

## **6:7-8 Land That Has Drunk the Rain**

### **SPIRITUAL RAIN.**

JEROME: Would you like to know in what way the faithful are compared with clouds in holy writ? Isaiah says, “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon them.”<sup>31</sup> Moses was speaking as if he were a cloud when he said, “May my teaching drop as the rain.”<sup>32</sup> The letters of the apostles are spiritual rain for us. As a matter of fact, what does Paul say in his letter to the Hebrews?: “For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it,” and again, “I planted, Apollos watered.”<sup>33</sup> HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS, ALTERNATE SERIES 73 (PSALM 96).<sup>34</sup>

### **THE SAME RAIN MAY BEAR THISTLES OR FRUIT.**

ORIGEN: Our earth, that is, our heart, receives blessings if it receives “the rain” of the doctrine of the law “that often falls upon it” and brings forth the fruit of works. But if it does not have a spiritual work but “thorns and thistles,” that is, cares of the world or the desire of pleasures and riches, “it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.” For that reason, each one of the hearers, when he assembles to hear, receives “the shower” of the Word of God; and, if one indeed brings forth the fruit of a good work, one will obtain “a blessing.” But if a person disdains the received Word of God and frequently neglects to hear it and subjects himself to the care and passion of secular affairs, as one who would suffocate the Word “with thorns,” he will procure “a curse” for a blessing, and, instead of receiving a blessing, his “end is to be burned.” Therefore, he says, “I will give you your rains in their season.”<sup>35</sup> HOMILIES ON LEVITICUS 16.2.4-6.<sup>36</sup>

### **WE FARM TO PLEASE GOD.**

PHOTIUS: “It is cultivated” manifestly for their salvation and the enjoyment of those producing fruit. And if “the Father is the vinedresser,”<sup>37</sup> just as the Lord says, and again the Son is also the sower, “the one sowing the good seed,”<sup>38</sup> if the crop is suitable for them, that is, if the fruit appears—for we also ought to bear fruit for God, as he says somewhere, “but now having become slaves to God, produce your fruit for sanctification”<sup>39</sup>—then if this is the case, we farm manifestly because of God, in order that we may please him with a virtuous life. Therefore we also will be deemed worthy of his blessing. FRAGMENTS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 6.7.<sup>40</sup>

### **NEAR TO BEING CURSED.**

CHRYSOSTOM: "Worthless," he says, "and near to being cursed." Oh, how great consolation in this word! For he said "near to being cursed," not "cursed." Now he that has not yet fallen into a curse but has come to be near to it, may he then come to be far off from it. And not by this only did he encourage them, but also by what follows. For he did not say . . . "which shall be burned," but what? "Its end is to be burned," if he continues in this way to the end, he means. Thus if we cut out and burn the thorns, we shall be able to enjoy those good things innumerable and become approved and partake of blessing. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 10.3.41

### **IT IS NOT GOD'S PURPOSE TO HARDEN.**

ORIGEN: Let us see then whether by an illustration used by the apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews, we are able to prove that by one operation God has mercy upon one while he hardens another. It is not God's intent to harden, but while having a good purpose, hardening follows as a result of the inherent principle of wickedness in such persons, so that he is said to harden him who is hardened. 42 . . . As regards the rain there is one operation, but the ground which is cultivated produces fruit, while that which is neglected and is barren produces thorns. ON FIRST PRINCIPLES 3.1.10.43

## **6:9-12 *In Your Case***

### **HOPE RECOVERS US.**

CHRYSOSTOM: This is the admirable part of Paul's wisdom. . . . For when he says, "We desire each one of you," it is as if one should say, "I wish you always to be in earnest and, such as you were before, to be also now and for the time to come." For this made his reproof more gentle and easy to be received. And he did not say, "I will," which would have been expressive of the authority of a teacher, but what is expressive of the affection of a father and what is more than "willing," "we desire." He is all but saying, "Pardon us, even if we say what is distasteful." "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end." Hope, he means, carries us through. It recovers us again. So do not despair, lest your hope be in vain. For one that works for good hopes also for good and never despairs of himself. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 10.5.44

