

Excerpt from Lecture XXI

on

Ecclesiastes 11:1-8: "Benevolence"

by

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"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the spirit, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good. Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; but if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 11:1-8)

Several times in the preceding part of this book we have found Solomon speaking of the proper way of enjoying the bounties of Divine providence--with gratitude, cheerfulness, and moderation. And occasionally he hints at the use which ought to be made of them for the temporal and spiritual benefit of others--"I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and TO DO GOOD in his life." On this latter topic he enlarges in this chapter, exhibiting in various and very interesting and beautiful light the virtue of benevolence and the motives to its practical cultivation.

I am aware that the passage has been applied by some to the virtue of *industry* rather than of liberality, and that this view has been supported by plausible reasons and ingenious criticisms. I am satisfied, however, that the ordinary interpretation is preferable; that in a treatise on the sources of happiness it is but reasonable to expect some special notice of the duties and rewards of benevolence, and that to this the figurative illustrations are admirably appropriate.

If a man were seen scattering corn on the surface of water that had inundated and overspread the fields, it might appear the act of a fool, the witless waste and unwarrantable destruction of the "precious seed." But the seed, on the inundation subsiding, might be deposited in a loamy and fertile bed, might spring up in rich luxuriance and yield in future days a produce of a hundred fold. There seems to be a beautiful allusion to some such practice as this in the opening of this chapter.

Verse 1: "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days." The word translated *bread* is, in Isaiah 28:28, rendered *bread-corn*.¹ The same is evidently the meaning of it here. By "casting *bread* upon the face of the waters," some have fancied that the verse is designed to represent *absolute hopelessness* (that is, not the slightest prospect of a return) as the result of our duty to beneficence and liberality; and they object to the view I am now giving of the allusion, namely, that the man who scatters his seed-corn on the waters does it with an *express view to a future crop*.

But is this really a well-founded objection? It is true that it is our duty to "do good, and lend, *hoping for nothing in return*" (Luke 6:35), that is, for no return from the objects of our kindness; but this does not preclude our "having respect unto the recompense of the reward" from a higher quarter. Nay, the prospect of an increase to ourselves in temporal or spiritual good is, in almost all the passages that inculcate liberality, held out as an encouragement to the practice of the duty: "Honor the LORD [Yahweh] with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Prov. 3:9,10). "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given" (Prov. 19:17). "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14). "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

The obvious meaning of all such passages is that the liberal distribution by the bountiful man, prompted and regulated by Scriptural principles, will in one form or another yield him a profitable result--for "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

The very same motive is presented in the verse before us: "Cast your bread-corn on the waters, *for you will find it after many days.*" In this world it may not always yield a return in kind, but it is not forgotten by God; it is not lost. Every work of charity performed and every gift of charity bestowed by his people, from love to his name and regard to his glory, is remembered by him for good. The charity which he delights in and rewards is not that charity which plumes itself as acts of merit and distributes its alms as purchase money for heaven. It is that which, disowning all self-confidence and self-glorying, is influenced by humble and lively gratitude for the riches of Divine mercy, gives freely because it has freely received, testifying its thankfulness for the grace of Him who, "though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). It "does good to all as it has opportunity, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). And whatever is done to his disciples for his sake, the blessed Redeemer will at last acknowledge as having been done to himself:

¹ "Bread corn [flour] must be ground; therefore he does not thresh it forever, break it with his cartwheel, or crush it with his horsemen."

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to **Me.**" (Matt. 25:34-40)

Our liberality ought to be as widely diffusive as the measure of our prosperity will admit. **Verse 2: "Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth."**

"Give a *portion.*" The expression is borrowed either from the custom of masters of feasts sending portions to the different guests at table--as when Joseph sent portions to his brethren, distinguishing Benjamin above the rest by the largeness of the meal allotted to him (Gen. 43:34); or from the practice of distributing gratuitously to the poor on festive occasions: "Go your way," says Nehemiah, "eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). The Jews commemorated their providential deliverance from the exterminating vengeance of Haman by "days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions to one another and gifts to the poor" (Esth. 9:22).

"Give a portion *to seven, and also to eight.*" That is, sow bountifully and not sparingly. You are in danger of keeping within, rather than of going beyond, the proper boundaries. You should, therefore, be jealous over yourselves and allow none to go unprovided for whom it is in your power to supply. *Seven* is one of the numbers significant in Scripture phraseology of abundance and completeness. Go beyond it! Do not keep within it, where our selfish tendencies of heart will naturally lead us to err.

