

GOD'S ANSWER TO PERSISTENT PRAYER

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A SERMON
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“There is a sound of abundance of rain.”
1 Kings 18:41.

FROM the narrative we may learn that *things can never be so bad but what God can bring deliverance in His own time*. The country had been parched in Palestine for three years. Travelers in the East will tell you how brown and burned that country looks at all times, but how it must have appeared when the clouds cleaved together and all the pastures were turned to dust, I can scarcely conceive. It must have been a terrible and piteous sight when the cattle had perished and the people were ready to die through famine and hunger. Yet, bad as it was, when the clouds had long ago vanished, when the children of three years old did not know what a drop of rain meant, when the skies seemed to be as brass above the heads of poor tortured mortals, then it was that the word of God came to Elijah, saying, “There shall yet be rain.” Courage, then! If the times should be full of danger, if there should be forebodings in the hearts of the bravest, if infidelity should threaten to put out the light of the gospel, or if Romanism should seem to blot out the name of Christ from under heaven, yet God can still appear! And if any one church is left and the Lord commands the clouds that they rain no rain upon her, her hedges be broken down, the wild boars out of the woods waste her and she seems to be utterly left, yet at the last hour of the day, when her hope all but expires, Jehovah, her friend, may come to help her! And so with us personally—if we are brought to the last handful of meal in the barrel and the last drop of oil in the cruse—if we are brought so low that now it seems relief would come too late, or could not possibly come at all, the Lord, who has His way in the whirlwind and who makes the clouds the dust of His feet, can now come from above! On cherubim and seraphim, right royally can He descend in speedy flight and bring help to His needy servants! Let us, therefore, drive despair away! There is no room for that in Jehovah’s world! As long as He still reigns, let the earth rejoice and let His people wait upon Him in hope.

Further, we learn another lesson, namely, that *when prayer has been exercised concerning anything, it is our duty and our privilege to expect the answer!*

We sometimes pray and receive nothing—but it is in most cases because we have asked amiss. Or if we are quite sure that our request was a right one, yet we have forgotten the canon or the law which says, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavers is as the waves of the sea driven by the wind and tossed: let not that man expect to receive anything of the Lord.” Now, if we ask believingly, we are quite sure to ask expectantly! We shall go up to the top of Carmel to look for the cloud if we have believingly sought for the rain. We shall send Gehazi yet seven times if he perceives no sign of mercy at the first—and we shall continue in importunate prayer—still believing that Jehovah cannot lie and will, as surely as He lives, be as good as His word and fulfill His promise to those who trust Him.

How bold it was of Elijah to go to Ahab, even before that cloud had been seen, before he had sent his servant to look for it, and to say to him, “There is a sound of abundance of rain!” What was that sound? I know not. I do not suppose that Ahab heard it, or that anyone else, except Elijah, recognized it. The ears of true faith are very quick and keen. She hears the coming of the blessing, the footsteps of the angels as they draw near, by way of Jacob’s ladder. God has heard her, and she hears her God! God is quick to hear her whispers and her thoughts—and she knows “the secret of the Lord,” for it “is with them that fear Him.” And long before the eyes have seen, or the ears have heard, or it has entered into the heart of man to imagine it, she perceives that the blessing is coming! There are certain sacred instincts which belong to the faith of God’s elect, which faith always comes from God. We must remember its divine origin and that it keeps up its acquaintanceship with the eternal Father by whom it was begotten. Like the shell picked up from the deep sea which always continues to whisper hoarsely of the sea from which it came, so faith continues to hear the sound of Jehovah’s goings. If none else hears them, she perceives them!

I thought of using this fact tonight as an illustration of the truth of God that there are *certain* signs which faith can see of a coming revival in a church. We will take that first. Then, *there are certain tokens which faith can perceive of coming joy and peace in an individual heart*—of that secondly. In the first place—

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN SIGNS AND TOKENS FOR GOOD WHICH PRAYERFUL FAITH CLEARLY PERCEIVES WHEN AN AWAKENING—A GENUINE REVIVAL—IS ABOUT TO COME.

What are these signs? I do not know that they are perceptible at this time throughout the churches of London. I do not know that they are perceptible *anywhere*, but I do know that wherever they are, they are the shadows which coming events cast before them! And one of the first of them is this—*a growing dissatisfaction with the present state of things and an increasing anxiety among the members of the church for the salvation of souls*. To have no conversions is a very dreadful thing, but to be at ease without seeing conversions is at all times more dreadful! I could bear a suspension in the increase of the church, I think, with some degree of peace of mind if I found all the members distressed and disturbed about it!

