

"And It Was So"

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"And it was so." [Genesis 1:7](#).

You will find those words six times upon the first page of Scripture. God spoke and said, "Let there be a firmament." "And it was so." He said, "Let the dry land appear." "And it was so." He bade the earth bring forth grass, "And it was so." He ordained the sun and moon for lights in the firmament of Heaven. "And it was so." Whatever it was that He willed, He did but speak the Word, "and it was so." In no single case was there a failure. There was not even a hesitation, a pause or a demand for a more powerful agency than the Divine Word. In each case, Jehovah spoke, "and it was so." Nor is this first week of Creation the only instance of the kind, for in no case has the Word of God fallen to the ground—whether of promise or of threat—the Word has been confirmed and fulfilled. "As it was in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall be, world without end." Whatever the mighty God decrees, foretells, declares, or promises shall, before long come to pass.

I shall ask you to accompany me in a mental voyage down the stream of history to show that this has been the case as far as all history is concerned up till now. "'And it was so." The Lord's will has been Law. His Word has been followed by fact. Dictum factum, as the Latins say. We shall then endeavor to show that with an Immutable God, it will be so continually in the great and in the small—in the affairs of the world—and in our own personal matters. What God has promised shall come to pass! And at the winding-up of all history, it shall be said, "God said this and that, and it was so."

I. We stand at the fountainhead of human history and hear the Lord declare to our parents that in the day in which they should break His commands and eat of the forbidden fruit, they would surely die. "And it was so." They died that moment. That spiritual death which was the great and essential part of the sentence, was then and there fulfilled! The likeness and image of God was broken in them immediately and we are dead in trespasses and in sins by reason of their death. He also warned them when His wrath, as it were, glanced aslant from them to smite the soil on which they stood, that the earth would bring forth thorns and thistles to them, and that in the sweat of their face they should eat bread, and truly it has been so. The earth has yielded her harvest, but she has produced her thorns and briars, also. And though the curse of labor has become a blessing, yet man's toil and woman's travail vindicate the Divine veracity.

When all flesh had corrupted its way, God repented that He had made man, and sent His servant Noah as a preacher of righteousness to threaten a universal flood. It did not appear very probable that the dense population of the earth could all be swept away and that the billows should rear their proud heads above the mountains—but it turned out that Noah was no fool and his prophecy was no raving. God had said that the world should be drowned "and it was so." The sluices of the great deep beneath were drawn up, the cataracts of Heaven descended and none escaped, save the few—that is eight—whom God enclosed within the ark.

A little further on the Lord appeared to His servant Abraham and told him that the wickedness of Sodom had been so great that the cry had gone up even to His Throne and the Lord communicated to His servant that He would go and see if it was altogether according to the cry thereof. And if so, Sodom would be destroyed. Abraham pleaded and his intercession almost prevailed, but as no righteous salt was found in the filthy cities of the plain, they were doomed to perish. They had given themselves to strange flesh and a strange judgment must, therefore, come upon them. Hell must

fall out of Heaven upon such abominable offenders! "And it was so," for when the morning dawned, Sodom was utterly consumed and the smoke thereof went up to Heaven.

You know how God kept His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who were strangers with Him, dwelling in tents, looking for a better city, that is, a heavenly. Whatever promise was made to the Patriarchs was fulfilled to the letter! In all respects, "it was so." When they went down into Egypt, God declared that after 400 years He would bring them out and though the tribes appeared to be naturalized in Egypt and were rooted to the soil, yet God would bring them forth. And though Pharaoh took strong measures and thought to hold them fast, yet God had said that they should come out with a high hand and an outstretched arm—"and it was so." Let the wonders which He worked on the fields of Zoan, the plagues which overthrew the sons of Ham, the going forth out of Egypt and the terrors of the Red Sea when the depths covered all the chivalry of Egypt—let these remind you that God had spoken—and so it was. Pharaoh was hardened, but he was not able to resist the will of the Almighty! He stands forever in history as a memorial that none shall harden himself against the Most High and prosper, for the Lord does as He wills in Heaven and on earth and in all deep places! Has He said, and shall He not do it? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