This cheerful and diffusive liberality is further enforced by another and very powerful consideration: "*for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.*" This uncertainty of human affairs has been frequently noticed in different connections in the preceding part of this book. It forms, indeed, one of its principal themes. The present may be a season of prosperity, but it may very soon be succeeded by a time of calamity and distress. Our ignorance of what is coming should lead us to make a proper use of the bounty of Heaven while it remains in our possession.

In the first place, we may soon, in Divine providence, be deprived of the means and consequently of the ability of doing good. No man, therefore, should look forward to a time when he will *begin* to lay out his substance for benevolent purpose, but each should use what he has *now*. The former indicates a propensity that is not very likely to be forsaken when his own convenient time does arrive; and long before that time comes, his riches may "make themselves wings and fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:5).

Secondly, when this does happen, it becomes a sad reflection, a melancholy addition to a man's

unhappiness that during his period of prosperity he has not been making a proper use of the means of good put into his hands (the use of them enjoined by the Giver); that he has selfishly wrapped up his talent in a napkin and kept it from the poor and needy till it is gone--unexpectedly gone--and his opportunities irredeemably lost. The opposite reflection is an animating support to the mind under the most impoverishing and depressing bereavements, when in proportion to the extent of our means we can say with Job (29:11-16),

When the ear heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me; because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case that I did not know.

Thirdly, it is frequently of consequence to us to secure friends in the time of our prosperity against the day of possible calamity and suffering. It sometimes happens that entire reverses take place in the circumstances of men, and that he who has assisted and relieved others requires relief and assistance from the very objects of his kindness. Paul appears to refer to such vicissitudes [changes] in human conditions when exhorting the Christians at Corinth to liberality in their contributions for the poor saints who were at Jerusalem. He says to them, "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack--that there may be equality. As it is written, *He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack*" (2 Cor. 8:13-15). The last expression alludes to the collecting of the manner, in which every man who gathered more than the daily allowance of an omer for each member of his household supplied, by his superfluity, the deficiency of his neighbors.

By the benevolent appropriation of a part of our substance, friends may be acquired whose grateful services may, at a future time and in altered circumstances, be of essential benefit to us. And if in our time of need they should disappoint us and give us to experience the bitterness of ingratitude, still we shall be able to look up with confidence to the Author of our blessings and our trials, whose providence will not forsake or leave destitute those who had endeavored to act as faithful stewards of his bounty so long as he had been pleased to continue it.

But see how the same considerations may be applied in an opposite way! The covetous worldly-minded man pleads the very circumstance which Solomon here urges as a reason for present and generous liberality as an apology for *hoarding*: "I know not what evil may come upon the earth. I must therefore take good care of what I have. I must reserve it to meet the contingencies of futurity. Who can tell but I may otherwise come to dependence and die poor myself?" A prudent precaution to prevent our becoming a burden upon others in the time of age and infirmity is by no means to be condemned. But it is an awful perversion when the apprehension of future possibilities is made an excuse for avarice. How much more noble the use that is made, by the Spirit of God, of our ignorance of the future. Instead of withholding from others on this ground, Solomon says to give while you have it to give, and to give liberally. Do not lose the precious opportunity. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Enjoy, then, the pleasure of present beneficence. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for you do not know what evil shall be upon the earth."

Then by a very beautiful figure Solomon illustrates the duty of the man who enjoys the munificence of heaven. **Verse 3a: "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth."** From earth, seas, lakes, and rivers, the sun exhales immense quantities of watery vapors. These condense in the atmosphere into clouds; and the clouds do not retain their precious treasure but, agreeably to the kind intention of the wonder-working Author of nature, discharge their contents upon the earth in refreshing and fertilizing showers. A bountiful man is a "cloud full of rain" to the parched wilderness of poverty. A parsimonious miser is a "cloud without water," yielding nothing but disappointment and mortification to the anxious man expecting a blessing. In the sultry climate of the East, a cloud charged with rain is sometimes inexpressibly precious. The very look, the very thought of it, is refreshment. And as the clouds are formed by the provision of nature for the express purpose of watering the earth, so is the bounty of providence bestowed on man not merely for himself but "that he may have something to give to him who has need" (Eph. 4:28). He receives that he may impart. He is blessed that he may be a blessing.

