

THE FORMER AND LATTER RAIN

Joel 2:23-27, *Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God And there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.”*

Today I'd like to examine the Holy Spirit as the Former and Later Rain, but with special emphasis on the Later Rain in the context of **revival**. There are many different opinions about **revival**, therefore, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and not be drawn into the prophecy-mongering because that will keep us constantly looking for an antichrist. The cunning and subtle design of satan is to get people far more concerned about prophecy than about being more like Jesus. Note, the Holy Ghost doesn't draw us to the contemplation of prophecy; to fill our heads with knowledge of how all these things are going to be worked out.

Rather, what the Holy Spirit does is to impress upon us that we should be ready! Watchful for prophesy to be fulfilled!

The three last parables that Jesus ever gave to His disciples, before He went to the cross, were on this subject: “**The Parable of the Ten Virgins**” (Matthew 25:1-10); “**The Parable of the Talents**” (verses 14-30); and “**The Parable of the Judgment of the Nations**” (verses 31-46). The first parable, the one about the ten virgins, is given that we should be watchful. “***Watch, therefore, for you know not the hour nor the day of His coming***” (verse 13). The point of the second parable, the one concerning the talents, is that you are to be faithful in what God gives us to do. And the third parable, the one about the Judgment of the Nations, where they are judged according to how they have dealt with “little ones.” This is the word of the Lord to be merciful. That is to be our state—to be full of mercy and truth.

So the Holy Spirit is deeply interested in you knowing something about prophecy, but only in order that you should be faithful, and that you should be watchful, and that you should be merciful; for they are the three tests of the genuine Christian faith — and not whether you know who the antichrist is. It’s in this context that I want to talk to you about the prophecy of the Latter Rain. “***He has given you the former rain and He will give you the latter rain***” (Joel 2:23). Our focus is going to be on the Holy Spirit as former and latter rain.

Let me ask you something, “Do you really expect revival?” If the answer is yes, then what you inwardly feel is in agreement with the “mind” of the Holy Spirit. God is a God of revival - He loves to revive His people. God is not a God of death but a God of life. **“I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). Joel 2:23, **“He has given you the former rain moderately and He will give you the latter rain abundantly,”** really fits in with our conception that God will revive His people.

So what is the “former and latter rain”? What David mentions in Psalm 65 is really describing the Former and the Latter rain: **“You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth.”** The former rain is given by God to soften the soil that has been made so hard through the long dry period, and God softens it with former rain; and the seed is sown at that period. Hence God, by the former rain, and by the moisture in the soil, cause the corn to spring forth (verses 9 and 10). If you looked in the margin of the King James Version, it says: **“You visit the earth after You have made it to desire rain”** (verse 9, KJV margin). God provides desire before providing the need. One of the greatest principles that God works upon is that He **“satisfies the desire of every living thing”** (Psalm 145:16). Yes, He satisfies desires that He has provided! And note, with us, desire is always a the heart matter.

If you keep pressing into God, and you delight yourself in Him, He will give you your hearts desire (Psalm 37:4). He will not do anything against desire. Notice that the earth desires rain, so He satisfies the longing of the earth. It's as if the earth has its mouth wide open waiting to receive what it has been longing for! Yet, only God knows how much rain should be poured out. If the farmer has continual rain, he looks with despair upon his wheat fields, because he knows that the stalk will be so thin, so mushy, so green, that it will just bend and fall over. It may be strong and big in appearance, but it's thin, it has no strength in it, and the slightest wind makes it bend and droop - and the farmer's wheat is lost. Therefore, what's the remedy? Dry spells!

Likewise, God may often bring you through times of dryness in order to make you strong. It's a sign that the Lord loves you. There are periods in our lives when God brings dryness on our souls and into our lives. You may go through a time of heartache, a time when things seem to go wrong, a time even when it feels like the Lord has left you. But this will make you strong! I hate to say it, but too much of a good thing will make you weak. And that's why the Lord brings you through the drought. It's not a sign the Lord has abandoned you; rather, it's a sign that the Lord loves you.

Then after the drought comes the latter rain - just before the harvest. God sends the **latter rain** in order that there may be an abundant harvest. For that rich, latter rain gives you full ears of corn.