But if we should ever come to this pass—God grant we never may!—that we shall see no conversions and yet shall all of us say, “Still, still our place is well attended. There are such-and-such persons who come—we ourselves are fed with spiritual food and, therefore, all is well.” I say, if it ever comes to that, it will be a thing to mourn over, both by day and night, for it will be a token that the Spirit of God has for a while forsaken us! Oh, that the churches in London where the congregations are but small, and where the conversions are but few, would be clothed in sackcloth and cast ashes upon their heads! Oh, that they would proclaim a day of fasting and humble themselves before the Lord in the bitterness of their souls, for when it came to this, Jehovah's hand would turn towards them in bounty and they would soon become the joyful mothers of children! As long as a church is satisfied to be barren, she shall be barren! But when she cries out in the anguish of her spirit, then shall Jehovah remember her. He hears the cries of His people, but when she will not cry and is at ease in desolate circumstances, then the desolation shall continue and the sorrows be multiplied!

Dear friends, it should be a matter of personal heart-searching for you how far any of you are at ease in Zion, how far you are satisfied without doing good yourselves, for in proportion as you are such, you are tainting the church with evil. But, on the other hand, let me inquire whether you have learned to sigh and cry for all the sin of this huge city, for all the abominations of this, our country? Let me ask whether you ever laid to heart the teeming millions of the heathen populations who are dying without a Savior? If you do this—and if all of us do it—it cannot be long before God shall look upon the earth and send a shower of divine grace, for that *anxiety in Christian hearts* is the sound of the coming of abundance of rain!

Another indication of a large blessing near at hand is when *this anxiety leads believers to be exceedingly earnest and importunate in prayer*. When, one by one, in their own chambers they become the King's remembrancers and plead with Him day and night. When by twos and threes in the family, the prayer becomes fervent and grows into a passionate cry, “Oh, God, remember the land and send a blessing!” When in the churches, the spirit of prayer needs not to be excited by appeals from the pulpit, but is general and spontaneous! When the members make it a matter of regular conscience and joyous privilege to attend the prayer-meetings and when there they do not preach sermons, nor deliver themselves of doctrinal disquisitions to their fellow men, but are like Elijah when he knelt at Carmel with his head between his knees, or else like Jacob, at Jabbok, when he said, “I will not let You go, except You bless me.” Then be sure of the blessing coming, for this sign never yet failed! Whenever and wherever there is this abounding prayer, there must be abounding blessing before long! Baal's worshipers may pray to him and he may not answer them. They may cut themselves with stones and cover his altar with their blood, but Jehovah always looks to the earnestness of His people and will surely avenge His own elect, though He bears long with them. He will give them the desires of their hearts! May we see—as we have seen it in this church—may we see it renewed among us—may we see it in every part of Christendom, in every church in London, in every church throughout the whole British Empire, in America and wherever there are believers—a deep and awful anxiety for souls that will not let believers be quiet, but will give them to exercise an incessant pleading with God which will stir up His strength and cause Him to make bare His arm!

A third sign, and a far more approximate one because it is the result of the other two, is *when ministers begin to take counsel, one with another*, and to say, “What must we do?” The church is earnest. We, too,

share the fervor. What must we do that we may be more useful, that we may win more for Christ?" It becomes the sign of a great blessing when men in the ministry will preach the gospel more fully, more simply, more affectionately, more in dependence upon the Holy Spirit than they have ever done before. In proportion as elocution shall be less regarded, rhetoric be less honored, long words less admired—but simplicity, plainness of speech, boldness and earnestness shall be sought after—in that proportion, depend upon it, the blessing will come! In vain the prayers of God's people and all their tears in that place where the ministry gives forth an uncertain sound!

How shall God bless His vineyard by a cloud in which there is no rain? How shall He water the plants of His own right hand planting from a cistern that holds no water? Ah, brothers, if any of you have been guilty of expounding philosophical themes when he ought to have been preaching the simple gospel—if we have been guilty of trying to get poetic sentences and flowery periods when our sentences ought to have been short and sharp like daggers in the consciences of men! If we have lifted up a mere dogma instead of exalting Christ, and have preached the letter and forgotten the spirit, may God forgive us this great offense and help us, from this time forward, to begin to learn how to preach, to begin to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from Him how to touch the springs of the human heart and, by His Spirit's power, lead men to cry, "What must we do to be saved?"