The meaning of the remaining clause of the same verse is not so obvious. **Verse 3b: "and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie."** These words are very commonly used to express the sentiment that whatever character belongs to a man when he dies, it is that character that he must retain. There can be no subsequent change. As death finds him it finally fixes him, pronouncing the sentence, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11). This yields a good sense, and one by no means remote from the general scope of the passage. The possessor of heaven's bounty is reminded that he must fall before the stroke of death; that when he does fall his state is forever fixed according to his character and works while he lived. A motive is thus set before him to benevolent activity and pious effort. It is drawn from the uncertainty of life and from the fearful consequences of being taken away amid a course of selfish prosperity and worldly-mindedness, of having his state fixed forever beyond the possibility of change or remedy.

From the connection, however, the general import of the figure seems rather to be the security of a return to the man of principled beneficence. "In whatever quarter your bounty is dispersed, you shall find it again. As where the tree falls it lies, so your charity is not lost. Give in all directions, for you shall find it again. Your recompense is secure." It is the same sentiment expressed in the first verse, "for you will find it after many days."

This is a subject about which men are ever disposed to find (and are ingenious at inventing!) excuses. Their circumstances, their families, their necessary expenditures, the uncertainties of business, the ingratitude and the vices of the poor, and especially their fears about what may happen--all these they plead as excuses for not giving, or at least for not giving *now*; for satisfying themselves at present with *hoping* what they may be able to do hereafter; for transacting the business of charity not by cash payments but by promissory notes at distant dates, which, when the time of demand arrives, they find fresh excuses for renewing.

It is against the timid who withhold present charity that the fourth verse is directed. **Verse 4: "He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap."** The farmer must take his seed time and harvest as they are sent to him by the God of the

seasons. The weather is not in his choice. If he minds every cold wind that blows or every cloud that gathers in the sky and threatens a shower, he may lose both his spring and his autumn. Day after day may pass while he is noting the direction of the wind and gazing on the face of the sky in timid hesitation whether he may safely scatter his seed or put in his sickle, till finally the proper season is gone and he is left with nothing but fruitless regrets that he cannot recall it.

The lesson taught by the comparison is that we should fulfill the duties of benevolence when it is in our power. We should embrace with alacrity every opportunity of doing good, not being startled and prevented by every little circumstance that may occasion inconvenience or apprehension, not habitually deferring from excessive scrupulosity and morbid fearfulness of possible mistakes till our opportunities of usefulness are irrecoverably gone.

But let not this principle be pushed to an extreme. Let it not be considered as entirely precluding the exercise of prudence and caution. In the whole of the business of life, prudence and caution are useful, and in few things more so than in the practice of benevolence. The farmer, although he cannot always get weather in every respect suitable to his mind, will not, however, purposely choose an unfavorable day either for sowing or reaping. So ought we to select our objects and our opportunities to the best advantage, lest we should bestow charity that will be unproductive of good, or even fruitful of evil, by being conferred on improper persons at unseasonable times or in an unsuitable manner.

We ought especially to beware of allowing fears about the future to eclipse our sense of present duty. This kind of fearful apprehensiveness leads us to refrain from doing anything that promises to be productive of good--because in every case there is a *possibility* of failure, the future arrangements of providence being entirely beyond our penetration.

Verse 5: "As you do not know what is the way of the spirit, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything." By "the way of the spirit" some understand the way of the *wind*. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes" (John 3:8). Others refer the phrase to the Spirit of God, since it is used by our Lord (in this same verse) as an emblem of the mysterious operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men--"So is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

I am inclined to think, however, that "the spirit" here means neither the wind nor the Holy Ghost but the *human soul*. Its connection with what follows in the verse gives more than probability to this interpretation. "You do not know what is the way of the spirit, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child." The formation and growth of the human fetus in the womb is one of those secret wonders of nature that elude our penetration. Anatomical skill, indeed, may ascertain many facts respecting the successive stages of its progress from conception to maturity, but questions might still be asked to which the most experienced anatomist could give no reply but an acknowledgment of his ignorance.

We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). The structure of our frame, so "curiously wrought" (Ps. 139:15), so singularly complicated, so exquisitely adapted in all its parts to all its functions, is one of the most marvelous products of the wisdom of Divine design and the power and skill of Divine operation. The beautiful provision made for the sustenance and growth of the

human embryo by the system of fetal circulation, the entrance of the principle of animal life indicated by its first faint fluttering movement, and the gradual increase of living vigor till by the pangs of parturition it is thrown from its prison, utters its first cry, and draws for itself the vital air of heaven--all is full of mystery and wonder.