## **IMITATING CHRIST.**

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: “We,” according to the good apostle, “wait for the hope of righteousness, for in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.”<sup>45</sup> “We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope,” and so on to, “having become a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”<sup>46</sup> Wisdom, full of every virtue, uses similar words to Paul’s: “Anyone who listens to me will live safely, trusting in hope.”<sup>47</sup> The establishment of hope and hope itself are spoken of interchangeably. That is why he has done admirably to add the word trusting to “will live safely.” He is showing that the sort of person who has hold of the hope he hoped for is at peace. This is why he adds, “And he will be tranquil, without fear, free from all evil.”<sup>48</sup> The apostle speaks openly in the first letter to the Corinthians when he says expressly, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,”<sup>49</sup> to bring this about. If you imitate me and I imitate Christ, then you are imitating Christ as he is representing God. So he establishes a target for faith in “the likeness to God so far as possible in justice and holiness combined with practical wisdom,”<sup>50</sup> and the goal in the actualization of the promise on the basis of faith. STROMATEIS 2.22.136.<sup>51</sup>

## **VISIT IN PRISON SAINT AND SINNER.**

CHRYSOSTOM: Hearing these things, let us, I beseech you, “minister to the saints.” For every believer is a saint in that he is a believer. Though he remains a person living in the world, he is a saint. “For,” he says, “the unbelieving husband is sanctified through the wife, and the unbelieving wife through the husband.”<sup>52</sup> See how the faith makes the saint. If then we see even a secular person in misfortune, let us stretch out a hand to him. Let us not be zealous only for those [ascetics] who dwell in the mountains; they are indeed saints both in manner of life and in faith; these others, however, are saints by their faith, and many of them also in manner of life. Let us not refuse to visit one in prison if he is unholy but go visit him if he is a saint. Whether he is a saint or brother, visit him. Suppose then you ask, but if he is unclean and polluted? Listen to Christ saying, “Judge not, that you be not judged.”<sup>53</sup> Act for God’s sake. What am I saying? Even if we see a heathen in misfortune, we ought to show kindness to him, and to every one without exception who is in misfortunes, and all the more to a believer who is in the world. Listen to Paul saying, “Do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”<sup>54</sup> But I know not where this notion has come from or how this habit has prevailed. For if one actively seeks after the solitaries and is willing to do good to them alone, but with regard to others, on the contrary, is overcurious in his inquiries and says, “unless he be worthy, unless he be righteous, unless he work miracles, I will not stretch out my hand”—such a one has taken away the greater part of charity. In time he will in turn destroy the charity

itself. If it is truly charity, it is shown toward sinners, toward the guilty. For this is charity, not to pity those who have done well, but those who have done wrong. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 10.7.<sup>55</sup>

#### **A JUST CLAIM ON YOUR AID.**

CHRYSOSTOM: So then also, if you see anyone in affliction, do not be curious to inquire further. His being in affliction involves a just claim on your aid. For if, when you see an ass choking, you raise him up without curiously inquiring whose he is, much more about a man one ought not to be overcurious in inquiring whose he is. He is God's, whether heathen or Jew. Even if he is an unbeliever, still he needs help. If the office is committed to you to judge or inquire, then you might well have inquired. But, as it is, his misfortune as such does not permit you to search out these things. Even about people in good health it is not right to be overcurious, nor to be a busybody in other people's matters; even less about those that are in affliction. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 10.8.<sup>56</sup>

#### **SHOW LOVE FOR GOD'S SAKE.**

CHRYSOSTOM: The poor perform needful services for you. What are these? Don't they serve you well? Suppose then I show an especially poor man who performs needful services for you far greater than they do. He will stand by you in the day of judgment. Will he deliver you from the fire? Will all your servants deliver you likewise? When Tabitha died, who raised her up? The servants who stood around or the poor? But you—you are not even willing to put the freeman on an equality with your servants. The frost is hard, and the poor man is cast out in rags, well-nigh dead, with his teeth chattering. Both by his looks and his air you should be moved. And yet, you pass by, warm and full of drink. How do you expect that God should deliver you when in misfortune? And often you will say to yourself, "If I had found one that had done many wrong things, I would have forgiven him, so won't God forgive me?" Do not say this. You neglect the one who has done you no wrong, yet you would be able to help. How shall he forgive you when you are sinning against him? Is not this deserving of hell? . . . Oftentimes you adorn with innumerable vestments of varied colors and gold decorations a dead body, insensible, that can no longer even perceive the honor. Meanwhile one who is in pain and lamenting and tormented and racked by hunger and frost, you neglect and give more to vainglory than to the fear of God. And it does not even stop here. Immediately accusations are brought against the applicant. For why does he not work, you say? And why is he to be maintained in idleness? But, tell me, is it by working that you have what you have? Did you not receive it as an inheritance from your fathers? And even if you work, is this a reason why you should reproach another? Do you not hear what Paul says? For after saying, "If anyone will not work, let him not

