

Small Rain for Tender Herbs

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true spiritual power lies in gentle, tender, and persuasive preaching, likened to the small rain nourishing tender herbs, exemplified by Moses and perfected in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:2, 1 Kings 19:11-12, Romans 10:17, Philippians 3:18, Luke 19:41, Matthew 5, John 3:16

Topics: "Divine Inspiration", "Christ's Compassion"

Description

In 'Small Rain for Tender Herbs,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound spiritual principle that true power in preaching lies in gentleness and tenderness. Drawing from Moses' example and the life of Jesus Christ, Spurgeon emphasizes that doctrine and rebuke should be delivered like soft rain nourishing delicate plants—persuasive, compassionate, and effective. This devotional sermon encourages believers and preachers alike to embrace a spirit of love and patience in communicating God's truth, balancing justice with mercy.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"As the small rain upon the tender herb." Deuteronomy 32:2.

THIS is the language of the great Prophet, Moses, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." We read of Moses that he was a Prophet mighty in word and deed—he combined with his incomparable teaching an unequalled degree of marvelous miracle-working. He was equally great as a law-giver and as an administrator. This double power was found in no other Prophet till our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, came. The other Prophets were, many of them, mighty in deed, but not in word. And others were mighty in word, but not in deed. Samuel spoke mightily in the name of the Lord, but his miracles were few. Elijah was a great doer, but few of his words remain. The combination of the two was peculiar to Moses and, afterwards, to Him of whom Moses had said, "The Lord your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto Him you shall hearken."

Moses was mighty, indeed, no man could have been more so. He it was that broke the power of Egypt by the 10 great plagues and led forth the once-enslaved people through the Red Sea—and fed them 40 years with bread from Heaven—and formed them into a nation. Heaven and earth and sea seemed to be obedient to Moses! God had girded him with such extraordinary power, yet I greatly question whether his

power of word was not greater than his power of action. Although he was slow of speech, yet with Aaron as his spokesman, he faced the terrible Egyptian king and so vanquished him, that he dreaded the word of Moses more than all the armies of the nations! In the five volumes which Moses wrote, which are to this day accepted by us as lying at the base of Revelation, Moses proved his great capacity in word. He was a master with his pen—he neither failed in prose nor in poetry, in law nor in divinity, in history nor in prophecy. Inspiration from above was his strength—he spoke the very Word of God which he had heard when he was with Him on the holy mount.

Yet we perceive that this might of word, which dwelt in Moses, displayed itself frequently in a mild and gentle utterance in the text. He declares that his doctrine should drop as rain and distil as dew and that it should be "as the small rain upon the tender herb." The highest power is consistent with the lowliest tenderness. He that is mightiest in word is mighty, not so much in thunder, earthquake and fire, as in a silent persuasiveness! God is often most present where there is least of apparent force. The still, small voice had God in it when it was written, "The Lord was not in the wind." It is a wonderful thing, however, this being "mighty in word." It is perfectly marvelous how God uses words to accomplish great things. Remember, it is by the Incarnate Word that we are saved at all. It is by the Inspired Word that you are made to know the will of God and it is through the words by which that Incarnate Word is preached unto man that God is pleased to communicate the inner life.

Faith comes by hearing, but there could be no hearing if there were no spoken words. You may wisely covet the power to speak with the words which God's wisdom teaches, for thus you will be an immeasurable blessing to your fellow men. You may well treasure up those words in your memory, even if you have not the gift to tell them out to others, for they are the wealth of the soul. You may be content to repeat the language of the Book of God, the ipsissima verba, the very Words of Inspiration, if you cannot put together sentences of your own, for the pure Word of God is, by itself, the best thing a man can say! And to repeat a text is often better than to preach a sermon from it. We cannot too widely scatter the actual language of the Holy Spirit, for we cannot tell what work the Divine utterance may perform. Thank God that He uses words, for thus He comes very near to us. Ask Him to open your own lips, that you may show forth His

praise! And if that is not granted you, then ask Him to open your ears, that His Words may sink into your souls and prove a savor of life unto life to you.