But there is another secret. When and from where does *the spirit*--the immortal soul--come? At what time does it take possession of its body? Does it enter with the principle of animal life when the infant first stirs in the womb, or does it unite itself with the body at the moment of its birth into the world? To such inquiries we can return no certain answer. We neither know "the way of the spirit" nor "how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child." The very union itself of immaterial and invisible spirit with gross corporeal substance has been, is, and ever will be incomprehensible by our feeble reason; and the time and the manner of their first coalition is alike a mystery.

"So you do not know the works of God who makes everything." We may apply this particularly to the subject of the preceding verses, or more generally to the various departments of the Divine procedure. There are wonders in providence as well as in creation. God has singular ways of working in both. You may say, "We cannot see how we are to obtain any return for our liberality. We cannot imagine that by giving away we can be anything but poorer, or how by the act of scattering our substance should increase." But God's ways are not your ways. He effects his purposes by hidden arrangements. They are promoting their ends, even when they may seem to you to counteract them and bring about events altogether out of the range of human expectation.

In your ignorance of the Divine administration, your best course is to discharge your duty with cheerfulness and without fruitless anxieties and apprehensions, confiding in his wisdom, faithfulness, and love. "Commit your way to the LORD [Yahweh], trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5). Use whatever measure of his bounty he bestows upon you according to his own directions, without reserve and without fear of the outcome. A proper feeling of reverence for God, who "does great things past finding out, yes wonders without number," should lead us to this implicit obedience and implicit reliance. "There is no searching of His understanding" (Isa. 40:28). "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33)

Every good, and especially every benevolent, action dictated by the principles of the word of God, is sowing seed for a future harvest. And true wisdom consists in doing this daily, constantly; losing no time and no opportunity. **Verse 6: "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good."** Many of our attempts at good may fail of the desired end, and some of them may even produce results opposite to our intentions. But such occurrences should not discourage us. Let them dictate prudence but never inspire despondency. Let them direct our efforts but by no means slacken them. If the sowing of the morning fails, that of the evening may yield a crop; and we cannot previously tell but that both may be equally productive.

We cannot ascertain beforehand which of our endeavors is to be most successful, nor can we be certain as to any one of them prospering. We may be tempted to try nothing by the morbid apprehension of failure. But the better course is to count on *some* of our attempts failing. Thus

we may recognize the greater probability of succeeding in some and making them the more numerous. If we bring to bear upon every one of them the entire amount of prudence and forethought we possess, we may insure a favorable outcome to them all. We shall then fulfill in its true spirit the direction of the Apostle Paul, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9,10).

It ought further to be remembered that even if all our designs and schemes of usefulness should be frustrated by unforeseen circumstances, yet having been in our hearts, and having been attempted from right motives, even from the principles of benevolence and piety, in the estimate of God they are the same as if they had been attended with the most perfect success. Men are exceedingly apt to form their judgment of actions according to their outcome. But He who "searches the heart" "judges righteous judgment." And even of the good intention to which his providence denies accomplishment, he says, "You did well that it was in your heart" (1 Kings 8:18).

It is natural that men should desire prosperity. **Verse 7: "Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun."** Light is a beautiful emblem of happiness or joy. By a kind of instinctive association we at once connect with it the idea of cheerfulness and pleasure. This is so natural, so accordant with universal feeling, that the figures is, I suppose, common to all languages. It occurs frequently in the Scriptures. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Ps. 97:11). "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday" (Isa. 58:10). The heavenly city, seen by John in the visions of God, "had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light" (Rev. 21:23).

But desirable as prosperity is, it cannot be secured. In every man's experience, although in very different proportions, the world is a scene of alternate light and shade, clouds and sunshine. **Verse 8: "But if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity."**

Long continued prosperity is very dangerous to its possessor. It is apt to make him forget himself, to seduce his affections from better things and to lead him to say "This is my rest." But however long uninterrupted prosperity may be enjoyed, its continuance can never be counted upon, not even for a day. When a man least expects it, "days of darkness" may be near. The day that has gratified his utmost wishes may be the day that gives beginning to disappointments and troubles. The sun of his prosperity may be eclipsed at its peak. The moment the sky has cleared of its only remaining cloud may be the moment a storm approaches.