eat,"<sup>57</sup> he says, "Do not be weary in well doing."<sup>58</sup> But what do they say? He is an impostor. What do you say, O man? Do you call him an impostor for the sake of a single loaf or of a garment? But, you say, he will sell it immediately. And do you manage all your affairs well? But what? Are all poor through idleness? Is no one so from shipwreck? None from lawsuits? None from being robbed? None from dangers? None from illness? None from any other difficulties? If, however, we hear any one bewailing such evils and crying out aloud and looking up naked toward heaven, with long hair and clad in rags, at once we call him, "The impostor! The deceiver! The swindler!" Are you not ashamed? Whom do you call impostor? Do not accuse the man or give him a hard time. But, you say, he has means and pretends. This is a charge against yourself, not against him. He knows that he has to deal with the cruel, with wild beasts rather than with rational persons. He knows that even if he tells his pitiable story, no one pays any attention. And on this account he is forced to assume even a more miserable guise, that he may melt your soul. If we see a person coming to beg in a respectable dress, "This is an impostor," you say, "and he comes in this way that he may be supposed to be of good birth." If we see one in the contrary guise, we reproach him too. What then are they to do? Oh, the cruelty, Oh, the inhumanity! And why, you say, do they expose their maimed limbs? Because of you. If we were compassionate, they would have no need of these artifices. If they persuaded us at the first application, they would not have contrived these devices. Who is there so wretched as to be willing to cry out so much, as to be willing to behave in an unseemly way, as to be willing to make public lamentations, with his wife destitute of clothing, with his children, to sprinkle ashes on himself? How much worse than poverty are these things? Yet, on account of them, not only are they not pitied, but they are even made subject to our accusations. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 11.7-8.<sup>59</sup>

#### **IT IS THE SEASON OF KINDNESS.**

CHRYSOSTOM: "Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you."<sup>60</sup> Stretch out your hand; let it not be closed up. We have not been constituted examiners into others' lives, for then we should have compassion on no one. When you call upon God, why do you say, "Remember not my sins"? So, even if that person is a great sinner, make this allowance in his case also, and do not remember his sins. It is the season of kindness, not of strict inquiry; of mercy, not of account. He wishes to be maintained; if you are willing, give; but if not willing, send him away without raising doubts. Why are you wretched and miserable? Why do you not pity him yourself, but even turn away those who would as well? For when such a one hears from you, "This person is a cheat; that a hypocrite; and the other lends

out money,” he neither gives to the one nor to the other, for he suspects all to be such. For you know that we easily suspect evil, but good, not so easily. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 11.9.<sup>61</sup>

## **6:13-20 *The Unchangeable Character of God’s Purpose***

### **HE SWORE BY HIMSELF.**

CHRYSOSTOM: Do you see that God regards not his own dignity, but more so how he may persuade people, even though God bears with having unworthy things said of himself. His wish is to impart full assurance. In the case of Abraham, indeed, the apostle shows that the whole promise was of God, not of [Abraham’s] patient endurance, since God was even willing to add an oath—for it was by him by whom men swear that God also “swore,” that is “by himself.” People swear by one greater. God swore not by one greater, for there was none greater, yet he did it. It is not the same thing for man to swear by himself as for God, for man is not the final authority over himself. You see then that this is said no more for Abraham than for ourselves: “that we who have fled for refuge,” he says, “might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.” Here too again, “having patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” . . . He did not say, “when he swore.” One shows the seriousness of an oath by speaking of swearing by one greater. But since the race of humanity is hard of belief, he condescends to communicate on our level. So then for our sake he [so to speak] swears, even though it be unworthy of him that he should not be believed. So also in this sense the apostle made that other statement, “He learned obedience through what he suffered,” <sup>1</sup> because people think going through experience to be more worthy of reliance. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 11.2.<sup>2</sup>

### **GOD’S PROMISE WILL NEVER BE CHANGED.**

EPHREM THE SYRIAN: “Through this” oath “God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise” that God’s promise, because indeed it is God’s, will never be changed. God’s oath was infallible in its being interposed, that is, between God, the angel and Abraham. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.<sup>4</sup>