I intend to make three observations upon my text. Moses says that his doctrine should be as the small rain upon the tender herb.

I. Our first observation is, MOSES MEANT TO BE TENDER. Moses intended, in the sermon he was about to preach, to be exceedingly gentle. He would water minds as tender herbs and water them in the same fashion as the small rain does. He would not be a beating hail, nor even a down-pouring shower, but he would be, "as the small rain upon the tender herb." And this is the more remarkable because he was about to preach a doctrinal sermon. Does he not say, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain"? Time was when a doctrinal sermon seemed to be most appropriately preached with clenched fists! The very idea of a doctrinal sermon seemed to mean a fight—a sort of spiritual duel in which the good man was evidently bent upon demolishing somebody or other who held contrary views. I trust we are learning better and that we try, now, to let doctrine distil as rain and drop as dew—"as the small rain upon the tender herb."

It is our duty at certain turning points of the road to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, but we are to remember that our contentions are the contentions of love—and that it ill becomes the man who holds the Truth of a loving Savior to hold it in bitterness, or contend for it with rancor. You will possibly think that I have been guilty in this matter, but I cannot make such a confession to any large extent. I have felt no bitterness and, when I have spoken forcibly, I have yet restrained myself from harder things which I might truthfully have brought forth. Yet, I regret that I have been forced into controversy for which I have no taste, and in which I have no pleasure. I have been driven to it—I have never sought it. To spread the Gospel I should choose the gentler method. It is only to defend it that I have to draw the sword. Fight for the Truth of God, yes! Be willing to live or die for the Truth of God, but if you wish to spread it, you will do it best by letting it drop as rain and distil as dew, gently and tenderly, "as the small rain upon the tender herb."

It is equally remarkable that this discourse of Moses was a sermon of rebuke. He rebuked the people and rebuked them, too, with no small degree of sternness, when he said, "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked: you grew fat, you are grown thick; then he forsook God which made him." He warned the people of their great sin and he did not hesitate to say, "They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them." Yet he felt that he had rebuked with the utmost meekness and had still been as the soft dew and gentle rain. Ah, Brothers and Sisters, upbraiding must be done in tenderness! Rebukes given in an unkind spirit had better not be given at all.

I passed by a preacher, one evening, who was addressing certain villagers in the most terrific strains. He was telling them, "The Lord is coming! The Lord is coming! You will all be destroyed!" There was plenty of sound, though I fear not an excess of sense—and there was a savor of delirious prophecy which went beyond the Scriptures into personal visions and figments of the man's own brain! I wondered what he hoped to do. The people were standing at their doors, smoking their pipes and taking it in as a curious kind of display. Perhaps better that he should rage like a sea in a storm than give the people no warning and yet I do not suppose any good could come of his shouts. Had he spoken gently to them, one by one, concerning faith in God—had he gone to their doors and spoken of the great love of Jesus Christ—perhaps there would have been some result. But one would not look for good fruit from the boisterous shouts of nonsense! And yet there are many who feel that if a man shouts and perspires, something must be effected.

Wisdom does not learn her exercises among the athletes, but among calm scholars. We do not blacken peoples' eyes to make them see, nor bully them into peace, nor kick them into Heaven. To strive, cry, lift up and cause clamorous voices to be heard in the streets is not Christ's way! Not a syllable have we to say against zeal, even when it breaks over all bounds of propriety—but it is the zeal which we value—and not the outbursts by themselves! We question greatly whether too often physical force is not mistaken for spiritual power—and this is an error of a mischievous kind. We need, if we can, to draw our hearers with bands of love, not with cart ropes and with "cords of a man"—not such cords as we put about dogs and bulls.

There must be in all rebukes an abounding gentleness, softness and holy sorrow. When Paul is writing a very strong condemnation, he says, "I now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ." Jesus Christ denounces the doom of Jerusalem, but it is with a flood of tears. He cries, "Woe unto you, Chorazin!" but He feels a woe within His own soul while He is uttering woe to them! Dear Brothers, it is well to observe this—that though it was a

doctrinal discourse, it was tender. And though Moses was preaching a rebuking discourse, it was still "as small rain upon the tender herb."