I would not weary you, I think, if I were to dwell a little while upon the promise that God gave to Israel that He would lead the tribes through the wilderness and surely bring them to their inheritance. It appeared very unlikely that they would ever enter into Canaan, when, for 40 weary years, they wandered in the pathless wilderness. Yet the Jordan was crossed in due season and Jericho was taken. He said that they should, every man, possess his portion and each tribe its lot—"and it was so." The Canaanites dwelt in cities that were

walled up to Heaven and they dashed into the battle in chariots of iron, yet they were overcome, for God had said it—"and it was so." He cast out the heathen and planted the vine which He had brought out of Egypt. He overthrew Og and Sihon, "and gave their land for an heritage; for His mercy endures forever." Many a time, after Israel had been settled in the land, did they provoke the Lord to jealousy, so that He sent Prophet after Prophet, and their message was, "If you thus sin against the Lord, you shall be given into the hands of your enemies..."and it was so." But when they were sorely smitten, they repented and they cried unto God and He had pity upon them. And then He sent another of His servants with a gentle message, saying, "Turn unto Me, and repent, and I will deliver you." "And it was so."

In every case He kept His Word, whether for chastening them or delivering them. Evermore was He faithful. When, in the later period of their history, Sennacherib blasphemed the Lord, His servant Hezekiah took the cruel letter of Rabshakeh and laid it before the Lord in the Temple and cried mightily unto Him—and Isaiah came with the promise, "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it." Who could put the hook into the nose of that leviathan? Who could turn him back by the way that he came? The Lord had said it should be done—"and it was so"—for that night the destroying Angel went through the host of Assyrians and there fell corpses on the plain as many as the leaves of autumn! Has God promised to rescue His children? Then be assured this, however numerous their foes, His Word shall not fail! Then came that dark day when Israel and Judah were threatened with captivity in a strange land. They sinned and, lo, "it was so." They were exiled far away. By the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept. They wept when they remembered Zion. But there came a promise to them—a promise which they had left all unread and forgotten in their Sacred Books, that after the lapse of 70 years they should return again and once more see the land of their fathers—"and it was so." God raised up for them a friend and a helper—and the captives came back again to their land.

Let us quote the grandest instance of all. The Lord promised, immediately after the Fall, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That promise had been succeeded by many others and those in Israel who knew the Lord waited for the coming of the Deliverer. The promise tarried long. Day and night devout man cried unto God, for their patience was sorely tried, yet they confidently expected the Messenger of God who would suddenly come in His Temple— and when the fullness of time was come, "it was so." The everlasting God was found living among men and they "beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth." It was the master-promise of all—the promise of the greatest gift that God has ever bestowed upon mankind! And that promise was kept, kept to the letter and to the hour. He had said it should be, "and it was so," though it was a wonder beyond all wonders!

We might pursue our theme and show you that as far as all past events have gone, God's Word has been verified. But now, though we keep to history, we shall leave the large volume of the public records and ask you to take down from its

shelf that little diary of yours, the pocketbook of your own life story—and then observe how God's Word has been true. You remember the warnings that you received in your youth, when you were told that the ways of sin might be pleasantness at first, but would end in sorrow. You were told that the cup might sparkle at the brim, but that the dregs thereof were full of bitterness. Did you test that statement in the days of your early manhood? Ah, then I know you cannot deny that it was as God had declared. He said, "The wages of sin is death"—"and it was so." He said it would be bitterness in the end thereof, "and it was so." He told you that the fascinations of sin were as destructive as they were alluring and truly, "it was so." If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you will blush as you answer the question, "What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed?"

