

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LACKING MOISTURE

A Sermon

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“And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”—Luke viii. 6.

IN this parable of the sower, there is great discrimination of character, not only between those who bring forth fruit and those who bring forth none, but also between those who bring forth fruit in different degrees,—not only between the fruitful and the fruitless, but also between various forms of fruitlessness. The reasons are given, not in bulk, but in detail, why this failed, and that failed, and the other failed. All this points to discrimination in hearing. When there is discrimination in the preacher, as there should always be, there should be an equal discrimination in the hearer, and each one should try to take to himself that special part of the Word which is intended for him.

The true preacher, especially our great Lord and Master, resembles a portrait painted by a real artist, which always looks at you; no matter where you are in the room, to the right, or to the left of it, its eyes seem to be fixed upon you. So does our Lord, whenever he preaches, look at us. May he look at us in that way just now, and may we catch his eye as he gazes upon us; and may the preacher also seem to be looking straight at you, because you are on the watch for that particular part of the truth which specially concerns you! If there is anything hopeful and cheering in the sermon, may it come to you who are mourning and doubtful! If there is anything arousing, may it come to those of you who happen to be tinged with self-confidence!

Coming to our text, I think it suggests to us three observations; first, *let us note well that there is a reception of the Word of God which fails to be effectual*; secondly, we shall enquire *why it fails in these cases*; and, thirdly, we shall consider *how this failure is to be avoided*.

I. First, THERE IS A SOWING THAT COMES TO NOTHING. There is
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even a reception of the seed into the soil which disappoints the sower.

This failure was not because the seed was bad. It was the same seed which, in the good soil, produced thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. You know that, sometimes, when we do not succeed in impressing our hearers, we condemn ourselves, perhaps very justly. If men are not saved, the preacher must not put the blame upon divine sovereignty; he must blame himself. He must also ask himself, "Have I really preached the truth? Have I preached it in a right spirit? Have I preached different truths in due proportion? Have I given the most weight to that which is of primary importance, and have I put that which is secondary in its proper position?" We, poor sowers, often chastise ourselves for our failures; or, if we do not, we ought to do so; otherwise, we shall never improve. God help us to preach better, to love men's souls more, and to be more earnest in seeking to bring them to Christ! I mean this wish for myself and for all of you who love the Lord.

But there was no fault to be found with the seed that fell on the rock, although it did not result in a harvest. The seed was good, thoroughly good. The sower got it from his Master, and his Master's granary contains no seed which will not grow. True preachers can say with the apostle Peter, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." We have preached to you the Word of God; so that, whenever we put our head upon our pillow, we can truly say that we have not preached what we thought, or what we imagined, but we have declared what we believe to be revealed in this blessed Book of God. That is the good seed that we sow; and if it does not grow in you, it is not the fault of the seed, it is your own fault. There is something about you that hinders it. Will you think of that, dear hearer, if you are unconverted?

But, in the next place, *the failure was not from want of receptiveness.* Those hearers, who are like the seed sown on the rock, do receive the seed. We are expressly told that by our Lord himself: "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the Word with joy." We have hearers who take in all we say, perhaps too readily; they hear indiscriminately. There are some hearers who are like a sponge; they suck up all, good, bad, and indifferent. If they hear of a clever, oratorical preacher, they speedily run after him. What he preaches, or whether he preaches with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is not a matter about which they enquire. They have not much depth of earth, but what little earth there is takes in the seed. There is not enough depth of earth for the seed really to fructify; yet they do, in some sort of fashion, receive it. I am not going to pile up indiscriminate censure upon this receptiveness. It is a briar upon which a rose may grow; but, still, it is a briar until it is properly grafted. Receptiveness may easily be carried too far, and men may even ruin themselves by being too ready to receive what they hear,—not by being too ready rightly to receive the real Word of Truth, but by receiving it in the wrong fashion. Do they disbelieve what you say? No, they are not earnest enough to do that. Do they doubt what you preach? No,

they have not gone so far aside as that. Do they argue against the gospel? Oh, no; they have not fallen into that form of depravity! They take in what they hear. They do not do much with it. There is not grace enough in their heart, after they have nominally received the Word, to cause it to grow. There is a lack somewhere, not a lack of receptiveness, but a lack in another direction.