Yet once more, in this discourse, this swan's song, this final deliverance of the great Judge in Israel, he was about to declare the wrath of God for here we read words like these—"A fire is kindled in My anger and shall burn unto the lowest Hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend My arrows upon them," and so on. Never stronger, sterner language! But even this was made to drop as the small rain. And if ever there is a time when the sluices should be pulled up and the floods of sympathy should flow, it is when we preach the wrath of God! I am certain that to preach the wrath of God with a hard heart, cold lips, tearless eyes and an unfeeling spirit is to harden men—not to benefit them. If we preach these terrors of the Lord persuasively, we have hit the nail on the head, for what does the Apostle say?—"Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

Gently, as a nurse persuades a child, though in the background is the rod, we would woo men to Jesus till we win them! Though we tell them that they must have Christ or perish—they must believe in Him or be forever driven from His Presence into outer darkness, we do this because we love them—love them better than those who flatter them! We dare not keep back, for a moment, the fact that sin is a horrible evil and brings with it endless misery. Nor would we dare to soften a syllable of the heavy tidings which we have to bear from the Lord to the impenitent. Yet we have no joy in being the bearers of harsh news—it is the burden of the Lord to us. We wish we had permission to preach always upon cheering themes, as, indeed, we would gladly do if men would turn to Jesus and live! Yet, even now, when we beat the warning drum, we do not forget to interject frequent pauses between the alarming strokes, that Pity's gentle voice may take its turn in the winning of souls.

I remember one servant of God who could not help interrupting the great New England minister by crying out, "Mr. Edwards, Mr. Edwards, is He not, after all, a God of mercy?" I hope I should never, under any circumstances, give occasion for such a question! Though the Lord is a God of vengeance upon such as refuse His Son and reject His Grace, yet is He abundant in mercy, tenderness and long-suffering! And He delights not in the death of any, but that they should turn unto Him and live! Therefore let us give space for Mercy to persuade while Justice threatens! The right spirit in which to preach the terrors of God is the spirit of the text. We are to make even our solemn warnings drop, "as the small rain upon the tender herb." Moses meant to be gentle. Though it was a doctrinal discourse, a searching and rebuking discourse—and a discourse full of the threats of God—yet he displayed in it his customary meekness.

Now, beloved Friends, if Moses meant to be tender, how much more truly was Jesus tender! The representative of the Law aimed at tenderness—how much more the Incarnation of the Gospel! He who came with 10 broken Commands to threaten men was tender—how much more He who comes with five wounds and fountains of eternal pardon to persuade men! How winning is the meek and lowly Lamb or God! The moment we look to His life, we see that wondrous tenderness displayed in His doctrine, for His teaching was compassionate in manner. Somehow, I cannot imagine our Lord Jesus Christ preaching with tones and manners at all similar to certain of His professed followers who thunder at men with a vehemence devoid of sympathy! He did thunder in indignation, but the lightning of conviction was by far the more noticeable—and with the lightning there always came a shower of pity.

The Sermon on the Mount, I have sometimes thought, was such as an inspired woman might fitly have preached! It is so full of heart and so exceedingly pitiful. For the most part, throughout His ministry, though

masculine to the last degree, yet there is a softness, a pathos of love—as if in the Person of Christ we had both man and woman, as in the first Adam at the creation. Jesus is the Head of the race, completely combining, in His own Person, all the vigor of the man and all the affection of the woman. He is, as it were, both Father and Mother to the children of men, blending everything that is sweet in manhood and womanhood in one Individuality and showing it all in His style which is as forcible as a hero's energy in the day of battle—and yet as gentle as a nurse with her children.

