

# Rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. (ii) (Quality: very good)

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 January 1900

Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[ 0 : 00 ] As the Lord may help me, I will speak again this evening upon the word in the 14th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the 17th verse.

Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

The 14th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the 17th verse. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

After speaking briefly this afternoon upon the natural side of this text and its connection, and its suitability to the occasion today for Thanksgiving, I felt that we could profitably consider it as a similitude of spiritual things.

And, taking that line, I said that the text offers these considerations. First is, that all fruitfulness spiritually depends upon rain from heaven.

[ 1 : 55 ] And secondly, that when the Lord is pleased to give rain from heaven, then there is a fruitful season, in the spiritual sense.

And thirdly, when there is a fruitful season, then our hearts are filled with food, spiritual food and gladness.

And lastly, that there is in this a witness for God that he is good. For as he hath not left himself without a natural witness, in that he does good to all men, gives rain from heaven, so is not left himself without a spiritual witness, in that he does good spiritually to men, and still causes rain to fall from heaven.

Now, this afternoon, I spoke only upon the first of these considerations, and that is, rain from heaven.

Which I said, we might understand spiritually as meaning first, the heavenly doctrine of the gospel. The doctrine that drops from heaven, as the rain.

[ 3 : 19 ] That also, there is in rain from heaven, the gracious influences of the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

He is in heaven, but rain from heaven brings something of Jesus Christ. According to that scripture, he shall come down as showers upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.

And thirdly, that in the rain from heaven, there is the holy influences of the Spirit of God. The doctrine is heavenly, and that which enriches the doctrine is Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit makes it effectual upon our hearts.

And then I pointed out, and then I pointed out, that the similitude holds good in these particulars. That rain is in its nature pure, and so is the doctrine of the gospel.

We may call it for simplicity's sake, gospel rain is pure, as it is from heaven. But also, it falls freely, without any labour to cause it to fall.

[ 4 : 47 ] So, we can do nothing to cause the gospel rain to fall upon our own hearts. Only pray, and wait, and watch.

But when it comes, it comes so freely, and quite irresistibly, canst thou stay the bottles of heaven? We notice that also, just as naturally, the rain falls in a certain sense sovereignly, here or there, so it is with the gospel rain.

It falls sovereignly, as God wills. And that as the rain softens the earth, the rain of the gospel softens our hearts, spiritually.

Well now, we will continue our meditation, as the Lord may help us, along these lines. And notice secondly, that when there is rain from heaven, then there is a fruitful season.

That is, of course, fruitful in the spiritual sense. The one thing, this is very applicable to the whole history of the church of God, in this dispensation.

[ 6 : 11 ] Now, there have been times when rain has been to a great extent with hell. And then, a condition of dryness and barrenness has fallen upon the professing church.

Again, there have been times of gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then, there has been a fruitful season again. And the word of the gospel has been like a refreshing shower upon men's hearts.

It is, of course, obvious that, in the history of the church of God, in this dispensation, there have been fruitful seasons and barren seasons.

Times when the Holy Spirit seems to have been poured out in a marked way, and the effects of the Holy Spirit. And the effects of it, wonderful. And times when it has not been so.

Of course, the first blessed rain was at the time of Pentecost. And how fruitful a season that was, is recorded for us in the Acts of the Apostles.

[ 7 : 30 ] Why, 3,000 souls one day, and 1,000 soon after, were added to the church. And the word of the Lord fell upon people's hearts with wonderful power.

First to convince them of sin, and then to bring pardon and peace into their souls. And the word of sin, and then to bring pardon and peace into their souls.

First to convince them of sin, and then to bring pardon and peace into their souls. First to convince them of sin, and then to bring pardon and peace into their souls. First to convince them of sin, and then to bring pardon and peace into their souls. Then again, there was a going forth of the Holy Spirit, and gospel truth fell plenteously.

And then there was another fruitful season, about a hundred years after that, in the 18th century. For before the time of Whitefield, and Birridge, and Newton, and those godly men, there was a great dearth of the hearing of the word.

And very little was brought forth spiritually. But it pleased the Lord to raise up those godly men. And in this special way, to clothe them with a spirit of power from on high.

[ 9 : 12 ] And through their ministry, the word of the gospel fell from heaven, with remarkable effects. And there was a large ingathering into the churches of God.

It was a very fruitful season. It is rather remarkable, but I mustn't dwell upon this too long, that since the time of the Reformation, there's been a fruitful season about the middle of each century.

About every hundred years, again the rain fell copiously from heaven. We are about the middle of another century.

And one is very much concerned as to whether there will be another gracious outpouring of the Spirit. At such times, when the Holy Spirit is poured out from on high, then the Lord's servants, in their preaching of the word, meet with abundant success.

