

# A Time of Refreshing

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

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*God is the author and finisher of a work of grace, and He promises to pour out His Spirit upon those who are thirsty and dead in trespasses and sins.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 81:10, Isaiah 44:3-5, Zechariah 4:6, Matthew 11:28, Luke 8:43-44, Luke 13:13, John 7:37, John 16:8-9, Philippians 1:6, Philippians 3:13-14

**Topics:** "Prayer", "Revival"

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## Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the promise of God's refreshing spirit as described in Isaiah 44:3-5, highlighting that true revival and spiritual awakening come solely from God, not from human effort. He urges believers to recognize their thirst for God and to seek Him earnestly through prayer, as it is God who convicts, leads, and enlarges His people. M'Cheyne points out that many in the church are like dry ground, lacking the desire for spiritual growth, and he calls for a collective cry for God's outpouring of grace. He encourages believers to dedicate themselves fully to God, as true joy comes from surrendering to Him. Ultimately, M'Cheyne's message is a call to seek a time of refreshing through earnest prayer and reliance on God's spirit.

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## Transcript

"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's" (Isaiah 44:3-5a, KJV).

These words describe a time of refreshing. There are no other words in the whole Bible that have been more often in my heart and on my tongue since I began my ministry. Although God has never left me without some tokens of His presence, He has not yet fulfilled this promise. I have taken it up today in order that we may consider it more fully and plead it more earnestly with God.

### God Is the Author of a Work of Grace

It is God who begins to convict dead souls of their spiritual condition. So it is in Zechariah 12:10: "I will pour . . . the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." Likewise, this is the promise in John 16:8-9a: "And when he is come, he will convict the world of sin . . . because they believe not on me" (NKJV). If any of you have been awakened to concern about your soul, God alone has done it. In the same way, if we are ever to see a time of widespread

revival that will cause people young and old to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" God must pour out the Spirit.

It is God who carries on the work. He leads awakened persons to Christ. Again, John describes the Spirit's function: "He shall convict the world . . . of righteousness" (16:8). If ever we are to see multitudes of souls flying like clouds to Jesus Christ--if ever we are to see parents rejoicing over their children, husbands rejoicing over their wives, and wives rejoicing over their husbands--God must pour out the Spirit. He is the author and finisher of a work of grace (Phil. 1:6).

It is God who enlarges His people. Remember how the olive trees supplied the golden candlesticks with oil in Zechariah 4--they emptied the oil out of themselves (v. 12). If there is little oil, the lamps burn dim, but if much oil, the lamps begin to blaze. If ever we are to see the children of God filled with joy and growing like willows beside the watercourses, God must pour down His Spirit. He must fulfill His Word, and He has promised that He is the Alpha and Omega, the author and finisher of a work of grace.

Because God is the author of grace, we must learn to look beyond ministers for a work of grace. God has given much honor to His ministers, but not the power to pour out the Spirit. He keeps that in His own hand. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). We would have little hope if a work of grace depended upon ministers, for where are our men of might now? God is as able to send His Spirit today as He was at the day of Pentecost, but men are focused on ministers and not on God. As long as people look to ministers, God cannot pour, because then they would say the work came from man.

Stop looking to man! One would think we would be humbled in the dust by this time. In how many churches has God raised up faithful men who ceaselessly warn everyone with tears? And yet the heavens are still like brass and the earth like iron. Look away from man to God. Then He will pour out the Spirit, and His shall be all the glory.

Because times of refreshing come from God, we have good reason to pray for them. We are often preaching to awaken others, but we should concentrate even more on praying. Prayer is more powerful than preaching. It is prayer that gives preaching all its power.

I observe that some Christians are very ready to censure ministers and to complain of their preaching, of their coldness, and of their unfaithfulness. God forbid that I should ever defend deadness in the ambassador of Christ! But the blame for unfaithfulness lies in the lack of faithful praying. Note that even the hands of Moses would have fallen down had they not been held up by his faithful people. Come, then, you wrestlers with God--strive with God that He may fulfill His Word.

### God Begins with Thirsty Souls

Distressed wanderers. There are often souls that have been under the heavy hand of God for a long time. God has led them into trouble but not into peace. He has taken them down into the wilderness, and there they wander about in search of refreshing waters, but they find none. They go from well to well seeking a drop of water to cool their tongue, and from minister to minister opening their mouths and panting earnestly, yet they find no peace. These are thirsty souls.

Now, it is a sweet thought that God begins with such as these: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty" (Isa. 44:3). The whole Bible shows that God has a peculiar tenderness for those who are thirsty. Christ,

who is the express image of God, had compassion on those who were weak: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37).

Many of Jesus' cures were intended to win the hearts of burdened souls. The woman who had spent everything she had upon other physicians, and who was worse rather than better, no sooner touched the hem of His garment than she was made whole (Luke 8:43-44). Another was bowed down 18 years but Jesus laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight (Luke 13:13).