The failure, also, *was not caused through lack of heat*. There was a hard rock, with a little soil upon it, just enough to take in the seed. That rock needed to be broken up, ground to powder, and made into good soil; but as it was not broken up, when the sun shone, the rock refracted and reflected all the heat, and gave great warmth to the soil in which the seed was lying, so that it grew very fast, for it was in a kind of hothouse. We have many hearers who, if enthusiasm could save them, would have been saved long ago. On Sundays, they are very soon warmed up, and there is so little of them that the heat of the sun soon penetrates to their rocky nature. The heat is refracted, and straightway they are all in a blaze. I know them; they are very nice people to preach to. How excited they grow! They are ready enough to shout "Hallelujah!" They speedily receive the Word, but there is no depth about them, so they do not retain it. They will do anything that we want them to do. They are not only enthusiastic, but they soon grow fanatical. I am not blaming them for this. If there were something else to go with it, it would be a good thing. The gardener or florist likes a good bottom heat to make his plants grow rapidly; but if it is all heat, if it is a dry heat, and nothing else, very soon they are scorched to death. The little moisture, that was in them at first, makes them grow rapidly; but when that is exhausted, they are soon withered. I do not deny that it is quite a pleasure to meet with a warm-hearted man. We have plenty of people about who are either cold or only lukewarm. If they give you their hand, you feel as if you had laid hold of a fish, it is so cold. We like to meet with hearers who respond to our appeals with kindly friendliness, and who, when the Word is brought before them, display a warmth of feeling towards it. These are very hopeful people; I cannot say more about them. Their name is Hopeful, but they do not always grow into Faithful. They give us great encouragement; but, alas! they often cause us great discouragement.

Then, again, this failure *was not caused through want of joy*, for we are told by our Saviour that they received the Word with joy. Oh, they are so happy! They feel that they are saved, and they are full of joy; and the main reason why they believe that they are saved is that they are so happy. Well, there is something in being joyful; I do not like to see people who seem to have a religion that disagrees with them. True religion does indeed make us glad. But then, my dear friends, if your only evidence of the possession of grace is that you are so happy, you may be unhappy to-morrow, and what will be your state then? Our human nature is so constructed, and our body has so much influence upon our mind and soul, that we can soon become very low in spirit, and scarcely know why we are in such a condition. That joy is part of the fruit of the

Spirit, I cheerfully acknowledge; but there are many joys that are not fruits of the Spirit at all, for they are earth-born and carnal; and there is often a so-called religious joy which is the fruit of carnal excitement and supposed conversion, and not the result of a real saving knowledge of God.

Perhaps, if these people had received the Word with sorrow,—if they had received it with a broken heart, and a contrite spirit,—if they had received it tremblingly, in the very depth of their souls,—if they had gone home to cry to God in secret prayer, instead of rejoicing in open exultation, there might have been evidences in them of a deeper, surer, truer, and more abiding work. These people had joy, and plenty of it. I am not saying anything against their joy; it was not the point in which they failed. They failed somewhere else, as I shall try to show you presently.

And, once more, they did not fail *from want of eagerness and speed in receiving the truth*. They received it at once, and the seed sprang up at once. Just because they had no depth of earth, it sprang up all the faster. The wheat that fell upon the shallow soil covering the rock grew directly; it sprang up because of the very absence of the element that was necessary to bring it to perfection. I believe in instantaneous conversion. I believe that the new birth must be instantaneous,—that there is a moment in which a man is dead, and another moment in which he is alive;—and that, just as there is a certain instant in which a child is born, so there is an instant in which we become the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But there is also a supposed conversion which is undone as quickly as it is done. There are to be found, in some churches, men who have grown wonderfully fast. They were drunkards a fortnight ago, and they are taking the lead among experienced Christians to-day. Well, it may rightly be so. God acts according to his own sovereign will, and he can work such wonders of grace and miracles of mercy. But it may turn out that a thing that grows very fast does so because it will not stand fast, and will not last long. We have to deal with so many who are always procrastinating and putting off; and, therefore, it seems a good fault when men are hasty about these things,—it is a blessed fault, if a fault at all. Yet it did so happen that, while these people were excellent in that direction, they failed in another, and failed in a fatal way, of which I have now to speak.