The word runs and has free course and is glorified. And the church is revived. Numbers are graciously called by grace, brought to the knowledge of the truth, through repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 10 : 43 ] Will there be another revival like that? Another outpouring of the Spirit from on high? Will again the preaching of the gospel draw thousands to hear it?

Will hundreds again be convinced of sin and quickened into spiritual life? Shall we hear that cry again? Resounding through hundreds of souls?

What must we do to be saved? We don't know. We can't say. One thing to me is very clear.

Either there will be another reviving, another fruitful season spiritually, or the Lord will return.

I feel sure that either another spiritual revival, or the Lord's glorious appearing is ahead of us.

[ 11 : 46 ] And how near that may be, no one can say nor which it will be. And I will say no more on this point then, than that there have been times when there's been a plentiful reign.

The Lord has caused the doctrine of the gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to be extensively effectual, and the church of God has been revived, and there's been a large ingathering into it of souls.

But now, the same point bears in other ways. If you take the state and case of churches as such, distinct churches, now, the history of churches often shows times of gracious fruitfulness, times of sad declining.

When I speak of sad declining, I don't only mean sad declining with regard to numbers, but sad declining with regard to godliness.

And, usually, there's a declining of godliness before there's a declining of numbers. If there's a declining of godliness, godliness in its life, and power in the souls of the people, there will presently be, inevitably, a decline of numbers.

[ 13 : 29 ] A nominal religion will not long hold numbers of people together. Now, churches have much cause for thankfulness when the Lord is pleased to send a plentiful rain.

I doubt not, but that, where the word of truth is faithfully, and affectionately preached, there will always be some blessing attending it.

Some. Sometimes, the Lord's servants get very disheartened. It seems much labour, and little fruit.

And, that word, suits their burdened spirit, Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed.

The arm of the Lord means his power. In other words, to whom is the power of the Lord revealed, made effectual, who feels that power?

[ 14 : 33 ] Who feels that power? Where are the evidences of it? What signs appear that the arm of the Lord is working? And we sometimes get very heavy-hearted about this.

But still, there's another side to that. Yet still, I said, I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for naught, yet still, my labour is with the Lord, and my work is with my God.

But still, with all that one sometimes gets very heavy-spirited, I believe that the Lord does not leave his servants to preach wholly in vain.

And if one soul is blessed, that seems wonderful to us. But still, what I was going to say was, that there are times when the Lord is pleased to give a fruitful season to his churches.

The word seems to be with more power. The heavenly rain falls, and we see the effects of it. There's a springing up of fresh life in the church, and in fresh instances, too.

[ 15 : 52 ] Oh, that the Lord would fulfil it. The churches, as far as one can judge, are in sad need of rain from heaven.

Sad need of rain from heaven. There's a drooping. The Lord grant her reviving. Some churches are still favoured.

Now, without making this too personal and direct, I feel I'm speaking in a sanctuary that has been much favoured with rain from heaven, and there have been fruitful seasons in this house of God.

Times of ingathering. The Lord grant it may be often so. I'm thankful to say to the Lord's goodness to me and to my flock that we have had fruitful seasons at home when one and another and another have been constrained to speak of the Lord's goodness to them and to make confession of their faith and their hope before us.

For whence a fruitful season, then souls are brought forth in that way. Now, let me apply it in the third sense.

[ 17 : 21 ] Fruitful seasons. Brethren, do you have our fruitful seasons in your own heart, in your own spirit? are there times when the doctrine of the gospel pours upon your soul with heavenly power and unction and you feel exactly like the rain, like the earth under the rain.

as I said this afternoon, there are in the earth those fertilizing virtues that make the earth fertile.

But without the rain, they're locked up, so to speak, in the hardness of the soil. But the rain liberates them and there's a springing up of life and growth.

Now, when the Lord is pleased to rain, even if it's only a comparative in a comparative small degree, but when the rain falls upon your heart, every spiritual feeling responds to it.

Every one. Faith believes it. Love enjoys it. Hope is strengthened by it.

[ 18 : 44 ] And your spirit is humbled before the Lord under a sense of his goodness to you in it. Everything that's spiritual in our heart responds to the heavenly rain.

You may get it sometimes in some measure under the ministry. That is often the way in which the Lord waters the souls of his people.

When should the doctrine drop us the rain but when it's being preached to us? When should the speech distill us the dew except when we're listening to the voice of a gospel ministry?

And it is the way of the spirit often to thus act when the word is being preached while the minister's labour, the Holy Spirit applies.

But it isn't only so. You may get a rain from heaven at times perhaps of affliction and sorrow and trial.

[ 19 : 55 ] The Lord then calls his word to drop upon your spirit and bring a sense of his goodness and his mercy and his love and his favour into your soul.

Now these are not perhaps all that frequent. I expect someone may be saying even now well I don't seem to get very many of these fruitful seasons.