All the mannerisms of Christ are wooing. And, therefore, we read, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." Hence we have Him saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." To Him the sick came by instinct as to a Physician peculiarly set for the healing of humanity! To Him the bereaved sisters, the widowed mothers and the outcast lepers ran with eager hope! Yes, to Him the wildest of maniacs yielded, feeling the irresistible spell of His love. Oh yes, our Lord's manner was gentleness, itself.

Furthermore, His style of speech was compassionately considerate, even as the dew seems to consider the withered grass and the small rain to adapt itself to the tender herb. In His teaching He evidently thought of the feebleness of the sort and suited Himself to those depressed by grief. You find no hard words thrown in to make the speaker seem wise. There are difficulties about His doctrine inherent to the nature of truth, but they are never aggravated by His style. I suppose nobody ever went to Him and said, "Rabbi, what did You mean by such-and-such a word?" They knew the meaning of the words, though not always did they catch the inner sense. Their misapprehension was never the fault of the words which He used. His use of the parabolic style was especially remarkable—He kept on saying the Kingdom of Heaven is like—like this, like that. When He feeds the multitude, He never gives them indigestible food—His menu is always bread and fish—and likewise, when He preaches, there is no indigestible Truth.

For the most part, in the early days of His preaching to the outside multitude, He gave them little more than moral truth, for that was all they were able to bear. It sometimes amuses me to see how certain "modern thought" men prove themselves to belong to the outside many—and not to the inner circle of disciples—for they take the Sermon on the Mount and extol it as the summit of the doctrine of Jesus, whereas it was only His discourse to the multitude and not such spiritual teaching as He gave to His Apostles when alone. There were gleams and specks of the Divinely-spiritual Truths of God flashing out of the moral Truth like flames from a fire, but for the most part He gave the crowd that which it could receive and not that which would have been above their heads.

He crumbed the bread into the milk and gave the people a portion fit for their childhood. He fed them with milk, for they were not yet able to bear that strong meat which His servant Paul was afterwards permitted to bring forth in a lordly dish for the feeding and feasting of those who have had their senses exercised in spiritual things. The Lord was very careful as to the manner of His teaching and, as to the matter of His teaching, too, even to His chosen. "I have yet many things to say unto you," He said, "but you cannot bear them now." There was a gradual development in His teaching as He saw the minds of men were prepared to receive the Truth which He should speak—from which method of wisdom and prudence let His disciples learn a lesson!

Furthermore, note well that the Truth which our Lord spoke had always a refreshing effect upon those that were spiritually alive. Our blessed Master's sermons were, "as the small rain upon the tender herb," not merely for the softness of their descent, but for the wondrous efficacy with which they came. His Words fell not as fire-flakes to destroy, nor as the dust from the wilderness to defile, but always as the warm shower

to cherish. What a delight it must have been to have listened to the Lord!

Oh, to hear Him preach just once! Ah, though He should rebuke me and do nothing else—yes, though He should thunder at me and do nothing else—how gladly would I listen to His voice and say, "Speak, Lord; for Your servant hears"! Surely this heart of mine would be more than glad to be as a fleece of wool, filled with the dew of His blessed doctrine! There must have been an unutterable sweetness, a delicious persuasiveness, a Divine power about the speaking of Jesus, for, "Never man spoke like this Man." His lips were as lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. Whatever He spoke was fragrant with infinite love and gentleness and, therefore, it revived the spirit of the contrite ones.

So we learn that Moses meant to be tender and Jesus was tender. What else do we learn? Why, that all the servants of Jesus Christ ought to be tender, for, if Moses was so, much more should we be! I know there are many here tonight who are preachers of the Gospel. Dear Brothers, let us endeavor, with all our might, to be always considerate towards those whom we address! Let us think of them as tender herbs, for many are so in their weakness, sorrowfulness, instability and ignorance! I am persuaded that we fix too high a standard when we preach and assume that our people know a great deal more than they do. I am sure we frequently need to go over, again, the elements, the fundamentals, the simplest doctrines of the Gospel to our congregations, for, though there are some that are fathers for whom we are grateful, yet it is true, today, as it was in Paul's day, we have not many fathers—and we ought not to preach with an eye to the few fathers— but with an eye to the many children!