Brothers in Christ who preach the gospel, it is in no spirit of mere criticism of the general ministry that I have offered these sentences! It is rather in criticism of us all and loving counsel to us all. If we are to obtain a blessing, depend upon it, we must come nearer to the cross! We must get to value human knowledge less and to value Christ infinitely more! And then, having these, we must cry aloud and spare not—and our message must always be concerning salvation. We must leave for a time the more difficult and deep things of God and we must keep hammering away at this one thing with all our might—that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life! Where this shall become commonly the case, there shall be the sound of an abundance of rain! God send us more Haliburtons, more McCheynes, more Harrington Evans, more men of the stamp of John Newton, Mr. Whitfield and the Wesleys—and when we have these, we may take it as an indication that God is blessing us and that it is a sound of abundance of rain!

I have not quite concluded the list of these favorable tokens. There will be a certainty that the rain is falling. The first few drops will be wetting the sensitive pavement of the Christian church *when we shall see the doctrine of individual responsibility fully felt and carried out into individual action*. I believe—I do not know whether there are any of you among them—that there are a great multitude of Christian people who think that religion is a thing for ministers and that ministers ought to do all they can for the spread of the knowledge of the true religion. Of course, they include City Missionaries, Bible women and good people who can give all their time to such work! But the notion that every saved man is to be a minister in some sense, that every converted woman has also her share of ministry to perform for Christ, that it is not one member of the body that is to be active, while all the others are to be torpid and idle—of this they do not dream! When it shall be believed that there is as much work for the foot as there is for the head and as much for the uncomely parts as for those that have abundant comeliness—when the poor shall feel that the church cannot do without them and the rich shall perceive that they have their work to do in the circles in which they move—when the illiterate shall talk of Christ as well as the educated. When the nurse-girl, the servant in the kitchen, the workman at the loom and plow shall all be moved by one common impulse—when the divine enthusiasm shall blaze in the learned and in the ignorant, when it shall flash up in the heart of the members of Parliament, when it shall be found in the highest and lowest places of the land—when every Christian shall feel that he is not his own, but bought with a price—when he shall see the blood-mark stamped upon him and say with the apostle, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," when the consecrated life shall be lived, not in cloisters and nunneries, but in cottages, mansions, palaces—in the abodes of wealth and fashion as in the dwelling places of poverty. When God's men go out into the world as *God's men*, feeling that they are to live for Him fully, as Paul lived for Him fully, feeling that for them to live is indeed Christ—then, brothers and sisters, there will be a sound of an abundance of rain!

Verily, verily, I say unto you, you need not think of the conversion of Japan, India and China, nor of Ethiopia's turning unto God—we, ourselves, need to be converted to God first! The Church of God is not fit to have a great blessing yet. If she is not first of all baptized in the Holy Spirit and in fire, she will not

be qualified to do the great deeds that God intends her to do before long. The world shall be saved, but the church must first be quickened. The nations shall be converted, but the Church of God must, first of all, be awakened! The fire shall go forth from Zion, but it must first burn furiously upon Zion's own hearth! Out of nothing comes nothing—and if the Church degenerates into nothing, she will do nothing. It is only when she possesses the divine life in the fullest vigor, that she shall be capable of doing work for God which shall glorify the name of the Lord Jesus! The Church has now got all the conversions that she is qualified to get. God always gives every Church as big a blessing as it is fit to have—and if it qualifies itself for more—it shall have more! God treats His Churches as parents treat their sons. They give them but little money when they are children—a penny will do—but when they get to be young men, they shall have yet more. We have but little because we are fit to possess and use but little. We are not faithful in what is given to us—and if the one talent often lies wrapped in a napkin, how can we expect to have five or 10 entrusted to us?