And as the days of darkness may be near when least anticipated, they may also be "many" in proportion to the number of the previous days of light. Often has lasting prosperity been succeeded by protracted affliction, and many days of sunshine and gladness succeeded by many of "darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph. 1:15). Let no man therefore say, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity" (Ps. 10:6). Job, in the season of his bliss and glory, said, "I shall die in my nest, and multiply my days as the sand" (Job 29:18). But while he was saying so, unthought of troubles were gathering round him.

The man who never anticipates and expects trouble must be but ill prepared to stand it when it comes. And since "all that comes is vanity," since our joys are precarious and transient, and since we cannot say with effect to the sun of our prosperity "Stand still" when a higher authority commands it to decline into the twilight of fear, the night of darkness and sorrow, then how unutterably foolish is the man who trusts to this vanity and counts on no reverse!

As a part of the improvement of these verses, my friends, allow me *in the first place* to note, that although such days of darkness should not at all overtake the prosperous worldly man during his earthly life, and though his entire course here below should be marked by success in all his pursuits and the fulfillment of all his wishes, yet when he dies as he has lived--"a man of the world, who has his portion in this life," then days of darkness," many days of darkness, an *eternity* of darkness awaits him. When the light of his earthly prosperity is extinguished, it must be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:13). Oh, then, how much more blessed is the poorest of the children of God, who, though his days of darkness on earth be many, possesses amid the deepest of their gloom a "treasure in the heavens that fails not" (Luke 12:33). If you would possess the light of true joy, you must come to the Fountain of light, even to Him of whom it is said, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

In the second place, we should learn to consider ourselves as debtors to one another, and to our fellowmen in general, in everything by which God puts it in our power to profit them. Whatever be the gift we have received, it becomes our duty to "minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). "Casting our bread upon the waters" applies to spiritual as well as to temporal things. To leave this out of the account is the prevalent defect of what is extolled as benevolence among men; but it is the extreme of inconsistency and folly. It is infinitely more foolish than if a man were to expend all his counsel and pains to obtain ease and comfort for another for an hour while he willfully disregarded what might secure his happiness for a lifetime; or than if a doctor were to devote all his skill to some slight topical ailment while he allowed a deadly disease to advance unheeded. He who neglects the spiritual and eternal interests of men is not of one mind with God. His benevolence is wretchedly defective and spurious.

Let Christians be encouraged to cast the seed of spiritual instruction upon the waters. We shall find it after many days. In some cases it may be long before any of the seed begins to sprout, and in other cases whole fields may speedily be "white unto harvest." In the spiritual as in the natural world, it is "God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7). When we sow our seed, therefore, let our prayers ascend for the quickening influences of heaven; and when any increase appears, let our acknowledgment be made to the God of all grace for those influences. The prayer of faith shall not be unanswered, the exertions of zeal shall not be unblessed, and our work and labor of love shall not be forgotten by Jesus, for whose sake and to the glory of whose name it is done.

And, my Christian brethren, if a portion of your worldly substance be required for the purpose of imparting the bread of life to famishing millions, will you withhold it? Will you keep it back from Him out of whose treasures you have received it? Do not be deaf to the appeals of Heaven. Let the pleading voice of the whole heathen world be heard. Let the claims of "the seed of Abraham, God's friend," awaken the grateful sensibilities of your hearts and open your hands to liberality. Seize the present opportunity. Let it not pass unimproved. Seek not after apologies for refusal.

Cover not a grudging disposition by plausible objections. Let not Conscience be bribed and cajoled by Avarice. Put not to the credit of prudence and principle what belongs to the account of hardhearted selfishness and the love of this present world. Allow no imaginary obstacles or trifling difficulties to deter you from the present exercise of your Christian generosity.

"Cast your bread-corn on the face of the waters. Give a portion to seven and also to eight." Hear with an awakened conscience and a willing mind the Divine expostulation with Israel recorded by the prophet Haggai:

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins? Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. "You looked for much but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands" (1:4-11).

Note also the blessing promised when they complied. Derive from it the encouragement it is fitted to give:

"And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD--since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me," says the LORD. "Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid--consider it: Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. **But from this day I will bless you**" (2:15-19).

Excerpt from "Lecture XXI" in *Lectures on the Book of Ecclesiastes* by Ralph Wardlaw (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1822). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except for some condensation and light editing for clarity. Also, punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized, long paragraphs have been divided, and the NKJV has been used for most quotations.