

HARVEST TIME

NO. 2896

[A peculiar and even unique interest attaches to the present Sermon, as it was the first of Mr. Spurgeon's discourses that was ever printed. Although it has appeared in another form, the publishers thought that it ought to be included in the regular weekly series, so it is now reprinted exactly fifty years after it was delivered. When cholera was desolating London and the wicked war in the Crimea was still being waged, the young pastor sounded a cheerful note to comfort the Christians of that day while he also warned others of the consequences of continuance in evil-doing. The message spoken half a century ago is by no means out of date even now.—Pub.]

**A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 1904.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
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*“Is it not wheat harvest today?”
1 Samuel 12:17.*

I SHALL not notice the connection; but I shall simply take these words as a motto; and my sermon will be founded upon a harvest field. I shall rather use the harvest for my text than any passage that I find here. “Is it not wheat harvest today?” I suppose the dwellers in cities think less of times and seasons than dwellers in the country. Men who were born, trained up, nourished and nurtured among cornfields, harvests, sowings, and reapings, are more likely to notice such things than you who are always engaged in mercantile pursuits, and think less of these things than rustics do. But I suppose, if it is almost necessary that you should less regard the harvest than others, it ought not to be carried to too great an extent. Let us not be forgetful of times and seasons. There is much to be learned from them, and I would refresh your memories by a harvest field. What a wondrous temple this world is; for in truth it is a temple of God's building, wherein men ought to worship Him. What a wondrous temple it is to a mind spiritually enlightened, which can bring to bear upon it the resources of intellect, and the illuminations of God's Holy Spirit! There is not a single flower in it that does not teach us a lesson; there is not a single wave, or blast of thunder, that has not some lesson to teach us, the sons of men. This world is a great temple, and as, if you walk in an Egyptian temple, you know that every mark and every figure in the temple has a meaning, so when you walk this world, you must believe that everything about you has a meaning. It is no fanciful idea that there are “sermons in stones;” for there really are sermons in stones, and this world is intended to teach us by everything that we see. Happy is the man who only has the mind, and has the spirit to get these lessons from Nature. Flowers, what are they? They are but the thoughts of God solidified, God's beautiful thoughts put into shape. Storms, what are they? They are God's terrible thoughts written out that we may read them. Thunders, what are they? They are God's powerful emotions just opened that men may hear them. The world is the materializing of God's thoughts; for the world is a thought in God's eye. He made it first from a thought that came from His own mighty mind, and everything in the majestic temple that He has made, has a meaning.

In this temple there are four evangelists. As we have four great evangelists in the Bible, so there are four evangelists in Nature; and these are the four evangelists of the seasons—spring, summer, autumn, winter.

First comes spring and what does it say? We look, and we behold that by the magic touch of spring, insects which seemed to be dead begin to awaken, and seeds that were buried in the dust begin to lift up their radiant forms. What does spring say? It utters its voice, it says to man, “Though you sleep, you shall rise again; there is a world in which, in a more glorious state, you shall exist; you are but a seed now, and you shall be buried in the dust, and in a little while you shall arise.” Spring utters that part of its evangel. Then comes summer. Summer says to man, “Behold the goodness of a merciful Creator; ‘He makes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good,’ He sprinkles the earth with flowers, He adorns it with those gems of creation, He makes it blossom like Eden, and bring forth like the garden of the Lord.” Summer

utters that; then comes autumn. We shall hear its message. It passes, and winter comes forth, crowned with a coronal of ice, and it tells us that there are times of trouble for man; it points to the fruits that we have stored up in autumn, and it says to us, "Man, take heed that you store up something for yourself; something against the day of wrath; lay up for yourself the fruits of autumn, that you may be able to feed on them in winter." And when the old year expires, its death knell tells us that man must die; and when the year has finished its evangelistic mission, there comes another to preach the same lesson again.

We are about to let autumn preach. One of these four evangelists comes forth, and it says, "Is it not wheat harvest today?" We are about to take the harvest into consideration in order to learn something from it. May God's most blessed Spirit help His feeble dust and ashes to preach the unsearchable riches of God to your souls' profit!