We shall do well if the babes in Grace are fed by us and to do this our preaching must be, "as the small rain upon the tender herb." We must try to the utmost of our ability to be very plain and simple, for many will not understand us even then. I was greatly pleased with a complaint brought against me the other day, to which I plead guilty and I expect I shall plead guilty to it for many a day to come. Someone said, "Mr. Spurgeon gives us meat, but there's no gristle—he cuts out all the bone." They wanted a bit or two of hard bone, just to try their teeth on. Alas, many have broken more than a

tooth over the novel teaching of "modern thought!" Now, I have never been particularly earnest, when feeding my flock, to seek out the poisonous pastures just to see how much of injurious fodder they could bear without getting sick. No! I have had regard to those who are not yet able to discern the differences in spiritual things and, therefore, I have led them to those ancient pastures where the saints were content to feed in days gone by.

I think we cannot be too simple, nor too plain, nor set out the precious things of God in too clear a light. The little ones of God have very great needs and must have our special care. These tender herbs are very apt to be dried up and, yet, being tender, they are not able to drink in a great shower all at once. When I have been traveling, especially in southern France and Italy, I have come upon places where the river has burst its banks and covered all the land with water—then, instead of blessing the fields, it has swept everything out of them, buried them in mud—and killed the crops. There is a great difference between irrigation and inundation! But some preachers forget this. A sermon may sometimes act in that fashion to some of God's dear tender ones—it may be a perfect deluge of doctrine, sweeping up by the roots those feeble plants which are not very deeply rooted in the faith. They shall not perish, but we must avoid everything which has a tendency to destroy even the least of them.

We do well to give the tender herbs the Water of Life, little by little. It must be, "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little," for God's children are like our children and need little and

often, rather than much and seldom! There is a loaf of bread and there is the child—you need to get that loaf of bread into the child. Well, you must do it by degrees, or else you will never do it at all! You will choke the child if you attempt to insert too much at a time into his limited storeroom. Take the bread and break it down—and in due time he will appropriate that quarter loaf and a great many loaves besides, for little children have great appetites! God's children cannot, all of them, receive a mass of doctrine all at once—but they have a fine appetite and if you give them time, they will gradually appropriate, masticate and inwardly digest all the Truths of God so that they will be nourished and made to grow! Let every minister of Christ remember this and patiently instruct his hearers as they are able to bear it.

And so, dear Friends, I will say one thing more upon this point, which is, let every Christian remember this, for every Christian is to try and bring souls to Christ. We are all to be teachers of the Gospel according to our ability—and the way to do it is to be "as the small rain upon the tender herb." Perhaps, dear Friend, you say, "Well, I should be small rain, without any great effort, for I have not much in me." Just so, but yet that small rain has a way of its own by which it makes up for being so small. "How is that," you ask? Why, by continuing to fall day after day! Any gardener will tell you that with many hours of small rain there is more done than in a short period with a drenching shower. Constant dropping penetrates, saturates and abides. Little deeds of kindness win love even more surely than one bounteous act. If you cannot say much of Gospel Truth at one time, keep on saying a little—and saying it often! If you cannot come out with a wagonload of grain for an army, feed the barn fowls with a handful at a time! If you cannot give the people fullness of doctrine like the profound teachers of former ages, you can at least tell what the Lord has taught you and then ask Him to teach you more!

As you learn, teach! As you get, give! As you receive, distribute! Be as the small rain upon the tender herb. Do you not think that in trying to bring people to Christ, we sometimes try to do too much at once? Rome was not built in a day, nor will a parish be saved in a week! Men do not always receive all the Gospel the first time they hear it. To break hearts for Jesus is something like splitting wood—we need to work with wedges that are very small at one end—but increase in size as they are driven in. A few sentences spoken well and fitly may leave an impression where the attempt to, all at once, force religion upon a person may provoke resistance and do harm. Be content to drop a word or two to-day and another word or two tomorrow. Soon you may safely say twice as much and in a week's time you may hold a long and distinctly religious conversation! It may soon happen that where the door was rudely shut in your face, you will become a welcome visitor, but had you forced your way in at first, you would have effectually destroyed all future opportunity.

