

God refreshing His heritage

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Date: 01 January 2000

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- [0 : 0 0] Psalm 68 at verse 9. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance when it was weary.
- Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance when it was weary.
- Now, my friends, there have been, as you know, some very terrible things happened in our country in the last number of days and weeks.
- You will all have heard, for instance, of this little boy of two called James Bulger, who was with his mother, or relation at any rate, in a superstore, like the one just across the road.
- And two boys of ten, apparently, simply enticed him away. And then, when they got him out, dragged him away. And as we now know, fearfully and dreadfully murdered him, as far as known evidence has been revealed.
- [1 : 2 5] Something like that. And all the more shocking, insofar as the children who committed that crime, so it would appear, were themselves only about ten years of age.
- that happened in a city in Britain, in Liverpool, once a renowned and great city, perhaps still is in many ways.
- And then, nearer still to my hometown, there was a bomb blast, as you know, in Warrington, or perhaps more than one, I should say.
- I went to school, I may tell you, very close to Warrington, and a lot of my school friends were born and bred and brought up, and went to their primary education, in Warrington.
- And we know what happened there recently. Great explosions, terrible fear, death, maiming, consternation. And all of that, I think you would have to say, is shocking.
- [2 : 3 4] Indeed, even the unbelieving world is telling us it's shocking. Even those who never go near, Bibles tell us, all of that is shocking. Not only has it shocked this world, but President Clinton of the United States has also commented on it.
- The whole world has noticed it. And some are even already saying that it's going to make a difference. Things will never be the same.
- So they think and hope. All of that then is shocking. But I will tell you something more shocking. It's that nobody in society today, apart from a few, has any idea why these things are happening.
- Oh, they have their explanations. But they do not fit. And they are not real explanations. And the reason why people today are not in church shows that they have no idea that behavior, crime, violence, murder, of the kind that we're talking about here, is very closely connected with our relationship to God and our attendance in the house of God.
- And yet the terrible fact is that people at large in society do not even begin to realize that.
- [4 : 1 3] I wonder how many people today in Liverpool and in Warrington or anywhere else have gone to an evangelical church to hear the reasons why these mischievous and villainous acts occur.

it will be a very interesting study. So the tragedy is not the crimes alone, terrible as they are. The tragedy is that people at large have no idea how these things can happen.

And it is because they do not come to hear the preaching which tells us that our own hearts are desperately wicked. All of us. You could do these things.

Those of you who are ten years old and nine years old and fifteen years old. You could do all of these things and maybe one day you will. You also could take away young boys and girls and treat them like that.

You also could lay bombs and explosives and kill people unrighteously. All of these things sadly are in the human heart. The heart, says the Bible, the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

[5 : 28] Who can know it? Well, nobody can know it but the real Christian. Maybe you have a good opinion of yourself. Even as I'm talking you're saying to yourself well, I may not be an angel but I would never do a thing like that.

How do you know? If you were given enough incentive, temptation, if you were desperate enough, if you were wanting money sufficiently and somebody said here's so many thousands of pounds just put this little packet inside our store and then walk away and don't mention it to the store attendant.

How do you know if you were desperate enough you wouldn't do it? You don't know what temptation is. Let's leave all that where it is. The question I want to come to is where can we find some comfort in this modern situation in which we find ourselves?

Because let's face it these things could be happening next door to us or all around us. Indeed they are happening one way or another. where can we find some comfort?

That's why I bring you to this text. Listen to it. Verse 9. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance when it was weary.

[6 : 56] There are three things to look at here. First of all, the inheritance. Secondly, the weariness. Thirdly, God's giving confirmation or comfort.

It comes so much the same thing. Now the heritage. God's heritage is his people. That's the first point we see here. The people of the Lord are God's divine inheritance.

Listen. Thou didst confirm thine inheritance. Now you might say to me, what is God's inheritance?

The answer is, it is the church. The true church. All believers throughout the world, they are God's inheritance.

They are special to him. Do you know these words in Deuteronomy 32? The Lord's portion is his people.

[8 : 02] Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. God's people are his special treasure. God's people in this world are the apple of his eye.

Now the apple of your eye is a very sensitive part of the body. As soon as anything goes near the eye, instinctively the eyelid closes and the eyelashes keep it away as far as they can.

That's the wonderful instinct of the eye. Put your finger near somebody's eye and it closes before you can really realize what you're doing. You've closed your eye. That's God's wonderful instinct given to us.

