,

never broke to pieces idols, never delivered you out of temptation; but under the cover of this smooth, easy profession, you could indulge in sin, walk loosely, and give a rein to the evils of your heart. An Antinomian spirit, you find, had been secretly creeping upon you. This opium draught by little and little had lulled you to sleep, and under its influence you have said in your dreams, 'It is all well; I know that I have felt in times past the goodness and mercy of God; I know too that I have wandered from him, been slack in prayer, gone much into the world, neglected his word, not been so strict as I used to be in my general walk and conversation; but, but (now see the opium working) it does not alter my eternal state, nor affect my interest in Christ.' You may have come with this Antinomian torpor upon you, to dream out in the pew your laudanum doze. But a word from the pulpit suddenly arouses you; "an interpreter" arises to interpret your dream, and shew you the miserable state of soul into which you have fallen. As you listen, the words sink with power into your conscience, and distress and trouble fill your mind.

Or, you may have been very slack in the things of God, fallen into a worldly spirit, got among companions who may be doing your soul sad injury, and through them be entangled in temptations from which you have no power to deliver yourself. You come and hear these temptations described, which you may have thought no child of God ever was entangled in; nay, could not believe any one with the grace of God could have felt the power of sin as you have. God makes it the means of setting your soul free from that snare. Or, you may have been entangled in self-righteousness, been cutting at the exercised people of God, despising his experienced family, not knowing yourself the path of tribulation. You come to hear, conviction may be fastened upon your conscience of your shortcomings, and send you

groaning home. Through that wound in your conscience, a whole army of terrors may flood your soul, set you to search and examine the groundwork of your religion, and bring you to roll upon your bed in agony of mind, begging of God to have mercy upon you.

Or, you may have come with a heavy burden, not seeing anything like grace in your soul, tried in mind, depressed in spirit, harassed by the devil, and despised by worldly professors. You come to hear; your state and case is described; the word of God is applied to you, comfort is spoken to your soul, and your heart is melted within you by a sense of God's goodness and mercy. The promise then does not fail: "It shall accomplish that which I please."

God knows in this congregation the hearts of all; what their experience is, what their desires, what they are seeking, how they are entangled or tempted. He knows everything concerning them; and can, if it be his gracious will, apply the word to each as is needed. Ministers, for the most part, little know what good they are doing. They stand up to preach; they come praying, and go home begging the Lord to bless the word; but they know not what arrows have entered the conscience; what convictions have pierced the soul; or what comfort and consolation have been administered—all this is left in darkness. But where there is a real work, solid good done, it will spring up sooner or later to the glory of God; for, he will accomplish all that he has purposed. If God set a man up, no man can put him down; if God put him down, no man can set him up. If God has sent his word to do a certain work, it shall prosper in the thing whereto he has sent it. If sent for conviction, it shall prosper; if for consolation, it shall prosper; if for encouragement, it shall prosper; if for deliverance, it shall prosper; if to strip, it shall prosper; if to clothe, it shall prosper; if to wound, it shall prosper; if to

heal, it shall prosper. See how the Lord takes the whole matter into his own hands!

It is an unspeakable mercy for preachers and hearers, that the Lord has tied himself, so to speak, by his own promise that his word shall prosper in the thing whereto he sends it. Were it not for this, how could I stand up before you this evening with any hope of profiting your souls? If it were left to me to make a divine, lasting, spiritual impression upon your heart, what hope should I have of effecting it? I might perhaps, if I dare, touch your natural feelings; I might, if my conscience permitted me, attempt to work upon your fleshy passions. Were I possessed of natural eloquence, I might turn this place into a theatre, myself into an actor, and you into weeping spectators. But would that be "the rain and snow from heaven?" Would that be "the word that goeth out of God's mouth?" Would that issue in a crop of "righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations"?

But how grievous it would be, that I should have come and spoken among you this evening, and no blessing to have attended the word; nothing that will stand the last trump; that the word from my lips, instead of falling as rain and snow upon the field, should have fallen as showers upon the pavement, without entrance or penetration, dried up in a few minutes, and all left hard, cold, and stony as before! But you will say, 'What is the blessing that you want to rest upon the preached word?' I will tell you. To have the work of grace begun, carried on, or strengthened; to be humbled into the dust of self-abasement; to have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; to have manifestations of God's mercy and love; to see the beauty, blessedness, grace, and glory that is in Christ Jesus; to have a sweet persuasion of our interest in the blood and obedience of Immanuel; to be separated in

heart, spirit, and affection from the world; to mourn over the evils of our nature; to be kept from every evil way, work, and word; to have a tender conscience, and a watchful, prayerful spirit; and to have the affections in heaven, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. And, besides these inward fruits, to live the gospel, as well as profess the gospel; to be Christians not merely in lip and tongue, and by hearing the truth; but in every department of life, as masters and servants, husbands and wives, children and parents; to manifest the grace of God in our trade, business, occupation, or profession; however situated, however placed, to shew forth the grace of God, and to yield to him those fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to his praise and glory. I believe, that solid blessings will always produce these solid fruits, will bring forth a crop in heart, lip, and life; and where this crop is not in some measure brought forth, well may we say, such a religion is vain.