It fell on a day, as God would have it, that your eyes were opened to see your lost estate. And there was a voice which spoke in the Gospel and said, "If you will return unto Me, return. Only confess the transgressions that you have sinned against Me, and I will forgive you. Come and put your trust in My Son, and your iniquity shall be blotted out like a cloud and your transgressions like a thick cloud." Led by Sovereign Grace, you came to Jesus. You washed in the fountain of His blood, guided to it by the Holy Spirit. What is your testimony? You were promised salvation, pardon, peace. My testimony is—and it was so! Is not that yours also? Oh, the joy of believing in Jesus! Oh, the bliss of casting one's self into the Father's arms and pleading the merits of the Only-Begotten! There is a peace of God that passes all understanding which comes to our faith when we exercise it upon Christ! Peace was promised—"and it was so."

Since the time when you believed in Jesus, you have had many needs, both spiritual and temporal, but He has promised no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. What say you, Brothers and Sisters? Your needs have come—have the supplies also come? I am sure you will say, "it was so"—strangely so—but always so! As your day, your strength has been. The shoes of iron and of brass have had rough usage, but they have not worn out. The all-sufficient God has proved that His Grace is all-sufficient for us. Our personal history bears witness that with regard to the Providence of God and to the supplies of His Grace, He said that He would grant us enough, "and it was so." He told you that when you believed in His Word, He would hear your prayers. Three times He put it in varied form, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Brothers and Sisters have been to the Mercy Seat and tried whether God hears prayer, and it has been so—He did hear prayer! We believed His Word and in due time our faith has been turned to sight and the promise has been fulfilled. We have read in God's Word that He would sanctify our trials to us and that, "all things work together for good to

them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." What then, is my witness, after having been week after week and even month after month racked with pain and laid low with sickness? What have these things been to me? Have they worked to my good? Do they bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness? My truthful witness is, "and it was so." I feel persuaded that every Christian shall have to say of his afflictions that they have been blessed to him—"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your Word," said one of old. And many in these modern times can say the same. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted"—the Lord said it would be—"and it was so."

Up to this hour it has always been true with regard to us, His people, that what the Lord has said, He has surely performed. We can—

"Sing the sweet promise of His Grace, And the performing God."

Let me remind you that our history is only the common experience of all God's people and if there is anything uncommon in the stories of the saints, then there is only a more than usually clear confirmation of the Truth of God. Look at the martyrs—they suffered what we can scarcely bear to read of—yet the Lord said He would be with them. "And it was so." They wore the chain for Christ's sake and He promised to be their companion—"and it was so." They went to the stake or bowed their head to the axe and they were promised that even to the end He would be with them—"and it was so." Right along through all the history of the Church militant and, I might also ask the confirmation of the Church triumphant, too—the saints declare that "it was so." Christ has kept His Word to the letter! Not one good thing has failed of all that He ever promised to His people!

II. And now, having taken this very brief run through history, let me ask you to follow me when I say that, AS IT HAS BEEN IN THE PAST, SO IT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE!

It is always good reasoning, when we are dealing with God, to infer the future from the past. "Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice." Having the same God and the same promises, we may expect to always see the same results. As for the future, a large part of Scripture is as yet unfulfilled. Many persons try to interpret it, but the man is not born who can explain the Revelation. Yet, whatever God has there declared will be explained by the working out of His Providence—

"God is His own Interpreter, And He will make it plain."

Whatever He has there promised, it shall be said of it, by-and-by, "and it was so." We learn that there is to be a wide spread of the Gospel. It is written, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Therefore be assured that it shall be so! Let the missionary toil on and the devil rage on if he will—the devil shall be disappointed and the servant of God shall have his heart's desire! God will honor His Church when she has faith enough to believe in His promises.