We shall talk of three joyful harvests and of three sorrowful harvests.

I. First, we shall speak of THREE JOYFUL HARVESTS that there will be.

The first joyful harvest that I will mention is *the harvest of the field* which Samuel alluded to when he said, "Is it not wheat harvest today?" We cannot forget the harvest of the field. It is not fit that these things should be forgotten; we ought not to let the fields be covered with corn, and to have their treasures stored away in the barns, and all the while to remain forgetful of God's mercy. Ingratitude, that worst of ills, is one of the vipers which make their nest in the heart of man, and the creature cannot be slain until divine grace comes there, and sprinkles the blood of the cross upon man's heart. Such vipers die when the blood of Christ is upon them. Let me just lead you for a moment to a harvest field. You shall see there a most luxuriant harvest, the heavy ears bending down almost to touch the ground, as much as to say, "From the ground I came, I owe myself to the ground, to that I bow my head," just as the good Christian does when he is full of years. He holds his head down the more fruit he has upon him. You see the stalks with their heads hanging down, because they are ripe. And it is goodly and precious to see these things.

Now just suppose the contrary. If this year the ears had been blighted and withered; if they had been like the second ears that Pharaoh saw, very lean and very scanty, what would have become of us? In peace, we might have depended on large supplies from Russia to make up the deficiency; now, in times of war (referring to the war in the Crimea), when nothing can come, what would become of us? We may conjecture, we may imagine, but I do not know that we are able to come to the truth; we can only say, "Blessed be God, we have not yet to reckon on what would have been; but God, seeing one door closed, has opened another." Seeing that we might not get supplies from those rich fields in the South of Russia, He has opened another door in our own land. "You are My own favored island," He says; "I have loved you, England, with a special love, you are My favored one, and the enemy shall not crush you; and lest you should starve, because provisions are cut off, I will give you your barns full at home, and your fields shall be covered, that you may laugh your enemy to scorn, and say to him, 'You thought you could starve us, and make us perish; but He, who feeds the ravens, has fed His people, and has not deserted His favored land.'" There is not one person who is uninterested in this matter. Some say the poor ought to be thankful that there is abundance of bread. So ought the rich. There is nothing which happens to one member of society which does not affect all. The ranks lean upon one another; if there is scarcity in the lower ranks, it falls upon the next, and the next, and even the Queen upon her throne feels in some degree the scarcity when God is pleased to send it. It affects all men. Let none say, "Whatever the price of corn may be, I can live;" but rather bless God who has given you more than enough. Your prayer ought to be, "Give us this day our daily bread;" and remember that whatever wealth you have, you must attribute your daily mercies as much to God as if you lived from hand to mouth; and sometimes that is a blessed way of living—when God gives His children the hand-basket portion, instead of sending it in a mass. Bless God that He has sent an abundant harvest! O fearful one, lift up your head! And you discontented one, be you abashed, and let your discontent no more be known! The Jews used to observe the feast of tabernacles when the harvest time came. In the country they always have a "harvest home," and why should not we? I want you all to have one. Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! For the harvest is come—"Is it not wheat harvest today?" Poor desponding soul, let all your doubts and fears be gone. "Your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure." That is one joyful harvest.

Now, the second joyful harvest is *the harvest of every Christian*. In one sense, the Christian is the seed; in another, he is a sower. In one sense, he is a seed, sown by God, which is to grow, and ripen, and germinate, till the great harvest time. In another sense, every Christian is a sower sent into the world to sow good seed, and to sow good seed only. I do not say that Christian men never sow any other seed than

good seed. Sometimes, in unguarded moments, they take garlic into their hands instead of wheat; and we may sow tares instead of corn. Christians sometimes make mistakes, and God sometimes suffers His people to fall, so that they sow sins; but the Christian never reaps his sins; Christ reaps them for him. He often has to have a concoction made of the bitter leaves of sin, but he never reaps the fruit of it. Christ has borne the punishment. Yet bear in mind, if you and I sin against God, God will take our sin, and He will get an essence from it that will be bitter to our taste; though He does not make us eat the fruits, yet still He will make us grieve and sorrow over our sins. But the Christian, as I have said, should be employed in sowing good seed; and doing so, he shall have a glorious harvest.