There is a great deal in speaking at the right moment. We may show our wisdom in not doing and in not saying, as much as in doing and saying. Time is a great ingredient in success. To speak out of season will show our zeal, but not always our sense. We are to be instant out of season as well as in season, but this does not involve incessant talking. I commend to everyone who would be a winner of souls by personal effort the symbol of our text, "as the small rain upon the tender herb." The rain is seasonable and in accordance with its surroundings. The rain does not fall while a burning sun is scorching the plants, or it might kill them. Neither is it always falling, or it might injure them. Do not bring in

your exhortations when they would be out of place and do not be incessantly talking even the best of the Truths of God, lest you weary with chatter those whom you desire to convince with argument. If you will wait upon the Lord for guidance, He will send you forth when you will be most useful, even as He does the rain. God will direct you as to time and place if you put yourself at His disposal!

Thus have I spoken, perhaps, at too great a length, upon the first head— Moses meant to be tender.

II. The second head is MOSES HOPED TO BE PENETRATING—"as the small rain upon the tender herb." Now,

small rain is meant to enter the herb so that it may drink in the nourishment and be truly refreshed. The rain is not to drench the herb and it is not to flood it—it is to feed it, to revive it, to refresh it. This was what Moses aimed at. Beloved, this is what all true preachers of Christ aim at! We long that the Word of God which we speak may enter into the soul of man, may be taken up into the innermost nature and may produce its own Divine result.

Why is it some people never seem to take in the Word of God, "as the small rain upon the tender herb?" I suppose it is, first, because some of it may be above their understanding. If you hear a sermon and you do not understand at all what the good man is talking about, how can it benefit you? If the preacher uses the high-class pulpit-language of the day, which is not English, but a sort of English-Latin—produced rather by reading than by conversation with ordinary mortals—why then the hearer usually loses his time and the preacher his labor!

One said to me, "If I went to such-and-such a place, I would not need my Bible, but I should need a dictionary, for otherwise I should not know what was meant." May that never be the case with us! When people cannot understand the meaning of our language, how can we expect that they can drink in the inner sense? I exhort any hearer here to whom it has not occurred that he must understand the sermon to be benefited by it, to seek out always, both in his hearing and in his reading, that kind of teaching which he can grip and grasp! He will rise to higher things by this means, but he cannot rise by that which never touches him. We cannot feed upon that which is high above and out of our sight. Ballooning in theology is all very fine, but it is of no use to poor souls down here below who cannot hope to be allowed a place in the car. Tender plants are not refreshed by water which is borne aloft into the clouds—they need it to come down to earth and moisten their leaves and roots! And if it does not come near them, how can they be refreshed by it? The fountains of Versailles are very grand, but for the little flowerpot in a London window, a cupful from a child's hand, poured near the root, will suffice.

Many do not drink in the sacred Word of God because it seems to them too good to be true. This is limiting the goodness of God—God is so good that nothing can be too good to be looked for from Him. How many fail to grasp a promise because while they say it may be true in a sense, they do not receive it in the sense intended by the Spirit of God! They dwarf and diminish the sense and, in the process, they evaporate the real meaning and the Word of God becomes of no effect to them. In many an instance, the Gospel does no mighty works because of their unbelief. Depend upon it, God's Word is a great Word, for He is a great God—and the largest meaning we can find in it is more likely to be true than a smaller one.

Many persons do not receive the Gospel promise to the full because they do not think it is true to them. Anybody else may be blessed in that way, but they cannot think it probable that they shall be! Though the Gospel is particularly directed to sinners, to such as "labor and are heavy-laden," and to such as need a Savior, yet these good folks think, "Surely Grace could never reach to me." Oh, how we lose our labor and fail to comfort men because of the unbelief which pretends to be the child of humility, but is really the offspring of pride! The small rain does not get at the tender herb because the herb shrinks from the silver drops which would cherish it.