There is to be, in the fullness of time, a Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. He who went up from Olivet sent two of His angelic servants to promise that in the same manner as He

went up into Heaven, He would return again. He shall surely come. Virgin souls who are awake and watching for the midnight cry will hear it before long. And when He comes, "the dead in Christ shall rise first"—there shall be a resurrection of the just at His appearing. So He has promised" and, "blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power." There are no bonds of death that can hold the saints in their graves when the Lord descends at the sound of the archangel's trumpet! God has said that they shall arise—and it shall be so. They shall, everyone of them, return from the land of the enemy and then will follow the millennial glory—we will not explain that splendor—but we know that it is promised, and that whatever has been foretold by God shall surely be! The saints shall possess the Kingdom and shall reign with Christ!

And Heaven and the eternal future in the Glory Land where the ever-blessed God shall reveal Himself unto His servants, "and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads"—every golden word, every sapphire sentence which glows and sparkles with the Glory of the Most High and the loving kindness of the Infinite shall be fulfilled! It shall be said of the whole, "and it was so." Yes! And concerning the dread future of the lost—those awful words that tell of fires that burn and yet do not consume—and of a wrath that slays and yet men live beneath its power—verily, verily, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal!" These shall all be fulfilled! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one Word that God has spoken shall fail. Of doom or of glory, of promise or of threat, it shall be said, "and it was so." And when the end shall come and Christ shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, and the drama of history shall be ended and the curtain shall drop and God shall be All-in-All—all shall be summed up in this sentence, "He spoke, and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast," He said it, "and it was so."

I desire, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, for your consolation, to bring this Truth of God home to yourselves, if the Spirit of God will enable me. "It was so"—this has been true and it shall be so to you. God's promises shall all be kept to you personally. God will fulfill His Word to you in every letter. Observe there will occur cases in which there will be no visible help toward the fulfillment of the Divine Promise and no tendencies that way. But if God has pledged His Word, He will keep it. Note well that in the creation of the world there was nothing to help God. "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him?" When He began to fit up the world for man and to furnish the house which He had made in the beginning, there was darkness and that was no aid. There was chaos and that was no help. Now you are troubled at the present time. Your condition is one of confusion, disorder, darkness—you see nothing that could make God's promise come true, not a finger to help—no one even to wish you well. Never mind! God needs no helper. He works gloriously alone. See how the earth stands. What does it hang on? "He hangs the earth upon nothing." Look at the unpillared arch above it. There are no buttresses, no supports, no props to the

sky—yet it has not fallen and it never will. "Trust you in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." And if He has given you a promise and you have laid hold upon it, though nothing should appear to aid its fulfillment, yet it shall be fulfilled! You will have to write, "and it was so."

Yes, and this shall be the case though many circumstances tend the other way. When there seems to be a conflict against God—not only no help, but much resistance—then do not fear. What does it matter to God? Though all the

men on earth and all the devils in Hell were against Him, what does it matter? Though heaps of chaff contend against the wind, what does it matter to the wind? They shall be whirled along in its fury! What if the wax shall defy the flame? It shall but melt in the fervent heat! If all the world and all Hell should declare that God will not keep His promise, yet He will perform it and we shall have to say, "it was so. "No opposition can stop the Lord!

But you may say, "This cannot be true, surely, in my case. I could have believed it on a great scale, but not for myself." Ah, does God speak Truth in great things, and lies in little ones? Will you blaspheme the Most High by imagining that in public acts of royalty He is true, but in the private deeds of His family He is false? What would be a worse imputation against a man than that? Who shall throw such a charge upon the eternal God? The Lord promised His servant Elijah that He would take care of him. Did He not make the ravens feed him? Did He not send him to the widow of Sarepta and multiply her meal and her oil? He was as true to him in the ravens' matter, and in the handful of meal matter, as when, in the business of the great rain, the Prophet bowed his head between his knees on Carmel and saw at length the heavens covered with clouds and the land deluged with showers! God will keep His Word in little things to you. Do not imagine that He forgets your little problems. The hairs of your head are numbered. A sparrow lights not on the ground without your Father. Are you not better than the sparrows which are sold at five for two farthings in the market? Will you not rest in your Father's care and believe that His promises shall be fulfilled and that your bread shall be given you, and your water shall be sure and you shall dwell in the land and verily, you shall be fed?