In some sense or other, the Christian must be sowing seed. If God calls him to the ministry, he is a seed sower; if God calls him to the Sabbath school, he is a seed sower; whatever his office, he is a sower of seed. I sow seed broadcast all over this immense field; I cannot tell where my seed goes. Some are like barren ground, and they refuse to receive the seed that I sow. I cannot help it if any man should do so. I am only responsible to God, whose servant I am. There are others, and my seed falls upon them, and brings forth a little fruit, but by and by, when the sun is up, because of persecution, they wither away and they die. But I hope there are many who are like the good ground that God has prepared, and when I scatter the seed abroad, it falls on good ground, and brings forth fruit to an abundant harvest. Ah! The minister has a joyful harvest, even in this world, when he sees souls converted. I have had a harvest time when I have led the sheep down to the washing of baptism, when I have seen God's people coming out from the mass of the world, and telling what the Lord has done for their souls—when God's children are edified, and built up, it is worth living for, and worth dying ten thousand deaths for, to be the means of saving one soul. What a joyful harvest it is when God gives us converted ones by tens and hundreds, and adds to His church abundantly such as shall be saved! Now I am like a farmer just at this season of the year. I have got a good deal of wheat down, and I want to get it into the barn, for fear the rain comes and spoils it. I believe I have got a great many, but they will persist in standing out in the field. I want to get them into the barns. They are good people, but they do not like to make a profession, and join the church. I want to get them into my Master's granary, and to see Christians added to the church. I see some holding down their heads, and saying, "He means us." So I do. You ought before this to have joined Christ's church; and unless you are fit to be gathered into Christ's little garner here on earth, you have no right to anticipate being gathered into that great garner which is in heaven.

Every Christian has his harvest. The Sabbath school teacher has his harvest. He goes and toils, and he plows very stony ground often, but he shall have his harvest. Oh, poor laboring Sabbath school teacher, have you seen no fruit yet? Do you say, "Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Cheer up, you do labor in a good cause, there must be some to do your work. Have you seen no children converted? Fear not—

*"Though seed lies buried long in dust,
It shan't deceive your hope,
The precious grain can never be lost,
For God insures the crop."*

Go on sowing still, and you shall have a harvest when you shall see children converted. I have known some Sabbath school teachers who could count a dozen, or twenty, or thirty children, who have, one after another, come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and to join the church. But if you should not live to see it on earth, remember, you are only accountable for your labor, and not for your success. Sow still, toil on! "Cast your bread upon the waters: for you shall find it after many days." God will not allow His Word to be wasted; it shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases. There may be a poor mother, who has often been sad. She has a son and a daughter, and she has been always praying that God might convert their souls. Mother, your son is an ungainly boy still; he grieves your heart; still the hot tears scald your cheeks on account of him. And you, Father, you have reprov'd him often; he is a wayward son, and he is still running the downward road. Cease not to pray! O my brethren and sisters, who are parents, you shall have a harvest!

There was a boy once, a very sinful child, who listened not to the counsel of his parents; but his mother prayed for him, and now he stands to preach to this congregation every Sabbath. And when his mother thinks of her first-born preaching the gospel, she reaps a glorious harvest that makes her a glad woman. Now, fathers and mothers, such may be your case. However bad your children are at present, still press toward the throne of grace, and you shall have a harvest. What do you think, mother, would you not rejoice

to see your son a minister of the gospel; your daughter teaching and assisting in the cause of God? God will not allow you to pray, and your prayers be unheeded.