God stir up His Church, then, in the manner which I have tried to depict, and there will be “a sound of abundance of rain.” And now to change the line of thought, I want to—

II. HAVE A FEW MINUTES' QUIET TALK WITH PERSONS WHO ARE DISPIRITED.

Some of you have got into Giant Despair's castle. You have had a taste of his cruel crab tree cudgel lately. You have been taken to see the dead men's bones outside the castle and you have been told that there is nothing for you but destruction. Now, there is, I believe, to such as you are, with all your sad distress of mind, an indication that the famine and drought of your soul shall soon end. Such a condition as yours cannot always be. There are always signs of abundance of rain. Perhaps there are some such signs now in you!

This is one—*God always means to bless us when He empties us completely*—when we get to know that we are nothing and have nothing unless He fills us with His hidden treasure! If you were self-confident and felt that you could rally yourself—that you had still some stores to fall back upon—it is very likely that your present state would continue. But if you are brought to the ground, you cannot go any lower and you shall soon be lifted up! If it has come to be the darkest hour in the night, the day will soon dawn, the first beams will soon streak and redden the horizon! When you become so poor and needy that you dare not trust yourself in anything—when you feel as if you scarcely could open your mouth, but cry, “Open You my lips”—when you feel as if your wisdom were all turned to folly and your wit all gone, like a man at sea, staggering to and fro, reeling like a drunken man. When you feel that you cannot help yourself, then remember the old proverb that “man's extremity is God's opportunity.” You must empty the pitcher before you can fill it! You must get the purse emptied of all the bad money before you can put in the genuine coin. You must throw the chaff out of the bushel before you can put in the wheat. And God is emptying you of your self-sufficiency and carnal trust in order that now there may be a full Christ for empty sinners, a rich Christ for poverty-stricken sinners! If you have got a moldy crust of your own, you shall not have the bread of heaven. If you have one brass farthing left of your own merit, you shall not have Christ—

*“'Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large—
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no full discharge!
But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nothing to pay,
Our God forgives us all!”*

Now, your being nothing, and having nothing, and your being helplessly bankrupt in spiritual affairs—is a token for good, and I thank the Master for it!

There is sure to be a sign of abundance of rain, too, *when your soul begins to be unutterably miserable apart from Jesus Christ*. If you could find comfort in the joys of this world, I would fear it would be a long while before you would find peace. But if pleasures which were once so sweet have now become insipid or distasteful. If social joys are now shunned because you have an aching void within your heart which these cannot fill. If you get alone and sigh and cry because you need—you need, you scarcely know what—but still you feel you cannot rest until you find your God! That unrest, that dissatisfaction, disturbance, longing, sighing and pining all are good signs! “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” I think I can hear in that longing of yours a sound of abundance of

rain! But there are better signs than any you can see in yourselves, for the most comfortable evidences we can ever bring from self are generally but miserable comforters, like those of poor Job. They begin by comforting and end by making us more wretched than before.

But here are some things that are signs of abundance of rain. The first is, *God has given His Son to die for sinners*. You are a sinner. You know it and you feel it. Now, a sinner is a sacred thing. The Holy Spirit has made him so by declaring that Christ came to seek and to save just such! If God has given His dear Son to bleed upon the cross as a substitute for guilt, surely He will deny nothing! "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?" Stand at the foot of the cross and as you hear the blood of Jesus falling, drop by drop, surely in the ears of faith there is a sound of abundance of rain!

But He lives. He is gone from the cross to heaven where He lives and intercedes before His Father's face. "Therefore also," it is written, "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever lives to make intercession for them." If you hear the voice of Jesus pleading with authority before the Father's throne, you feel certain that God will not refuse His Son's request, but will do to Him according to His petition. So that here is another sound of abundance of rain! "He made intercession for the transgressors"—that is you again. He makes intercession for such as you are! Give Him, then, your cause to plead, nor doubt the Father's grace.

Another blessed sign of an abundance of mercy for poor burdened souls is *the gift of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. It is a thing that we are to pray for, that the Holy Spirit may be poured out, but the Holy Spirit *is* poured out, *was* given to the whole Church on the day of Pentecost in order that He might abide with us forever! The Holy Spirit, then, is here—the head of the present dispensation, ruling and reigning in the hearts of His people. But why does He come? To convince of sin; to give us repentance; to show us Christ; to lead us to Christ, to work faith in us, and to breed all the spiritual graces within our souls.

Oh, friends, however barren and dead we may be, the Holy Spirit can quicken us! And in the fact that He is given to His people there is another sign of abundance of rain.