God's Word stands true even when our unworthiness is in the way. I know you have fancied, "If I were a great saint, God would surely keep His Word to me. But I, being a very grievous sinner, how shall He be gracious to me?" And do you think that God is good and truthful only to the good and true? Would you be so yourself? Surely we must deal honestly with all men, whoever they may be! Their character is no excuse for our unfaithfulness to our own promises. Our Lord Jesus has said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." And if you come to God, He will not cheat you and say, "I said, 'Who confesses and forsakes his sins shall have mercy,' but I did not mean the promise for such an one as you are." No, Christ has said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out" and if you come to Him, though you are the blackest sinner out of Hell, yet Christ will not reject you, for it

is not your character, but HisCharacter that is to be considered in the promise! Even "if we believe not, yet He abides faithful—He cannot deny Himself."

Yes, and His promise comes true and we have to say of it, "and it was so," even in cases of our own confessed incapacity to receive it. Take the case of Abraham, for that is typical of many others in this respect. He had the promise of a son and heir. And though, as for his own body, it was as dead and Sarah was well stricken in years, Abraham did not consider himself or Sarah, but believed the promise and, in the fullness of time, there was the sound of laughter in the tent, for Isaac was born! We err when we become so depressed by our own incapacity as to conceive doubts of God's faithfulness. The Lord gives the promise that the barren woman shall keep house—and it is so. Our desert-hearts shall have the blessing—it shall drop upon the pastures of the wilderness and the little hills shall rejoice on every side! Our weakness shall not hinder the fulfillment of the Divine Promise. God is able to bless us even when we feel only fit to be cursed. O empty one, God can fill you! O dried branch and withered tree, you that stand like an oak smitten by lightning, only fit for the burning—the Lord, the everlasting God—can quicken you and put fresh sap in you, and make your branches to bud again to the glory of His holy name! He promises and if you believe, you shall have to say, "and it was so."

It will be thus right on to the end of the chapter. A few days ago I stood by the side of a dear departing Brother who feebly lifted his hands from the bed and said just these few words, "Christ, Christ, Christ is All." And then he said, as I bade him "Good-bye," "We shall meet in Heaven. I shall go there soon and you will follow, but I hope it will be a long while before you do." I asked him whether that was quite a benediction and he said, "You know what I mean. The Church needs you." About half-past five this afternoon, he who rejoiced that he would soon be in Heaven entered within the gate of pearl! He had served us well as a deacon of this Church and now he sees the face of the Ever-Blessed. He believed, while here on earth, that it was bliss to be with Christ and he finds it so! He is saying, "The half has not been told me." Well, well, whether we live to old age, or depart in mid-life, or die in early youth, what does it matter? We shall find that passing across the river is delightful when at eventide it is light. And oh, the glory of the everlasting daybreak! The splendor of the sun that goes down no more! Oh, the bliss of beholding saints and angels, and seeing the King in His beauty! The messengers of God said that Heaven is blessed—and it is so—it is so! The voice from Heaven said, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," and it is so! [See Sermon #1219, Volume 21—A VOICE FROM HEAVEN.]

I would leave a thought with those who are exercised with doubts and fears about the Lord's sure mercies. It is a very hard thing that we should doubt our God, but we do. And therefore let us shoot arrows at unbelief. Note well that when God spoke in the Creation, "and it was so," there was only His power concerned. Supposing He had spoken and it had not been so? Then the only result would have been that God was proved not to be Omnipotent.

tent. But His might did not fail Him! His glorious attribute of power showed its majesty and what the Lord spoke was accomplished. Yet, in this instance, only one attribute was at stake. Now, when you consider any one of God's promises recorded in the Bible, there is more than one attribute engaged for its fulfillment—there are at least two—for there is the Divine Truth at stake as well as the Divine Power. If He said it should be and it is not, it is either that He would not or He could not—if He could not, then His power has failed. But if He would not when He promised, then His truth is forfeited! We have, therefore, a double hold when dealing with Covenant promises and may rest in two Immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie!