No doubt many miss the charming influences of heavenly Truths of God because they do not think enough. How often does the Word fail to enrich the heart because it is not thought over! The small rain does not get to the root of the tender herb, for time and opportunity are not allowed to it. O you that would profit by the ministry of the Gospel, take this for your golden rule—hear once, meditate twice, and pray three times! I prescribe to you, as a composition and compound of excellent virtue, that there should be at least twice as much meditating as there should be hearing! Is it not strange that people should think sermons worth hearing, but not worth meditating upon? It is as foolish as if a man thought a joint of meat worth buying, but not worth cooking, for meditation is, as it were, a sort of holy cookery by which the Truth of God is prepared to be food for the soul.

Solomon says, "The slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting" and, verily, there are many of that sort, who hunt after a sermon and when they have found it, they roast it not—they do not prepare it as a Truth of God should be prepared before it can be digested and become spiritual meat. Why get books if you never read, or clothes if you never dress, or carriages if you never ride? Yet any one of these things is more sensible than hearing sermons and never meditating upon them! Do not do so, dear Brothers and Sisters, I pray you!

We are not members of the Society of Friends, although I hope we are friends and members of a society, but we should try and do after the service what they try to do during the service. Let us keep silence and let the Truth sink into us. We should be all the better if occasionally we were famished of words, for too often we are smothered with them. It would be profitable to have the supply of words stopped, that we might get below the language and look inward at the hidden sense, that we might reach the heart of the Truth and feel its energetic operation upon our heart and soul. We are too often like men who skim over the surface of the soil while there are nuggets of gold just out of sight, which we might readily secure if we would but stop and dig for them. You cannot hope to feel the efficacy of that which is preached, so that it shall be to you as the small rain upon the tender herb unless you thoughtfully consider it.

And, once more, we ought to pray that when we hear the Word of God, we may be prepared to receive it. It is of great importance that we should open the doors of our soul to let the Gospel enter. Hospitality to Truth is charity to ourselves. Some people sit, while we are preaching, like men in armor and, though the Gospel bow is drawn with all our force, the arrow rattles on their mail. It is only now and then that, Divinely guided, the arrow finds out a joint in their harness. But the profitable way to hear is to come here without armor of prejudice, or stubbornness and lay yourself open to receive the arrow—then will it be "the arrow of the Lord's deliverance." Gideon's fleece became wet with the dew, for it was ready to receive it. Every bit of wool has an aptitude, a sponginess, to suck up dew—and the moisture of the atmosphere fell where it was welcome when it fell on that fleece! The fleece was a nest for the dewdrops to rest. So let it be with our spirits. I pray God to make it so.

"The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord." May He so prepare us that when the doctrine preached shall come to us as the small rain, it may not fall on stones and dead wood, but on growing herbs, which, though tender, will, nonetheless, gladly accept the blessed gift of Heaven and return thanks for it!

III. I shall conclude with this third reflection, that MOSES HOPED TO SEE RESULTS. You may, perhaps, say that you do not see this in the text. Will you kindly look again? "As the small rain upon the tender herb." Now, observe, in looking about among mankind, that, whenever wise men expect any results from their labors, they always go to work in a manner suited and adapted to the end they have in view. If Moses

means that his speech shall bless those whom he compares to tender herbs, he makes it like small rain. I see clearly that he seeks a result, for he adapts his means.

There is a kind of trying to do good which I call the "hit-or-miss" style of doing it. Here you are going to do good—you do not consider what method of doing good you are best fitted for, but you aspire to preach and preach you do! Of course, you must give a sermon and a sermon you give. There is no consideration about the congregation and its special condition, nor the peculiar persons composing it, nor what Truth of God will be most likely to impress and benefit. Hit-or-miss, off you go!