Weary sinner, this is what Jesus wants to do for you! Only learn that it must come from His hand. You try other physicians in vain. You will get worse rather than better. Instead, wait on Him. Kneel and worship Him, saying, "Lord, help me." Long for a time of refreshing that weary souls may be brought into peace. Arise and plead with God that He may fulfill His Word.

Thirsty believers. All believers should be thirsty, but few are. Those who are genuinely so are thirsty for the Word. When two travelers are going through the wilderness, you can tell which of them is thirsty by noticing who is always looking out for wells. Thirsty believers love the Word read and preached. They thirst for it more and more.

Is it so with you, dear believing brethren? It is a fearful sign to see little thirst in the children of God. I do not wonder when the world stays away from our meetings for the Word and prayer but when professing believers do, my soul weeps for the pride of the church. God grant that we may not have famine of the Word for very long.

Thirst will lead believers to united prayer, which is the well where living water may be drawn. If your town were in desperate need of water, would you not meet one with another to consult and dig new wells? Yet now our towns are in much need of grace. Souls are perishing for lack of it, and you yourselves are languishing. Oh, meet to pray!

Thirst will also evidence itself in a desire to grow in grace. Some persons are contented when they come to Christ. They sink back, as it were, into an easy chair. They do not ask or wish for more. This must not be. If you are thirsty believers, you will seek salvation as much after conversion as before it: "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13b-14).

#### God Pours Floods on the Dry Ground

The dry ground represents those who are dead in trespasses and sins just as you have seen the ground in a dry summer all parched and dry. Dry ground does not ask the clouds to rain. So it is with most in our churches. They are all dead and dry, parched and withered, without a prayer for grace or even a desire for it. Yet God says, "I will pour floods upon them."

The signs of dryness abound in the church:

They do not pray. I believe there are many in our churches who never pour out their heart to God. Many are dropping into hell who never so much as said: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." These are the dry ground. It is sad to think that the souls that are nearest to hell are the souls that pray least to be delivered from it.

They do not wish a work of grace in their souls. I believe that many of you regularly go to the house of God who would rather lose house, home, and friends than have a work of grace done in your heart. You love death. Nothing would terrify you so much as the idea that God might make you a praying Christian. You are the dry ground.

Those who do not attend to the preached Word. I have heard people under deep conviction of sin declare that they never really heard a sermon in all their life until their consciences were awakened. During every sermon, they were preoccupied with other thoughts. I believe this is the way with many of you. You are the dry ground.

What will God pour out on you? Instead of floods of wrath, He will pour out floods of grace, floods of the Spirit, floods of blessing. The mercy of God passes all understanding! You deserve the Flood that came on the world of the ungodly, but He offers floods of blessing. You deserve the rain of Sodom, but behold, He offers floods of His Spirit.

Christians, we should be the first to cry out for refreshing! God's own Word encourages us to pray for floods. He puts the words into our mouths. Therefore, do not ask for drops when God offers a deluge. Rather, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10).

#### God Causes New Life and Spiritual Prosperity

Saved souls will be like grass. At present, Christ's people are like a single lily among many thorns, but in a time of grace they shall be like grass. Count the blades of grass that spring up in the clear sunshine after rain; so many shall Christ's people be. Count the drops of dew that come in the morning and the stars that sparkle in the night sky; so shall Christ's people be in the day of His power. Oh, pray for an outpoured Spirit, you men of prayer, that there may be many raised up in our day to call Him blessed!

Believers shall grow like willows. There is nothing more distressing in our day than the lack of growth among the children of God. They do not seem to be pressing forward or to be running a race. When I compare this year with last year, where is the difference? The same weakness and coldness persists. I fear that there is great laziness in divine things.

How different is the description of saints in the New Testament when the Spirit was poured out! They were like a willow that grows day and night and never ceases shooting out new branches. Cut it down and it springs up again. So would you, dear Christians, spring up if there were a flood time of the Spirit in our day. Then you would care less about material success than prayer and praise. You would experience more change in your heart--victory over the world, the devil, and the flesh. Even in affliction, you would grow in sweet submission, humility, and meekness.

Self-dedication. "One shall say, I am the Lord's" (Isa. 44:5a). There is no greater joy than for a believing soul to give himself all to God. This has always been the way in times of refreshing. It was so at Pentecost. First they gave their own selves unto the Lord. It was so with Jonathan Edwards and all the holy men of old.

"I have this day been before God," says Edwards, "and have given myself--all that I am and have--to God so that I am in no respect my own. I can claim no right to myself--in this understanding, this will, these affections. Neither have I right to this body, or any of its members--no right to this tongue, these hands, these feet, these eyes, these ears. I have given myself clean away."

Oh, that you would know the joy of giving yourself away! You cannot keep yourself. This day try and give all to Him. Lie in His hand. Little children, write on your hand: "I am the Lord's."

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