Thereafter, God sends the sunshine to ripen it. In Psalm 65, the first portion speaks of **Former Rain**, and then verse 11 brings in the **Latter Rain**. ***“You crown the year with Your goodness.”*** This is the latter rain, when God crowns the harvest year with His goodness. Only the latter rain can give an abundant harvest. Have you ever heard a field of wheat singing? When you see a field of ripe wheat, it actually sings! This typifies the Holy Spirit coming upon His people. As the wind passes over the wheat field, all the heads bow in unison. And they start to sing. If ever you have the privilege of being in a large wheat field, listen to the sounds of ripe wheat. How it rustles and sings! But it will only do it when it’s in good, full ear! It doesn’t sing when the ear isn’t formed - it sings when the ear is fully formed. That is what David is speaking about.

Earlier I stated that I strongly reject what I call prophecy mongering. There are people who read endless books on fancy views of prophecy, all of them telling you what is going to take place. But you see, that’s not God’s way. God’s key to prophecy is not “This is going to happen like that.” God’s key to prophecy is; “This is that which I had spoken about!” Yes, the very thing that God had announced! God doesn’t tell you what is going to happen in detail, to fulfil a certain prophecy. What God does reveal is the fulfilment of that prophecy - when it takes place. “This is that” (Acts 2:16). So Peter could declare by the inner witness and not by mental calculation when the Holy Ghost had come down at Pentecost.

When Simeon and Anna came into the Temple and saw that Baby, (Luke 2:25-38), by the witness of the Spirit they knew “this is that” which God had promised, and they boldly announced, “This is the Messiah!” God’s way doesn’t change. He still deals with prophecy that way!

We can truthfully say that God has fulfilled His word concerning the former rains, because the **latter rains** are coming down today. “This is that” which was prophesied by the Lord. We are nearing the time when the Son of Man shall reap His harvest. And **latter rain** always comes before the great harvest. We can safely say that Pentecost was former rain. And there has been a long, dry period in between - a spiritual strengthening. But the **latter rains** have begun. I believe that God is about to give us an abundant, glory shower of latter rain. I believe that the Body of Christ is going to have a lasting victory against the forces of darkness. And the numbers of those redeemed, will show you that Calvary was not in vain. The devil does not have the power to rob God of Calvary’s victory! The number of those whom God will save, as the Scripture declares, “***will be a great multitude, which no man can number***” (Revelation 7:9; Genesis 13:16).

Williston Walker, the respected historian, quotes another wise church historian named Heussi and says that in 50 a.d. (in the early church), if one was a true member of the church, these three things were present:

(1) He was baptised in the Name of Jesus for the remission of his sins in water; (2) He was baptised in the Holy Spirit; and, (3) He called Jesus Lord. That was what qualified the ordinary early-church Christian around the days of the Apostles. Today, we've lost the immanence of the Holy Spirit. See how things have changed. We acknowledge Him as inspiring the Bible. We often feel that He inspires the preacher. We also declare that we have been moved by the Spirit during praise and worship. But what we have lost is the personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the midst of His people, ruling and governing and directing us. That is what's called "the immanence" - the nearness, the indwelling - amongst His people. And that is what happens in revival. This is **latter rain**.

Through Joel God declared: "***I will restore that latter rain and I will come in the midst of you. Yes, I will dwell in you midst.***" Now, Jesus Christ is Lord of His church. And the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the manifestation of **Lord** in the church. We acknowledge Him as Lord of His church, the Christ, sitting at the right hand of God. And we know His loving, deep, personal interest, in every one of us. But what do we know today of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, as being in our midst - as being Lord in the church? Very, very little. If we believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord, then surely, we must acknowledge the Person He sent to dwell among us and manifest His divine presence! We need our Lord to be Lord more than ever. We need revival - so we need the latter rain!

As the word of the Lord says: ***“I will give you the latter rain... And the floor shall be full of wheat. And the vat shall overflow with wine and oil.... And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else. And my people shall never be ashamed.”***

If we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, let us also acknowledge that His Lordship is being manifest in our presence by the Holy Spirit. Consequently the **Latter Rain** will come and a great harvest of souls should be ushered in every time we meet. And accompanying this outpouring will be signs and wonders in a measure that the world has never seen before. ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”*** (John 14:12). Are you ready for the great outpouring - for the great awakening? Remember, prophecy is founded on a simple truth... ***“This is it.”***