But I think there is another we must not forget—and that is *that there is a mercy-seat*. I like, when I feel my own sinfulness and corruption, to think that there is still a mercy-seat. There it stands. I may not have gone to it as I ought. I may feel as if I never could go to it as I ought. My heart may be as heavy as a stone, but there is the mercy-seat and God does not mean not to bless me, or He would have taken that mercy-seat away! He would have said, "No, I forbid you to pray. I will never hear you again." But as long as there stands that blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, why, who is it meant for? It is surely meant for the needy! It is meant for those who need to pray—and the blood upon it is an evidence that it is meant for the guilty who need pardon—

***"The mercy seat is open still,
Here let my soul retreat."***

The very fact that I may pray is another sign of an abundance of rain!

And once more—is it not a sign of an abundance of mercy to a poor devil-dragged sinner who has been dragged, as it were, through a whole forest of temptations, through the brambles and briars of his sins, who is all wounded, torn, ragged and bleeding—is it not a sign of mercy to him that *there is the invitation always ringing from the gospel*, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"? Always does that invitation stand! Never does it cease to call! This silver trumpet always sounds! The bell is always ringing—

"Come and welcome, sinner, come!"

"Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money, let him come: yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price." Why that invitation? Is it mockery? Is it scorn or sarcasm? Does God invite intending to repulse? Does He set open the door of mercy meaning to shut it in the sinner's face? Impossible! God is willing to receive and bless, for God invites most freely. And, mark you, He does more than invite—He commands—and with the command there is a threat! "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; He that believes not shall be condemned." He makes it a sin not to believe—a sin not to have mercy upon yourselves—a sin not to take the mercy which He freely gives! Yes, He makes this the greatest of all sins. This is *the* sin which causes men to perish, that they believe not in Christ. "He that believes not is condemned already, because He has not believed on the Son of God." Now, see how hearty God is in this matter. He first invites—will He reject you? Next, He commands you

to come—can He cast you away when you do as He bids you do? Then He threatens you, if you do not come. How His heart of generosity is displayed here! He cannot refuse to save you if you trust Him. You, blackest, worst and vilest, if you trust Him, He cannot refuse you! He has threatened to destroy you if you do not trust—can He destroy you if you do? What a God were that! No! Cast yourselves upon Him! Fall flat upon the promise which He gives you in His dear Son and surely, so doing, you shall feel that great rain for which your thirsty soul is longing, for the very invitation is a sound of abundance of rain!

Christian brothers and sisters, I dare say some of you sometimes get very dry and feel as if you need an abundance of rain. Well, *that very sense of need, that inward craving*, will be a sign of its coming! Continue much in prayer, even when you do not get a blessing in it. An esteemed clergyman gives this advice to his friends—if they have not liberty in prayer, to be sure and use a form! I think that is about as bad advice as he could possibly have given! When you feel you have not liberty in prayer, pray in order to get liberty! Do not leave the mercy-seat till you do, but put up with no makeshifts. Do not resort to any of those legs of wood, iron and stone. Get to have real and living fellowship with Christ and dread above all things, the possibility of sham religion being put in the place of the real, living thing! Never be satisfied, dearly beloved, until you live every day in communion with Christ! Do not be content without the abiding presence of that gracious Sun of your soul, your blessed Savior! Without Him, this life is a very death—and the thought of the world to come a torment to the spirit! And when you feel you cannot do without Him, without the reality of His assured presence. When services will not do and the Bible, itself, will not do. Without getting Him, without getting heart-work and spirit-work, without getting the soul and sustenance of it—then it is that before long an abundant blessing will drop upon your soul!

The Lord make us uneasy and wretched out of Him—make us hungry and thirsty apart from Him! The Lord make us covetous beyond all covetousness after Him, dissatisfied beyond all peace of mind apart from Him! And when we get to that, He will feed us with bread to the fullest and give us the wines on the lees well-refined, that we may drink and rejoice! May God give a blessing to these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MATTHEW 7.

While we are reading, let us also be adoring at the same time, for the words of Christ have a gracious divinity about them. They are infinite. They are omnipotent. There is a kind of life in them—a life which communicates itself to those who hear them. Our Savior did not preach sermons—He preached texts. All His sermons are full of golden sentences, not hammered gold leaf, like those of men, but ingots of solid gold and the gold of that land is good, the most fine gold. There is none like it. Thus He preaches in the seventh chapter of Matthew.