II. That brings me to ENQUIRE WHY THESE PEOPLE MADE SUCH A SAD FAILURE?

The seeds that fell on the trodden path, while they were lost to the husbandman, did feed the birds, at any rate; but these on the rock did not. They quickly sprang up, and were soon withered; and good for nothing. They promised much, but it came to just nothing at all. And, in this way, some of those, who appear to be the most hopeful, may cause us most grief by being our greatest disappointments.

Now, why was this? Luke tells us, and no other Evangelist tells us, that it was because they "lacked moisture."

Does not this mean, first of all, that *they lacked the influence of*

the Divine Spirit? When we speak of spiritual dew, we refer to the operation of the Holy Spirit. When we talk of the river of the water of life, we mean those sacred things which come streaming down to us from the throne of God through the working of the Spirit of God. These people lacked that moisture. They were converted, so far as they were converted at all, through the eloquence of the preacher; and a man, who is converted by eloquence, can be unconverted by eloquence. Or they were converted by the zeal and earnestness of Christian people. But, if you were converted by one man, another man can unconvert you. All that is of man goes to be unravelled; all the spinning and the weaving of earthly machinery can be pulled to pieces; but the work of God's grace endures for ever. Have you, my dear hearer, felt the power of the Holy Spirit first withering you up? "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." Has he ever dried up, in you, all that was of yourself, and turned the verdant meadow into a barren wilderness? It must be so with you at first; there is no sure work which does not begin with emptying and pulling down. Has the Spirit of God ever so wrought in you as a spirit of bondage, shutting you up in prison under the law, fixing your hands in handcuffs, and your feet in fetters, putting you in the stocks, and leaving you there? If you have never known anything about that experience, I am afraid you have hitherto "lacked moisture."

Then, when the Spirit of God comes to a soul that is thus broken down, he reveals Christ as a Saviour for that sinner,—a full Saviour for the empty sinner. And, oh, how sweetly does the soul rejoice as it perceives the suitability, fulness, and freeness of Christ; and looks to Jesus, and trusts him! Have you ever felt that sacred moisture which softens the heart so that it sweetly yields to Christ,—that moisture which refreshes the heart, and makes it bloom again with a holy hopefulness and delight in Christ? O my dear hearers, what we say about the Holy Spirit is no mere talk; it is a matter of fact! "Ye must be born again,"—born from above. Ye must be partakers of the Spirit of God, or else all your religion, however beautiful it may appear to be, will wither when the sun has risen with burning heat.

Now, my brothers and sisters in Christ, you find that everything goes ill with you when you lack moisture. One of our brethren sometimes says to me, after a service, "Oh, sir, there will be good done to-day, for there was dew about!" I know what he means, and hope you also do. You have a little flower at home, which you keep in the window,—a geranium, or perhaps a fuchsia. You set great store by it, because of its associations; but perhaps you have been out for a week, and when you come back, it looked so drooping that it seemed as if it must die, and you soon discovered the reason why. It was quite dry: "it lacked moisture." You gave it some water, and it soon began to revive. These plants are kept alive by moisture. But when they lack moisture, the more the sun shines upon them, or the warmer the room is, the worse it is for them. They need moisture, and so do we, poor plants that we are. We

need the Holy Spirit; and if the Lord does not water us daily from the living springs on the hilltops of glory, we shall certainly die. So take heed, brothers and sisters, that you do not lack the moisture of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence.

Why did these people lack it? *There was moisture in the air.* It is evident that the other seed, which brought forth thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold, had moisture; yet this, which was in the same air as the other "lacked moisture." There were morning dews, and there were mists and rains; yet these seeds on the rock "lacked moisture." The reason was, that there was a want of power to retain the moisture in the soil. When it came down, it ran off again, or speedily evaporated, because there was a rock, and only a very little earth on the top of it to hold the moisture, and all that came there soon disappeared. There are many persons who seem to be like this rocky soil; they have no receptiveness for the Divine Spirit; they manage to do without him.

Now let me warn you of *certain things that indicate a lack of moisture.* The first is, doctrine without feeling. You believe the Bible doctrine concerning Christ. I am glad that you do; but dry doctrine, without the bedewing influence of the Spirit of God, is just a granite rock out of which you will get nothing whatever. You say that you believe the doctrine of human depravity; but have you ever really felt it, and mourned over it? You say that you believe the doctrine of redemption; but have you ever proved the power of the precious blood of Jesus? Have you ever been melted at the sight of the cross? You say that you believe the doctrine of effectual calling; but have you been effectually called by grace? You say that you believe the doctrine of regeneration; but have you been born again? If not, you lack moisture. I have known some brethren, who have been so "sound" that they have been nothing but sound. "Sixteen ounces to the pound," they said they were. I thought that they were seventeen ounces to the pound, and that the last bad ounce spoilt the other sixteen. You may be wonderfully orthodox, and yet be lost. That hard pan of rock must be broken up, and ground to powder, that the moisture may get to the seed. Of what avail is doctrine without feeling?