Young man, your mother has been wrestling for you a long time, and she has not won your soul yet. What do you think? You defraud your mother of her harvest! If she had a little patch of ground, hard by her cottage, where she had sown some wheat, would you go and burn it? If she had a choice flower in her garden, would you go and trample it under foot? But by going on in the ways of the reprobate, you are defrauding your father and your mother of their harvest. Perhaps there are some parents who are weeping over their sons and daughters, who are hardened and unconverted. O God, turn their hearts! For, bitter is the doom of that man who goes to hell over the road that is washed by his mother's tears, stumbles over his father's reproofs, and tramples on those things which God has put in his way—his mother's prayers and his father's sighs. God help that man who dares to do such a thing as that! And it is wondrous grace if He does help him.

You shall have a harvest, whatever you are doing. I trust you are all doing something. If I cannot mention what your peculiar engagement is, I trust you are all serving God in some way; and you shall assuredly have a harvest wherever you are scattering your seed. But suppose the worst—if you should never live to see the harvest in this world, you shall have a harvest when you get to heaven. If you live and die a disappointed man in this world, you shall not be disappointed in the next. I think how surprised some of God's people will be when they get to heaven. They will see their Master, and He will give them a crown, "Lord, what is that crown for?" "That crown is because you did give a cup of cold water to one of My disciples." "What! A crown for a cup of cold water?" "Yes," says the Master, "that is how I pay My servants. First I give them grace to give the cup of water, and then, having given them grace, I give them a crown." "Wonders of grace to God belong." He that sows liberally shall reap liberally; and he that sows grudgingly shall reap sparingly. Ah, if there could be grief in heaven, I think it would be the grief of some Christians who had sown so very little. After all, how little the most of us ever sow! I know I sow but very little compared with what I might. How little any of you sow! Just add up how much you give to God in the year. I am afraid it would not come to a farthing per cent. Remember, you reap according to what you sow. O my friends, what surprise some of you will feel when God pays you for sowing one single grain! The soil of heaven is rich in the extreme. If a farmer had such ground as there is in heaven, he would say, "I must sow a great many acres of land;" and so let us strive, for the more we sow, the more shall we reap in heaven. Yet remember it is all of grace, and not of debt.

Now, beloved, I must very hastily mention the third joyful harvest. We have had the harvest of the field, and the harvest of the Christian. We are now to have another, and that is *the harvest of Christ*.

Christ had His sowing times. What bitter sowing times they were! Christ was one who went out bearing precious seed. Oh, I picture Christ sowing the world! He sowed it with tears; He sowed it with drops of blood; He sowed it with sighs; He sowed it with agony of heart; and at last He sowed Himself in the ground, to be the seed of a glorious crop. What a sowing time His was! He sowed in tears, in poverty, in sympathy, in grief, in agony, in woes, in suffering, and in death. He shall have a harvest, too. Blessings on His name, Jehovah swears it; the everlasting predestination of the Almighty has settled that Christ shall have a harvest. He has sown, and He shall reap; He has scattered, and He shall gather in. "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands." My friends, Christ has begun to reap His harvest. Yes, every soul that is converted is part of His reward; every one who comes to the Lord is a part of it. Every soul that is brought out of the miry clay, and set on the King's highway, is a part of Christ's crop. But He is going to reap more yet. There is another harvest coming, in the latter day, when He shall reap armfuls at a time, and gather the sheaves into His garner. Now, men come to Christ in ones and twos and threes; but, then, they shall come in flocks, so that the church shall say, "Who are these that come in as doves to their windows?"

There shall be a greater harvest when time shall be no more. Turn to the 14th chapter of Revelation, and the 13th verse: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." They do not go before them, and win them heaven. "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud One sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Your sickle, and reap: for the time is come for You to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped."

That was Christ's harvest. Observe but one particular. When Christ comes to reap His field, He comes with a crown on. There are the nations gathered together before that crowned Reaper!—

*“They come, they come: the exiled bands,
Wherever they rest or roam;
They heard His voice in distant lands,
And hastened to their home.”*

There they stand; one great army before God. Then comes the crowned Reaper from His throne; He takes His sharp sickle, and see Him reap sheaf after sheaf, and He carries them up to the heavenly garner. Let us ask the question of ourselves, whether we shall be among the reaped ones—the wheat of the Lord.