But when a man means to see results, he begins studying means and their adaptation to ends—and if he sees that his people are strong men and women and he wants to feed them, well, he does not bring out the milk jug, but he fetches out a dish of strong meat for them! You can see he means to feed his people, for he has great anxiety when preparing their spiritual meat. When a person wants to water plants and they are tender herbs, if he looks for results, he does not drench them—that would look as if he had no real objective, but simply went through a piece of routine. Moses meant what he was doing. Finding the people to be comparable to tender herbs, he adapted his speech to them and made it like the small rain.

Now, what will be the result if we do the same? Why, Brothers, it will come to pass thus—there will be among us young converts like tender herbs, newly planted, and if we speak in tenderness and gentleness we shall see the results, for they will take root in the Truth and grow in it. Paul planted and then Apollos watered. Why did Apollos water? Because you must water plants after you have planted them, that they may the more readily strike into the earth. Happy shall you be, dear Friends, if you employ your greater experience in strengthening those whose new life is as yet feeble! You shall have loving honor as nursing fathers and your wise advice shall be, "as the small rain upon the tender herb," for you

shall see the result in the young people taking hold of Christ and sucking out the precious nutriment stored away in the soil of the Covenant that they may grow thereby.

Next, when a man's discourse is like small rain to the tender herb, he sees the weak and perishing one revive and lift up his head. The herb was withering at first. It lay down as you see a newly-planted thing do, faint and ready to die. But the small rain came and it seemed to say, "Thank you," and it looked up, lifted its head and recovered from its swoon. You will see a reviving effect produced upon faint hearts and desponding minds. You will be a comforter! You will cheer away the fears of many and make glad the timid and fearful. What a blessing it is—when you see that result—for there is so much the more joy in the world and God is so much the more glorified!

When you water tender herbs and see them grow, you have a further reward. It is delightful to watch the development and increase of Grace in those who are under our care. This has been an exceedingly sweet pleasure to me. I quote my own instance because I have no doubt it is repeated in many of you. It has been a great delight to me to meet men serving God and preaching the Gospel gloriously who were once young converts and needed my fostering care. I know men, deacons of Churches, fathers in Israel, that I remember talking to 20 or 25 years ago, when they could not speak a word for Jesus, for they were not assured of their own salvation. I rejoice to see them leaders of the flock, whereas once they were poor, feeble lambs! I carried them in my bosom and now they might almost carry me. I am glad enough to learn from them and sit at their feet.

It is a great thing for a father to see his boys grow into strong men, upon whom he may lean in his declining days. "Blessed is the man that has his quiver full of them"—they were the children of his youth

and they are the comfort and joy of later days. You, dear Friends, in your own way, you shall comfort the youngsters who are just seeking the Savior and then, in later years, when you hear them preaching and see them outstripping you in gifts and in Graces, you will thank God that you were like the small rain to them when they were very tender herbs!

Once more, we water plants that we may see them bring forth fruit and become fit for use. So shall we see those whom God blesses by our means become a joy to the Lord, Himself, yielding fruits of holiness, patience and obedience, such as Jesus Christ delights in. His joy is in His people. And when He can rejoice in them, their joy is full. Let us try to be little in our own esteem, that we may be as the small rain. Let us try to be a little useful, if we cannot reach to great things—the small rain is a great blessing. Let us try to be useful to little things. Let us look after tender herbs. Let us try to bring boys and girls to Jesus. Let us look after the tender plants of the Lord's right hand planting, those who are babes in Grace—the timid, trembling, half-hoping, half-fearing ones. Let us come down from the seventh Heaven to bless this fallen earth.

We have been reading about the trumpets and the "star called Wormwood"—let us come down from those high matters to commonplace affairs. Let us quit clouds and skies—and condescend to men of low estate. Let us come down from communing with the philosophers of culture and the Apostles of a new theology—to the ordinary people who live around us and cannot comprehend these fine fictions! Let us come down to the streets and lanes and do what we can for the poor, the fallen, the ignorant. Let us go with Jesus in the gentleness and sweetness of His Divine compassion, to the little children in years and the babes in Grace. So shall we be like Moses! So shall we be, better still, like the Lamb of God, to whose name be glory forever and ever!

Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/small-rain-for-tender-herbs/>

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