I seem so often to lack the heavenly rain and I think it is so at this time pretty much. I think that when there has been one of those fruitful seasons of spiritual revival then it isn't only that larger numbers are affected by the word but it is more deep and powerful individually.

We must consider this that we are now living in a comparatively dry period. and we are all affected by it and we feel it so.

The rain does not fall all that copiously on any of us except on rare occasions. The Lord grant then if it be his will another fruitful season to us.

[ 21 : 27 ] Lord help us to pray for this and watch for it and the Lord help us to the Lord keep us from grieving in any sense his holy and blessed spirit for that shorter cause of withholding of the rain.

Shorter fruit fruit fruit fruit fruit seasons fruit fruit fruit seasons when our souls are refreshed fruit fruit fruit seasons when spiritual principles are revived fruit fruit seasons when we are made fruitful ourselves in every good word and work fruit fruit fruit fruit seasons in which to serve the Lord with gladness and rejoice with trembling and to bring forth those fruits in heart and life which are to the honour and glory of God.

If the Lord give us again fruitful seasons we shall have much cause to be thankful to his goodness to us. Now I come I must come to the next consideration that when there is a fruitful season then our hearts feed filling our hearts with food and gladness in other words sustenance and comfort food well if we have any spiritual life at all our hearts need food and I may dwell a little upon this matter of feeding upon the word for it enters very very much into our spiritual life and experience foods we cannot always feel to feed with gladness upon the word

I doubt whether anyone feeds always even when they listen to the gospel preach we really only feed when the heavenly rain pours to soften and refresh our spirit then we feed filling our heart with food well on what do we feed and how do we feed and what is the effect of our feeding upon the word well as to the food it is again the precious truths of the gospel man doth not live by bread alone if he is a spiritual man but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord and brethren it is when the doctrine drops upon our heart bringing the sweet savour of the person name righteousness love and blood of

Jesus that we feed we feed upon him we feed upon him as the very bread of life to our souls especially is that true he that eateth me even he shall live by me Jesus is the living food of living hearts and if you can feed on him your living soul spiritually yea even if you hunger for him you're a living soul if you feel that nothing of a natural earthly nature and character can really satisfy your soul if you can say and the Lord knows if you feel it I hunger now for heavenly food and my poor heart cries out for

[ 25 : 57 ] God oh my friends if you feel that nothing but God's favour in your soul nothing but the love of Jesus in your heart nothing but the blessed effects of the gospel in your experience really bring you peace comfort satisfaction rest joy you're in the right way surely you must be these are not the feelings and desires and necessities and wants and hungerings of the natural state of men surely they betoken spiritual life in the soul but hungering is not feeding thirsting thirsting is not drinking there must be there must be the food as well as the hunger well as I was saying if the

Lord give you a spiritual fruitful season then and then you really feed upon Jesus Christ for he is the substance of the gospel doctrine it is the doctrine that brings Jesus Christ to you and the Holy Spirit reveals and sweetly applies his name and merit his love and blood to your heart what it is though isn't it when we have a fruitful season then we feed on Jesus Christ and we feed on Jesus Christ in and by his word but now you might like another explanation of this spiritual experience how do we feed when we have a fruitful season we feed in two ways we feed by believing and we feed by feeling and these two must go together if we are fed we may indeed be saved by a real believing on

Jesus Christ whatever we may feel ourselves if we feel we cannot feed still if we have faith enough to say in substance this nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling that saving faith but then there's a feeding faith I've been thinking in this last minute or two of that word in the epistle to the Hebrews that reads this way for unto them was the gospel preached as well as unto us but the word preached did not profit them not being mixed with faith in them that heard it no my friends it is the mixing of faith with the heavenly doctrine of the gospel of

Jesus Christ that is feeding there is something very expressive about that mixing faith with the word because as you know so well things will never mix unless they are of such a nature as to be sympathetic each to the other naturally speaking contrary elements will never mix to use a very plain and simple illustration of this you know you just can't mix oil and water you can put oil and water into the same vessel and if you shake the vessel up plenty you will confuse the oil and the water but they won't mix and as soon as the vessel is allowed to stand at once they will separate as much as ever because the constituent properties of the elements of oil and water just won't mix now my friends it is just like that with regard to the doctrine of the word now the reason the sad reason why people without faith can never feed on the word is because the prevailing principle in their hearts is unbelief now you might as well try to make oil mix with water as unbelief mix with the truth they can't mix and well perhaps if the truth is forced upon the mind with some energy and perhaps carries some kind of natural conviction there may be a good deal of confusion in the mind for a while but presently the mind will fall back to its original state there's been no mixing with the word there's the unbelief still prevailing but now with faith it's just the opposite now faith mixes with the word because it's of the same nature there is if I may put it so a mysterious sympathy between the nature of living faith and the nature of a living gospel and a living ministry and they mix they flow together they cooperate together until by believing our souls are nourished and fed by faith mixing with the word it becomes strengthened nourished confirmed and so of course of love oh when love mixes with the word how it nourishes us you can never feed on the gospel if you don't love it never never to feed on Jesus