Notice again, that there was first a harvest, and then a vintage. The harvest is the righteous; the vintage is the wicked. When the wicked are gathered, an angel gathers them; but Christ will not trust an angel to reap the righteous. “He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle.” O my soul, when you come to die, Christ will Himself come for you; when you are to be cut down, He that sits upon the throne will cut you down with a very sharp sickle, in order that He may do it as easily as possible. He will be the Reaper Himself; no reaper will be allowed to gather Christ's saints in, but Christ the King of saints. Oh, will it not be a joyful harvest when all the chosen race, every one of them, shall be gathered in? There is a little shriveled grain of wheat that has been growing somewhere on the headland, and that will be there. There are a great many who have been hanging down their heads, heavy with grain, and they will be there too. They will all be gathered in—

*“His honor is engaged to save
The meanest of His sheep;
All that His heavenly Father gave
His hands securely keep.”*

II. But now we are obliged to turn to THE THREE SAD HARVESTS. Alas! Alas; the world was once like an Eolian harp; every wind that blew upon it gave forth melody; now the strings are all unstrung, and they are full of discord, so that when we have a strain of joy, we must have the deep bass of grief to come after it.

The first sad harvest is *the harvest of death*. We are all living, and what for? For the grave. I have sometimes sat down, and had a reverie like this. I have thought: Man, what is he? He grows, and grows, till he comes to his prime; and when he is forty-five, if God spare him, perhaps he has then gained the prime of life. What does he do then? He continues where he is a little while, and then he goes down the hill; and if he keeps on living, what is it for? To die. But there are many chances to one, as the world has it, that he will not live to be seventy. He may die very early. Do we not all live to die? But none shall die till they are ripe. Death never reaps his corn green; he never cuts his corn till it is ripe. The wicked die, but they are always ripe for hell when they die; the righteous die, but they are always ripe for heaven when they die. That poor thief there, who had not believed in Jesus, perhaps an hour before he died,—he was as ripe as a seventy years' saint. The saint is always ready for glory whenever death, the reaper, comes, and the wicked are always ripe for hell whenever God pleases to send for them. Oh, that great reaper; he sweeps through the earth, and mows his hundreds and thousands down! It is all still; death makes no noise about his movements, and he treads with velvet footsteps over the earth; that ceaseless mower, none can resist him. He is irresistible, and he mows, and mows, and cuts them down. Sometimes he stops and whets his scythe; he dips his scythe in blood, and then he mows us down with war; then he takes his whetstone of cholera, and mows down more than ever. Still he cries, “More! More! More!” Ceaselessly that work keeps on! Wondrous mower! Wondrous reaper! Oh, when you come to reap me, I cannot resist you; for I must fall like others—when you come, I shall have nothing to say to you. Like a blade of corn I must stand motionless; and you must cut me down! But, oh! May I be prepared for your scythe! May the Lord stand by me, and comfort me, and cheer me; and may I find that death is an angel of life—that death is the portal of heaven, the vestibule of glory!

There is a second sad harvest, and that is *the harvest that the wicked man has to reap*. Thus says the voice of inspiration, “Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.” Now there is a harvest that every wicked man has to reap in this world. No man ever sins against *his body* without reaping a harvest for it. The young man says, “I have sinned with impunity.” Stop, young man! Go to that hospital, and see sufferers writhing in their agony. See that staggering, bloated wretch, and I tell you, stop your hand, lest you become like him! Wisdom bids you stop; for your steps lead down to hell. If you enter into the house of the strange woman, you shall reap a harvest. There is a harvest that every man reaps if he sins against *his*