### **NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GOD, SAVE LYING.**

CLEMENT OF ROME: With this hope, then, let us attach ourselves to the one who is faithful to promises and just in judgments. The one who bids us to refrain from lying is all the less likely to lie. For nothing is impossible to God, save lying. <sup>1</sup> CLEMENT 27.1-2.<sup>6</sup>

## **SCRIPTURES DO NOT LIE.**

ATHANASIUS: Through Moses God gave commandments about sacrifices, and the whole book of Leviticus is taken up with acceptable ways for them to be carried out. The Lord, through the prophets, found fault with those who contemptuously misstated these things, calling them disobedient to the commandment. He told them, “I have not asked you to do these things! . . . Neither did I speak to your fathers about sacrifices, nor give them commands about whole burnt offerings.”<sup>7</sup> Some have put forth the opinion that either the Scriptures do not agree or that God, who gave the commandment, is a liar. But in this there can be no disagreement—far from it. The Father, who is truth, cannot lie, “for it is impossible for God to lie,” as Paul affirms. Actually, these things are plain to those who accept the writings of the law with faith and look at them in the right way. Here is my explanation, and may God grant by your prayers that I am not too far from the truth. It does not appear to me that God gave the commandments and the law concerning sacrifices right away when he led them out of Egypt. Nor did he who gave the law really pay any attention to the whole burnt offerings, as such. He was looking ahead to those things that were prefigured and pointed out by them. “For the law has but a shadow of the good things to come.”<sup>8</sup> And “Those regulations were set forth until the time of reformation.”<sup>9</sup>

That is why the whole law did not deal with sacrifices, although it did include commands concerning them. By means of these commands it began to teach people, calling them away from idols and drawing them to God, giving them proper teaching for the times in which they lived. So you see, God did not give the people those commands about sacrifices and offerings when he brought them out of Egypt, nor even when they first came to Mount Sinai. God is not like people, that he should want those things for himself. No, he gave the commandment so that they might know him and his Word (the Son)—and forget about those so-called gods that do not really exist but appear to do so because of the show people put on.

FESTAL LETTERS 19.4.<sup>10</sup>

## **GOD’S PURPOSE.**

SEVERIAN OF GABALA: When he said above, “the full assurance of the hope,”<sup>11</sup> he made clear that God furnished to Abraham “full assurance,” not that which belonged to his conduct through works but that which be-longed to him through God’s redemptive plan. FRAGMENTS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 6.17.<sup>12</sup>

### **THE WORD FOR ALL NATIONS.**

EPHREM THE SYRIAN: "Through two unchangeable things" . . . the former is that he swore by himself. The latter is that David said, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, that you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." <sup>14</sup> It is by this means that we who have been made coheirs of his promise "might have strong encouragement." We "have fled for refuge" in order to protect ourselves, not for God's justice, in order that God may draw and drive us away from the evils of this world, and may open for us the way "into the inner shrine behind the curtain." We do not go in first. We do not go into the shrine of the tabernacle, where Moses went, but into the inner shrine in heaven, "where Jesus has gone as a forerunner, having become a high priest forever," not in order to offer the victims of sacrifices, like Aaron, but to offer the word for all nations, like Melch-izedek. COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.<sup>15</sup>

### **THE ANCHOR OF HOPE.**

CHRYSOSTOM: Paul shows that while we are still in the world and not yet departed from this life, we are already living amid God's promises. For through hope we are already in heaven. . . . As the anchor, dropped from the vessel, does not allow it to be carried about even if ten thousand winds agitate it but, being depended upon, makes it steady, so also does hope. Note what a fitting image he has chosen. He did not speak of a foundation, which would not be suitable, but of an anchor. For that which is on the tossing sea and seems not to be very firmly fixed stands on the water as upon land and is shaken and yet is not moved. For in regard to those who are very firm and who love the truth, Christ with good reason spoke of one who "has built his house on a rock." <sup>16</sup> But in respect of those who are giving way and who ought to be carried through by hope, Paul has more suitably set down this metaphor. For the surge and the great storm toss the boat, but hope does not permit it to be carried back and forth, although winds innumerable agitate it, so that, unless we had this hope we should long ago have been sunk. Nor is it only in things spiritual, but also in the affairs of this life, that one may find the power of hope great. Whatever it may be, in merchandise, in husbandry, in a military expedition, unless one sets this before him, he would not even touch the work. But he said not simply "anchor," but "sure and steadfast," not shaken. ON THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS 11.3.<sup>17</sup>