But sometimes, in certain promises, even more is observable. For instance, you who have known the Lord these 10 or 20 years, have been helped before. But suppose the Lord were to fail you now? Then not only would His Power and His Truth be compromised, but His Immutability also, since He would then have changed and would no longer be the same God today as He was yesterday! Three attributes are leagued upon your side—you have three sacred pledges for the fulfillment of the promise! Frequently you also have God's Wisdom brought into the affair in hand. You have been in great difficulty and you have seen no means of escape. But you have laid the case before God and left it there. He has inspired His servant David to say, "Cast your burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain you." Now, if He does not sustain you, there are four attributes at stake! His Power—can He do it? His Truth—will He keep His promise? His Immutability—has He changed? His Wisdom—can He find a way of escape?

Frequently, my Brothers and Sisters, the Lord's honor is also brought into the field in addition to the other attributes. You recollect how Moses put it when the Lord said, "Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them." Then Moses said, "Why should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did He bring them out, to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?" See, too, how Joshua uses the same argument with the Lord—"The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it...and what will You do unto Your great name?" Oh, that is grand pleading—that is grand pleading! Now if the Lord has brought you into deep waters and you have put your trust in Him and said, "I know that He will deliver me." If He does not do so, the enemy will say, "It is a vain thing to trust in God, for the Lord does not deliver His people." His honor is at stake and, ah, He is a jealous God! He will rouse Himself and go forth like a man of war to show Himself strong in the behalf of them that trust in Him!

In addition to all this, Divine Love is included in the issue. How did Moses put it? The people said, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness." And Moses argued thus with the Lord, "Did You bring all these people out of Egypt that they might die in the wilderness? Have You no love to them? Will You be cruel to the sons of men?" Even thus may we plead with the benevolence and pity of the Lord.

"Will the Lord cast off forever? Will He be favorable no more?" Oh, no, that cannot be! Each child of His can sing—

"And can He have taught me to trust in His name, And thus far have brought me, to put me to shame?" "Is it so that He has taught me long after the sweetness of His Grace and yet will He deny it to me? Does the Lord tantalize men in this way? I could have been happy enough in my poor ignorant way as a sinner, but now that I have been made to taste of higher and sweeter things, I shall be doubly wretched if I may not enjoy them! If He makes men hunger and thirst, and then does not feed them, He is not a God of love." But He is a God of love and, therefore, He cannot treat His servants so! You remember Luther used to say that when he saw that God was in his quarrel, he always felt safe. "Your honor is at stake," he would say, "and it is no business of Luther's—it is God's business when God's Gospel is concerned." Every Divine Attribute is pledged as a guarantee that every Divine Promise shall be kept! Here faith may gather strength, and rest assured that the Covenant is sure in every jot and tittle! If one child of God who has put his trust in Jesus should perish, the everlasting Covenant of Grace would have failed, for this is a part of its stipulations, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit

will I put within you." And if I have come to Jesus and rested in Him and, after all, do not find salvation and eternal life, then the Covenant has become a dead letter to me—and this it shall never be! "Although my house is not so with God, yet has He made with me an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure." He will not allow His promise to fail!

Last word of all, remember that the very blood of Christ is at stake in the matter of God's Promise. If a poor guilty sinner shall come and rest in Jesus and yet is not saved, then Jesus Christ is grievously dishonored—He has shed His blood in vain! Shall they perish on whom His blood is sprinkled? Has the Fountain, after all its boasted efficacy, become a mockery? Is there no power in the Atonement of Jesus to cleanse the guilty? Ah, Beloved, He said it would cleanse and it was so, it is so and it shall be so forever! They who rest in Christ shall not perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of His hand. Each one of us, as we arrive in Heaven, shall add our testimony to the general verdict of all the saints and say, "It was so. He said it and He fulfilled it. Glory be unto His name!" If any soul comes to Jesus at this hour, he shall find eternal life. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Such is the Gospel. The Lord grant His great blessing!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 107:33-43.