fellows. The man who sins against his fellow creature shall reap a harvest. Some men walk through the world like knights with spurs on their heels, and think they may tread on whom they please; but they shall find their mistake. He who sins against others, sins against himself; that is Nature. It is a law in Nature that a man cannot hurt his fellows without hurting himself. Now, you, who cause grief to others' minds, do not think the grief will end there; you will have to reap a harvest even here. Again, a man cannot sin against *his estate* without reaping the effects of it. The miserly wretch, who hoards up his gold, sins against his gold. It becomes cankered, and from those golden sovereigns he will have to reap a harvest; yes, that miserly wretch, sitting up at night, and straining his weary eyes to count his gold, that man reaps his harvest. And so does the young spendthrift. He will reap his harvest when all his treasure is exhausted. It is said of the prodigal, that "no man gave to him"—none of those that he used to entertain—and so the prodigal shall find it. No man shall give anything to him. Ah! But the worst harvest will be that of those who sin against *the Church of Christ*. I would not that a man should sin against his body; I would not that a man should sin against his estate; I would not that a man should sin against his fellows; but, most of all, I would not have him touch Christ's Church. He that touches one of God's people touches the apple of His eye. When I have read of some people finding fault with the servants of the Lord, I have thought within myself, "I would not do so." It is the greatest insult to a man to speak ill of his children. You speak ill of God's children, and you will be rewarded for it in everlasting punishment. There is not a single one of God's family whom God does not love, and if you touch one of them, He will have vengeance on you. Nothing puts a man on his mettle like touching his children; and if you touch God's Church, you will have the direst vengeance of all. The hottest flames of hell are for those who touch God's children. Go on, sinner, laugh at religion if you please; but know that it is the blackest sin in the whole catalog of crime. God will forgive anything sooner than that; and though that is not unpardonable; yet, if not repented of, it will meet the greatest punishment. God cannot bear that His elect should be touched, and if you do so, it is the greatest crime you can commit.

The third sad harvest is *the harvest of almighty wrath*, when the wicked at last are gathered in. In the 14th chapter of Revelation, you will see that the vine of the earth was cast into the winepress of the wrath of God; and, after that, the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out, up to the horses' bridles—an amazing figure to express the wrath of God! Suppose, then, some great winepress, in which our bodies are put like grapes; and suppose some mighty giant comes and treads us all under foot; that is the idea—that the wicked shall be cast together, and be trodden underfoot until the blood runs out up to the horses' bridles. May God grant, of His sovereign mercy, that you and I may never be reaped in that fearful harvest; but that rather we may be written among the saints of the Lord!

You shall have a harvest in due season if you faint not. Sow on, brother; sow on, sister; and in due time you shall reap an abundant harvest. Let me tell you one thing, if the seed you have sown a long while, has never come up. I was told once: "When you sow seeds in your garden, put them in a little water overnight, they will grow all the better for it." So, if you have been sowing your seed, put it into tears, and it will make your seed germinate better. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Steep your seed in tears, and then put it into the ground, and you shall reap in joy. No bird can devour that seed; no bird can hold it in its mouth. No worm can eat it, for worms never eat seeds that are sown in tears. Go your way and when you weep most, then, it is that you sow best. When most cast down, you are doing best. If you come to the prayer meeting, and have not a word to say, keep on praying; do not give it up, for you often pray best when you think you pray worst. Go on, and in due season, by God's mighty grace, you shall reap if you faint not.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *1 SAMUEL 12.*

In Samuel's old age, the people desired to have a king; and though it went much against the grain, yet, by the Lord's advice, Samuel consented to it. Here he makes his last protest.

Verse 1. *And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that you said unto me, and have made a king over you.*

"I have not stood in your way. I have not sought my own honor. I have at once frankly resigned my office among you."

2. *And now, behold, the king walks before you: and I am old and gray-headed; and behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day.*

“My sons come here today, not as my successors, but as fellow subjects with you of your newly-chosen king; they are not in opposition to him any more than I am.”

Like an old servant who is about to be dismissed, Samuel asks them to bear witness to his character; and this he does, partly as a lesson to the king who had taken his place, and partly as a clearance of himself in rendering up his charge.