And God says, my people are the apple of my eye. Now could anything be more beautiful to express his love for his own dear children? They are his choice possession.

His peculiar treasure. They are called in scripture God's peculiar people because they belong to him. Let's use an illustration. There are many, many houses in Scotland.

[9 : 07] Thousands, I suppose. Maybe millions. I don't know. Thousands of generative houses in Scotland. Thousands of homes of all sorts. Big and small and in the middle. But you have one home which belongs to you.

And all the other homes really don't matter to you so much. But your home matters to you. That's your house. That's your treasure. Your inheritance. Your possession. Your own home.

Now that's the way God thinks about his church. All the other things in life don't matter so very much. God isn't so interested in the house of commons and the house of lords and law courts and police stations and schools and colleges and universities and hospitals.

God is interested in a way in these things of course. But they are not his peculiar treasure. They are not his glorious possession. They are not his rich inheritance.

inheritance. But the church is. The church is his house. His home. Here he dwells. It is the very temple of the living God.

[10 : 15] So that's the difference. You may know Psalm 60 goes a little bit like this. God tells us in that Psalm that he will do certain things.

He says I will divide Shechem and meet out the valley of Sukkoth. Gilead is mine and Manasseh is mine. Ephraim is the strength of my head.

Judah is my lawgiver. Now all of those places are places within the boundaries of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament. They were places precious to God because they were in Israel.

Shechem Sukkoth Gilead Manasseh Ephraim Judah they were all part of the promised land. Towns or places within the promised land and God says he is going to do something good in every one of these places but when you come then to verse 8 see the difference.

Notice the contrast of verse 8. Moab that's somewhere outside the land. Moab is my wash pot. Over Edom will I cast out my shoe.

[11 : 27] Philistia triumph thou because of me who will lead me into Edom. Now these places were associated with out there and you see God looks at the world in a remarkable way.

God looks at the world as two places. First of all in here and then out there. He looks at his own people as his treasure his children they are my family says God.

I love these people they belong to me they are my inheritance. They will inherit the kingdom of God and I will inherit them. I will love them eternally and they will love me eternally.

I will redeem them by the blood of my dear son. I have chosen them in Christ before the world began. I give them my Holy Spirit I teach them I keep them I preserve them safe unto life eternal.

And all of that is because they are the inheritance of the Lord. He watches over them every moment as a mother does with a little child. Come you mothers.

[12 : 32] You know what I'm talking about. You have a little child who is just beginning to toddle, can crawl a bit and lift itself up and beginning to move now on two legs for the first time and oh how excited.

And you never take your eyes off that child. If you do you make sure there's somebody else who will do the watching for you. If you have a fire you make sure that there's a guard well round the fire.

If you have a hot electric ring on the cooker you make sure that it's out of reach. If you have anything that they could stumble and fall and hit themselves on you make sure it's removed. No sharp needles, no sharp scissors, everything is taken out of their reach.

You're watching over this child all the time. Rightly so, only a fool would do otherwise. So God watches over the souls and lives of his dear children. He watches them every moment.

They are his inheritance. They are the heritage of the Lord. God. I pause to say what a privilege to be a Christian.

[13 : 36] What a privilege to belong to this great God. What a privilege to have his care and his love and his surveillance. Talking of surveillance, I got a shock the other day.

A man came to the door selling aerial photographs. photographs. And I'd had one of these gentlemen two years ago. A photograph of the manse from up there.

And the first man that came wanted to charge about a hundred pounds. So I waved him farewell. But this man came and he only wanted twenty pounds. He says, the other one said wanted too much.

I can cut the price down to twenty. So that was tempting. In the end he won his case and I bought it. But I thought to myself, you never know, do you, who's watching you these days.

Here it was, in all likelihood I was studying my sermon or something in my study there in the manse and he with his aeroplanes taking photographs of us all. You never know who's watching. But here's a comforting thought.

[14 : 40] We do know who's watching. Always taking aerial photographs of you wherever you go. God our Father, Jesus our Mediator, the Holy Spirit always with us, always watching, surveying, surveying everything we do.

This is my inheritance. Dear friends, we would rather be Christians than sit on King's thrones. We would rather be Christians than have our names written in heaven. We would rather be Christians than have the very moon and stars for our playthings given to us by God.

Because these things are baubles, nothing but to have God, his comfort. Now, secondly, let's look at the weariness.

This is what the text says, Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance when it was weary.