[The previous portion of this Exposition was published with Sermon #3061, Volume 53—THE RULE OF GRACE.]

Verse 33, 34. He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. Harken unto this, you who are men of understanding! God can soon take away from any people the

privileges which they cease to prize. He sent barrenness upon the earth in the days of our first father, Adam, and He has long cursed with barrenness the very land in which this Psalm was written. He can give us what He pleases, and He can take it all away when He pleases. And, spiritually, God can easily turn a fruitful land into barrenness. The means of Grace, the ministry of His Word which was once very rich and fertile to you, may suddenly lose all its savor and all its fruitfulness. Yes, even His own Word, which may be compared to water springs, may suddenly seem to you to be but as dry ground. And your secret devotions, your reading of godly books, your conversation with gracious men and women—all of which were like wells of water—may seem to be dried up. If you walk contrary to God, He will walk contrary to you. "He turns a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." When the people of God fall from their steadfastness. When they wander from the paths of holiness, it is easy for God to let them know that the best means are only means—and that the best earthly supplies are barrenness, itself, apart from Him. God grant that it may never be so with any of us! But now see what happens when the Lord turns His hand the other way.

35. He turns the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water springs. He can make the sandy desert into a lake of water! He can make that which was barren as the desert of Sahara to become as fruitful as the Garden of the Lord. And if you are just now mourning your barrenness, believe in the Omnipotence of His Grace which can work such wonderful transformations as these for you. "All my fresh springs are in You," said the Psalmist. And so they are with us! Therefore, why should not those fresh springs now flow into our nature so as to make the dry ground into water springs?

36, 37. And there He makes the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; and sow the fields, and plant vineyards which may yield fruits of increase. See, Brothers and Sisters, when God blesses us, then we begin to work for Him. When He works, we work. He blesses the barren land with fruitfulness and then we sow the fields and plant vineyards. We do not sit still because God is at work—no, rather, we obey the Apostolic injunction, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

38, 39. He blesses them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and allows not their cattle to decrease. Again, they are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. God has a great many rods and we get a great many smarts because of our many sins. If we were but saved from our sins, we would not need all these rods, "oppression, affliction and sorrow"—tribulation, anguish, pain and distress. I will not tell you the names of all of them,

but they are very many and their strokes are very painful. May God grant that we may be rid of sin, for only so shall we be rid of many of these sorrows!

40. He pours contempt upon princes, and causes them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way. God makes very little of earth's biggest men—"He pours contempt upon princes." He has wonderful ways of making very poor those who are very rich in themselves. He makes those who were lords of all the fields to be exiles and wanderers in the wilderness where there is no way. Do not get proud, Brothers and Sisters, or else that may be your lot. He who is so near perfection that he need not pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner," may before long be so near desperation that he will not have to pray even the publican's prayer! Let none of us become too great, lest we soon be made very little.

41. Yet sets He the poor on high from affliction and makes him families like a flock. God always has an eye of pity for the poor, and especially for the spiritually poor. While "He pours contempt upon princes" with one hand, He is lifting the poor from the dunghill with the other!

42. The righteous shall see it and rejoice. When God's Providence and Grace are at work with men, the righteous shall see it, understand it and be glad.

42. And all iniquity shall stop her mouth. She is generally very noisy and boastful, but sometimes, when God's judgments are abroad, she is obliged to hold her tongue. "All iniquity shall stop her mouth." O Lord, stop it speedily, for she is making a great noise just now!

43. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the LORD. Those who watch Providence will never be without a Providence to watch!