3. *Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? Or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Or whom I have oppressed? Or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind my eyes therewith? And I will restore it to you.*

It is so usual a thing, among Oriental judges and rulers, to expect bribes, that you cannot, in those countries, take a single step in a court of law without bribery. It was therefore a very unusual circumstance that Samuel should be able to challenge anybody to say that he had ever wrongfully taken so much as a single farthing. And the great rulers, in those countries, are accustomed to enrich themselves by levying heavy taxes upon the people. But Samuel affirmed that his services had been perfectly gratuitous, so that all he had done for the people had cost them nothing. If they had any fault to find with his government, it could only be because it had been so just and also so cheap; his yoke had indeed been easy to their necks. What a fine sight it is to see an old man thus able to challenge all who had known him, throughout a long life, to testify that he had not led a selfish life, or studied his own interests even in the least degree!

4, 5. *And they said, You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither have you taken ought of any man's hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.*

In the most solemn way, they cleared him; when he rendered to them the account of his stewardship, they all bore witness that everything had been done, not merely according to strict rectitude, but in the most generous spirit of self-consecration. May all of us be enabled so to live that, when our sun goes down, it shall be as cloudless a sunset as was that of Samuel!

6-8. *And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which He did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place.*

A remembrance of past mercies is very profitable to us. National mercies ought not to be forgotten, and personal favors should always be fresh in our memory. Alas! The old proverb is only too true, “Bread that is eaten is soon forgotten.” So is it even with the bread which God gives us; we eat it, yet soon forget the hand that fed us. Let it not be so with us.

9-11. *And when they forgot the LORD their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the King of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, we have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You. And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you dwelled safe.*

They often transgressed, and were as often afflicted; but whenever they returned to the Lord with their confession of sin, and again sought His mercy, He was always quick to deliver them. Let us profit by their experience. Have we brought ourselves into trouble through sin? Have we wandered and backslidden, and are our hearts therefore heavy? Let us return unto the Lord, and confess our sin, for He has not cast us away, He will turn again at the voice of our cry; He will forgive us, and graciously receive us unto Himself again.

12, 13. *And when you saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, you said unto me, No; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom you have chosen, and whom you have desired! And, behold, the LORD has set a king over you.*

“He has consented to your request, though it was a foolish one.” Remember, brethren, it is not every answer to prayer that is a token of God’s favor. If our prayers are very foolish, and even if there is sin in them, God may sometimes give us what we ask in order to show us our folly, and make us smart for having

offered such a prayer. Though, under God's government, they had been most highly privileged, they must necessarily have a king, like the nations which were not so favored. "So now," says Samuel, "God has given you this king, so do your best with him." Samuel had a hopeful spirit; and he hoped that though the circumstances were not as he would have wished them to be, yet that the people might do well after all.

14-17. *If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both you and also the king that reigns over you continue following the LORD your God. But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call unto the LORD, and He shall send thunder and rain; that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for a king.*

This was to be a token to them that Samuel was God's Prophet. On a previous occasion, in answer to his prayer, God had thundered against the Philistines; but, this time, His thunder was His voice against Israel.

In reading the Bible, we must always remember that it was not written in England but in Palestine. Wheat harvest there takes place about the month of May, when the weather is usually settled, and such things as thunder and rain are almost unknown. It was extraordinary, therefore, as when we speak of "a bolt out of the blue."

18, 19. *So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for your servants unto the LORD your God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask for a king.*

That thunderstorm was a powerful preacher to them, and the rain drops, that fell so copiously, brought the teardrops into their eyes. The phenomena of nature frequently impress men with a sense of God's power, and prostrate them before Him.

20-22. *And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: you have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; and turn you not aside: for then should you go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.*

How gently the old prophet speaks! What a change from the pealing thunder to this gracious voice! It seems like the clear shining after rain.

23-25. *Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He has done for you. But if you shall still do wickedly, you shall be consumed, both you and your king.*

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