Verse 1. *Judge not that you be not judged.* Set not up for critics, especially in the act of worship. Probably there is no greater destroyer of profit in the hearing of the Word of God than is the spirit of carping criticism.

1, 2. *Judge not that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.* When the Lord comes in judgment, He might almost decline to mount the throne, for He might say, “These men have already tried and condemned each other—let their sentences abide.” If He were to judge us as we have judged others, who among us would stand? But we may rest assured that our fellow men will usually exercise towards us much the same judgment that we exercise towards them.

3. *And why do you behold the speck that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?* It is a beam. You do not see it because it is in your own eye. How is it that you can be so severe towards that which is in another, and so lenient towards yourself?

4, 5. *Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull the speck out of your eye and, behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the speck out of your brother's eye.* There may be, dear friends, a great deal of hypocrisy about us, of which we are not aware, for when a man sees a fault in another and tells him of it, he says, “You know I am a very plain-spoken person. There is no hypocrisy about me.” Well, but there is, and, according to the Savior's description, this may be sheer hypocrisy because meanwhile in your own eye there is something worse than you see in your fellow, and this you pass over! And this is simply untruthful dealing and it amounts to hypocrisy. If you were really so zealous to make people see, you would begin

by being zealous to see, yourself! And if you were so concerned to have all eyes cleansed from impurity, you would begin by cleansing your own, or seeking to have them cleansed.

6. *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again, and tear you to pieces.* It is a pity to talk about some of the secrets of our holy faith in any and every company. It would be almost profane to speak of them in the company of profane men. We know that they would not understand us—they would find occasion for jest and ridicule and, therefore, our own reverence for holy things must cause us to lay a finger on our lips when we are in the presence of profane persons. Do not let us, however, carry out one precept to the exclusion of others! There are dogs that eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Drop them a crumb. And there are even swine that may yet be transformed—to whom the sight of a pearl might give some inkling of a better condition of heart. Cast not the pearls before them, but you may show them to them sometimes when they are in as good a state of mind as they are likely to be in. It is ours to preach the gospel to every creature—that is a precept of Christ, and yet all creatures are not always in the condition to hear the gospel. We must choose our time. Yet even this I would not push too far. We are to preach the gospel in season and out of season. Oh, that we may be able to follow precepts as far as they are meant to go, and no further.

7. *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* This is the simplest form of prayer. Follow up your prayer by the effort. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Add force to your petitions and to your prayers. If the door blocks the way, knock until it is opened.

8. *For everyone that asks, receives, and he that seeks, finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened.* One way or another you will get the blessing if you are but persevering! And blessed is the man who is a master of the art of asking, but does not forget the labor of seeking an entrance through the importunity of knocking!

9, 10. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?* Our Lord will give us the real thing. Sometimes we would be quite satisfied with an imitation of it. And sometimes we have to wait and be prepared for the reception of the real thing—it is infinitely better for us to wait for months than immediately to get a stone—better to wait for a fish than the next moment to have a scorpion! There were some in the wilderness who asked to be satisfied, and they were so, with the flesh of quails. They got their stones, they got their scorpions. But the Lord's people may sometimes find that they have to wait a while. God will not give to them that which is other than good for them.

11, 12. *If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.* Wonderful condensation of the two tables of the law! God help us to remember it. This is a golden rule and he that follows that shall lead a golden life.

13, 14. *Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are which go in that way. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it.* Do not be ashamed of being called narrow! Do not be ashamed of being supposed to lead a life of great precision and exactness. There is nothing very grand about breadth, after all. And I have noticed one thing—the broadest men I have ever met with in the best sense, have always kept to the narrow way, and the narrowest people I know are those who are so fond of the broad way! I could indicate some literature which professes to be exceedingly liberal—it is liberal, indeed, in finding fault with everybody who holds the gospel, but its tone is bitterness, itself, towards all the orthodox! Wormwood and gall are honey compared with what the liberal people generally pour out upon those who keep close to the truth of God! I prefer to cultivate a broad spirit to a narrow heart—and then to talk about the breadth of the way.

15. *Beware of false prophets.* But as long as he is a prophet, people will respect him. Do not find fault with him, he is a clever man.

15-25. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree brings forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not everyone*

that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils; and in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I say unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity. Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. For the best man will be tried, and perhaps all the more because he is such!

26-29. *And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine. For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

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