Now, God's inheritance is his people, as I have said, and God's people get very weary at times. They get tired, they get very sad, and the weariness is something which all Christian people become aware of.

[15 : 56] I doubt if there ever was a child of God in this world who did not at times feel the burden and the weariness of living in such a world as this.

It's all part of our sanctification. God keeps us here for a time in this world so that we might yearn to get out of it. Not in the sense of neglecting our duties, but in the sense of longing one day when our duties are all done, when we've all preached our last sermon, when we've all swept our last floor, when we have all closed the last door, travelled our last mile, switched the last switch, turned the last handle, read our last book, then we can say goodbye world.

I shall never come back. And you know, the Christian is very glad that he will never get back to this world. He wouldn't come back if you paid him a thousand kings' ransoms to come.

No, no, because the Christians have great experience of this world. That was the touching thing about the men from Russia when they were speaking at Leicester. They didn't say anything about their sufferings.

They'd had plenty, you know, under the Soviet regime, plenty of sufferings under the oppression of communism. What they did talk about was not their sufferings, but a present opportunity and the need to pray.

[17 : 22] Keep praying for us, don't stop praying, they said, because the doors are open but they could quickly shut again. If this Mr. Yeltsin gets out or something, the portcullis may come down.

No more freedom for the church. Things like that. God will send us into circumstances that will make us weary.

Do you feel like that just now? I think I meet, wherever I go, I meet Christians who are thoroughly weary of life. They feel that the world has just lost all sense of purpose and direction.

Let me tell you about a book I was reading about the church of England. It concerned that man Gareth Bennett, the Oxford Don, who sadly, I think it would be right to say, did away with himself.

Because of the preface to Crockford's clerical directory, do you remember, two or three years ago that he had written, and all the press turned on him, and some of the bishops and archbishops turned against him too, and the strain apparently unhinged his mind, and he just did away with himself, alas, poor man.

[18 : 34] But in the book that I'm reading, it tells us this, that the writer, who seems to be very sympathetic to some of the things we believe, he had gone to America, to the Episcopal Church in Alaska.

And there he was talking to a woman and others, and this woman said it all. She said, Sir, she said, in our church, meaning the Church of England, these people, they've come in, and they've stolen our church away from us, and what can we do to get it back?

You see, they'd stolen a prayer book, they'd stolen the 39 articles, as it were, they were putting women into their pulpits, they were letting all sorts of funny people into the pulpit, all sorts of funny things, happening in worship.

They weren't simply singing the praises of God anymore. They were having queer fellows like clowns coming to entertain the people, and then they were having all sorts of funny dancing in costumes. The Bible was downgraded, other funny things like choruses had come in, and she said, our church used to be so wonderful, now she said, it's all gone, somebody's stolen our church, what can we do to get it back?

And you see, this woman was aware of the weariness of it all. things had been spoiled by these liberal types of thinkers. Well, my friends, sometimes in life we will discover that a weariness comes over the people of God.

[19 : 56] I want to mention two or three forms of this weariness. Weariness will come over you, if you're a Christian, when you see very little blessing in the churches.

Now, we're in that position right now. We don't know why. It may be that we ministers are simply not good enough. I'm prepared to put my name under that heading right away.

But it may be that that's not the reason. It may be that there's other reasons. But whatever it is, something is keeping back the blessing. Maybe it's some of you, and people like you, as well as me, maybe we're all to blame for this.

Maybe we're not zealous enough for God. Maybe we're half asleep. Maybe we're living too much for ourselves and our families, and not enough for God and his truth. Well, we may not know, but whatever it is, it's a fact today, is it not?

There is so little blessing in the churches of our nation. Not like that in other countries, mind you. In Africa, someone was telling me about Malawi, where some of our dear student friends here come from.

[21 : 03] And they were saying it in Malawi, about one third of the population goes to church. The churches are burgeoning with thousands of people, wonderful congregations of Christians in Malawi, and other countries like that too.

It's wonderful, they say. But it's not like that here. So the people of God are weary. Another reason which causes this sense of weariness is this, when so few are being converted.

And that's true right throughout our country. So few being converted. Oh, there are exceptions. Thank God. But it's food for thought why there are so few.

Ministers today are like men that pour gallons and gallons of truth into people's ears. and hardly a teaspoonful seems to stay.

You pour it into one ear and it goes out of the other. Not of course in every case. Again, there are notable exceptions. Here, as everywhere. Thank God for that.