It is equally worthless where there is experience without humiliation. I mean that some talk about having felt this, and having felt that, and they boast of it. Some of them have even thought that they have become perfect, and they glory in it. Well, they lack moisture. As soon as you get side by side with them, you feel a want of something, you do not quite know what it is. It is dry experience; perhaps it is boiling hot, but it is very dry. There is no bowing before the Lord in a humble confession of unworthiness; no understanding of what it is to feel the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should loathe ourselves, as condemned criminals ought to do. I pray the Lord to save us from an experience, however perfect it seems, which is not moist,—which has not a living tenderness wrought into it by the power of the Spirit of God. Avoid, then, experience without humiliation.

Shun also practice without heart-love. I have known some

brethren and sisters, who have been most exact and precise in all their conduct. I have thought that they scarcely ever sinned, and I have not wondered that they did not, because there did not seem to be enough juice in them to sin; they did not appear to have any human nature in them. They were just like dry pieces of leather; never excited; never getting into a bad temper; they have not seemed to have any temper, either bad or good. They never say a word too hastily; they always measure things out very exactly; yet a lack of love is a fatal lack. I knew one, whom I greatly esteemed as a minister of the Word for many years. I esteemed him for his regularity of conduct. I believe that he got up to the tick of the clock, that he had family prayer to the tick of the clock, and that he did everything in the same methodical manner. I remarked to him once, "There are many people, round about your chapel, who are living in the depths of sin; do you ever get any of them into your place of worship?" "No," he replied, "I do not want to get them in." I asked, "Why?" "Well," he answered, "they are mostly harlots and thieves; what could I do with such people?" Then I saw that it was possible to be regular, and precise, and good, up to a certain point, and yet to have no moisture; and as the moisture was not there, of course no thief or harlot would go to hear him, he was too dry for them. It is an awful thing to have a Pharisaic practice, perfect when looked at by the casual eye, yet without the life and light of love; and, therefore lacking moisture.

Beware, dear friends, of a belief that never had any repentance connected with it, for that is another way in which the lack of moisture is manifested. There are some people who are willing to believe a great deal; but you never hear of them groaning because of sin, or confessing it with a broken heart in true humility before God. To trust in repentance without faith, would be ruinous to the soul; but to have a kind of faith without repentance, would be also ruinous. If faith never has tears in its eyes, it is a dead faith. He, who has never wept because of his sin, has never really had his sin washed away. If thy heart has never been broken on account of sin, I will not believe that it was ever broken from sin; and if thy heart is not broken from thy sin, thou art still at a distance from thy God, and thou wilt never see his face with acceptance.

Beware, also, of a confidence that is never associated with self-diffidence. Yes, my dear sir, speak as boldly as you will, be as brave as you may for your Master; but, at the same time, be very lowly in spirit. Let thine own weakness be seen, as well as thy Master's strength. Whilst thou dost glory in Christ's merits, confess thine own sinfulness, and admit that, in thyself, thou art nothing. We can never have too much confidence in God; but, unless it is associated with deep self-distrust, it will lack moisture, and it never will produce any real harvest unto God.

Beware, also, of action without spirituality. We have many people of that kind, who are very active in serving God in one way and another. Would that all were, if it were in a right spirit! They are busy from morning to night, but there is no prayer, and no dependence upon God, mingled with their efforts; but that will

not do. That is all wasted activity. However busy we may be, we shall effect nothing unless we receive from the Holy Spirit all the power with which we work, and are dependent upon him for the success of every word we say. Beware of having so much to do that you really do nothing at all because you do not wait upon God for the power to do it aright.

Then there is another dry thing, namely, zeal without communion with God;—zeal for extending the kingdom of Christ, zeal for spreading the denomination, zeal for the advance of a particular sect, zeal that is intolerant, probably; but, all the while, no careful walking according to God's Word, no observing what God would have us to be zealous about, no humbling of ourselves in the presence of the great Lord of all, and no bathing of ourselves in the river of the water of life by fellowship with God.