Christ you must love him to feed on his precious blood you must feel that blood is precious to your heart to feed on his sweet name that name which is so sweet in a believer's ear you must love him you can't feed on him if you don't love him now faith and love mixes with the word and thus we are nourished by it it profits us but then the other comes into it there is a feeling a sweet feeling we feed by feeling as well as by believing oh that that is a dry feeling when there is no liveliness in our spirit no tenderness in our heart no softening down under the sweet power of the gospel in our affections no falling of that dissolving rain of God's mercy and love upon us it's dry feeding if we feed at all oh but it's sweet feeding when the word is felt to be precious

[ 33 : 59 ] Jesus precious his blood precious his love precious his righteousness precious his gospel precious that's feeding if I may put it this way by believing you have an interest personally in the gospel and by feeling you have a sweet experience and sense of it in your soul well it is brethren it's only when it's a fruitful season we feed like that and when we feed like that it's a fruitful season and it's a fruitful season because rain from heaven has fallen upon our otherwise so parched hearts well that's how it works doesn't it it's just like that your heart sometimes may seem so sterile so hard so untender you hardly know what to make of your spiritual condition then the

Lord is pleased to give you another sweet fruitful season under his word I mean to cause the rain the gospel rain to come with freshness upon your heart and you drink it in and you feel it as effectual to you as ever it was as when you first felt it and then your heart feeds on the bread of life filling our hearts with food food oh it's food we want something to really nourish us fancies ideas transient emotions oh what does it all amount to it's vanity it's less than vanity but living bread oh that is food there's another point in this feeding

I must just briefly mention before I leave it filling our hearts with food and gladness now you know when we're naturally fed it isn't only that we feel relieved of hunger it isn't only that we feel nourished but our food becomes incorporated into our very system itself our food becomes us physically the very the very cells of our bodies are replenished and nourished and the food becomes us well it's like that in this deep and sacred mystery of feeding on Jesus or there's such a thing as a spiritual assimilation of Jesus into our souls just as truly as we assimilate our food into our bodies we assimilate by feeding on Jesus

Christ we assimilate him into our hearts until the soul is so close that Jesus becomes our life our very life when Christ who is our life our life mind you not only maintains it but is it is our very life well when it comes to that surely we may say that that living bread has been assimilated into our spiritual life until he is our life his precious body and blood is life in us well now isn't that wonderful to enter into it I feel it is to have a fruitful season and then to be feel our heart is filled with food and such food as Jesus

Christ is and of which he has said he that eateth me shall live by me and shall live forever gladness ah there's gladness in the soul then you can say really from your very heart there was put gladness into my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increase and it is gladness it's something of heaven begun something of heaven's joy felt below just a little a very little but it's heaven's holy joy it really is oh if Jesus Christ has ever filled your heart in any degree with gladness that really is the beginning of heaven's high praises in your soul that certainly that gladness that holy joy that won't end in the miseries of hell will it

[ 39 : 56 ] I must close nevertheless he left not himself without witness in that he did good now what a witness is what a witness this is that he has done us good has the Lord ever done you good now if he has don't put a doubt on it don't let unbelief put a doubt on it if he has done you good he's done you good if he's favoured your soul in any measure like I've tried to describe today if he has caused the rain to fall upon your heart at all if he has nourished you if he has given you faith to mix with his precious gospel if he has made it good to your soul if you felt you could say

Lord evermore give me this bread oh it's just what I need and I need nothing better then he's done you good hasn't he he's done you good you have no real cause to question whether the Lord has ever done anything for you if he's done this for you now if he's done you good that's a witness that's a witness that he is a good God to you there what good and doest good God is good in his very nature he is a good God and can never be other than good he's infinitely eternally unchangeably good but he's done if he's done you good then it's a witness that he is your God your portion the Lord give you this witness in your heart for truly it is so brethren if he gives you a fruitful season if he fills your heart in any measure with spiritual food if he makes you glad in his blessed name then it's a witness that he is a good

God to you now there I must leave it and the Lord graciously bless the word if it please him often oh that he would give us fruitful seasons and fill our hearts with food and gladness the Lord give to the dear people at Union Chapel under the dear pastor's ministry fruitful seasons feed your souls that will rejoice him and that will rejoice you and the Lord visit us in our spiritual homes from which some of us have come here today the Lord pour upon the hills of Zion again a most refreshing shower of heavenly rain amen salvation to

Jesus I Mmmm Well I S I have■■■ I S I I mad a V