[22 : 14] But it's a weariness to think how few are being converted. And it's a weariness to think how much opposition there is to the gospel in the world.

Did you ever hear these words of George Wishart, a friend of John Knox? Wishart was a great Scottish martyr who died just before the Reformation in Scotland, which occurred in 1560.

And George Wishart said this, I get weary of this world because there is so little love of God in it. Amen.

Amen. That's how I feel. Do you? I get so weary of this world. There's so little love of God in it. What a senseless society.

What are people doing? They're rushing up and down the high street to buy another Hoover or another dishwasher or another television or another recording machine or another you put whatever you like there.

[23 : 18] But they're not happy. and they never will be because a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Did it ever strike you you can only wear one suit of clothes at a time. Now supposing you're an archduke you can clear out all the suits in the best West End tailor spend half a million pounds if you like fill your wardrobe with the very best suits but the funny thing is the disappointing thing is you can only wear one at a time.

Oh let's go into racing cars supposing you have the best fastest most wonderful car or motorbike please yourself you can only go 70 miles an hour unless you want to be stopped by the arm of the law.

so you see isn't life stupid really if people are living for this world for edges and televisions and recorders and not for that world no wonder no wonder there's something radically wrong.

God is the sole source of blessing we don't have him we've got nothing we might as well live like the brood beasts if people don't seek after God let them drop in all falls and crawl about the high street like beasts if they want to live like beasts let them walk like beasts on all falls God made man upright with a mind to think about heaven and glory and eternity what's the sense of living like pigs or cattle oh there's no satisfaction in the things of the world only in God have we peace or comfort so lastly briefly thirdly our text tells us not only of the inheritance not only of the weariness but the good news in our text is this God sends plentiful rain in a time of weariness to confirm the inheritance now this is an interesting expression

[25 : 38] I won't worry with the Hebrew but this is an interesting text literally it translates like this a rain of free gifts didst thou shake out when it was weary a rain a shower or a rain of free gifts oh God thou didst shake out when it was weary and one commentator J.A.

Alexander comments very well I think he says this the free gift came when it was most needed and this is the doctrine of the text that when the people of God most need the blessing God has a habit of sending it down upon them if you're a Christian look back in your life to when your back was against the wall to that terrible moment when you almost thought that God had forgotten you look back to that time I have such times in my experience I can remember when I was in such desperation now and again all I could do was go into a room shut the door make sure nobody would hear me and literally cry to high heaven not knowing what on earth I was going to do have you had your times like that I certainly have well I'll tell you look back and you will discover

God never let you down in a time of need sufficient grace was given that's what this text is talking about oh God thou descend a plentiful rain the earth had become as hard as the Sahara desert barren dry there was no prospect of any more blessing sounds like Great Britain doesn't it sounds like Liverpool doesn't it sounds like air there's no help of anything good who's going to put this town right who's going to put the country right God in a time of need God can do it with his blessing and you see it comes like rain that is to say it has to come from there it has to come from those clouds that are above the showers that God himself sends down doesn't come from here doesn't come from here but from there

God must send a shower upon the heritage when it is weary oh friends it is not in vain to keep on praying to God it is not in vain to keep on asking for him to come and visit us again no no it is not in vain the day the day will come when God will visit his people with fresh showers in Liverpool and air and places where we have longed for him to come and to be Psalm 124 like as a bird out of the foulest snare escapes away so is our soul set free broke are their nets and thus escaped we wherefore our hope is in the Lord's great name who heaven and earth by his great power did frame that wonderful reformation psalm that Calvin sang and Luther sang and Knox sang and the

Geneva church sang and the Scottish church sang and the English reformers sang why did they sing it because it was true our nation escaped like a bird from the foulest snare we need to escape again from a different sort of snare oh God thou to thine heritage did send a plenteous rain where by thou when it weary was did step refresh again if the death of poor little James Bulger and these people in Warrington can bring us to learn anything it is this we need to take a fresh look at the heavens and to ask the Lord to cause the cloud to pass by the showers to begin the blessing to descend for men to come again to the house of God to listen again to the word preached again to bend their knee to Christ and again to seek

[30 : 14] God's secret blessing and eternal favour have you ever sought it for yourself are you part of God's heritage or are you just tacked on like something that doesn't belong you're just dragged in to these things without really loving them or do you love them for yourself God grant that every one of us may do so and that his name may be sanctified in Britain and in the world by refreshing his weary heritage in these difficult times through which we are passing you