Thus I might keep on showing you various ways in which people may have a great deal that is very good, yet it will all come to nothing because they lack moisture. But *the seed cannot assimilate the dry earth until it is mixed with water, and held in solution*, and spiritual life can only be fed by truth held in solution by the Holy Spirit. When he softens and prepares us, then our roots and rootlets take up the true nutriment, and we grow thereby.

In the case of the seed upon the rocky ground, there was, also, *a deficiency of sensitive vitality*. The seed grew for a time, and then became dry; and are there not multitudes of people, in our churches now, who are just like that? They are as dry as old hay, they have withered away. We cannot turn them out; but, oh, that we could turn life into them! Oh, that the water of life might flow all about them, so that they might live thereby, and bring forth fruit unto God!

I have said enough, if God shall bless it, to set many people searching their hearts to see whether this sacred moisture is there.

III. Now, to close, we are to CONSIDER HOW THIS EVIL IS TO BE AVOIDED.

Well, first, let us one and all *cry to God to break up the rock*. Rock, rock, rock, wilt thou never break? We may scatter the seed upon you, but nothing will come of it till that rock is broken. The great steam-plough needs to be driven right through men's hearts till they are torn in sunder, and the old rock of nature is ground to powder, made friable, and turned into good soil. Dear friend, do pray to God to make sure work of you. As far as you are concerned, the one thing you have to do is to believe in Christ Jesus, that you may be saved. But a part of the process of your salvation is the taking out of you the heart of stone, and the giving to you of a heart of flesh. There is no true growing unless this takes place.

The next thing is, *look well to spirituality*. This moisture was a very subtle thing; men might easily overlook that dampness in the atmosphere, and in the soil, which was all-essential. Who can tell you what unction is? Yet a sermon without unction is a poor, worthless thing. There is a certain secret something which distinguishes a true Christian from a worldling or a mere professor; see that you have it. Do not be content with the Creed, baptism,

the Lord's supper, or anything else that is visible; but say, "Lord, give me the moisture that I need; give me that secret something without which I shall be lacking the very thing which I most need." You cannot see your soul; you cannot fully tell what it is; yet you know that it is a something that keeps your body alive, and when that something is gone, the body becomes dead; so is all religion dead until it receives the life which comes from the moisture that so many lack.

That leads me further to say, *look to the Holy Spirit*. Be very tender towards the Holy Spirit. We preach Christ to you, as we are commanded to do; but we do not want you ever to forget the blessed Spirit, without whom nothing saving can ever be wrought in you. You cannot make yourself to be born again; even the faith that saves is the work of the Spirit of God, if it be the faith of God's elect. Be jealous and tender, therefore, and walk carefully in reference to the Spirit of God, lest you grieve him.

Then I would say, next, *do try to avoid all dry heat*. Do not work yourself up into a frenzy, and think that there is anything saving in it. The heat of excitement may be necessary, just as dust flies from the wheels of a chariot when it moves swiftly; but, as the dust does not help the chariot, but is a nuisance to those who are riding in it, so is it with excitement. It does not help the true movement, and it is a nuisance to those who are living near to God.

Lastly, *be constantly looking for that divine mystery of secret vitality which is called in the text "moisture."* I commend to you this prayer. "Lord, give me this blessed moisture. Saturate me through and through with the heavenly dew, the divine rain, that I may grow, and bring forth fruit to the glory of thy holy name." God bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—42 (VERSION I.), 40, 499.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM XLII.

We often read this Psalm, because we are very often in the same state that the psalmist was in when he wrote it, and the language seems to suit us at many periods of our life.

Verse 1. *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.*

It is the "hart" that panteth; and, in the Hebrew, the word is in the feminine. The old naturalists say that the female has greater thirst than the male, and that it shows it more, having more feebleness of body, and less power of endurance. The hart is said to be, naturally, a thirsty creature; and when it has been long hunted, its thirst seems to be insatiable. The psalmist does not say, "My soul hungereth," but, "My soul thirsteth." As man can bear hunger much longer than he can bear thirst; he may continue without food for days, but not without drink; so the psalmist mentions the most thirsty creature, and the most ardent of the natural passions: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks." He does not merely say, "after the brooks;" but, "after the water brooks."