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Christ's Teaching on Prayer

R. H. Boll

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Compiled and Reprinted from Articles in The Word and Work

WORD AND WORK PUBLISHERS

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Foreword

I feel very grateful that the Lord put it into the heart of Sister Marie Rehorn to compile these timely writings on prayer and to take the initiative (by bearing a good part of the publication cost) in having them made available in booklet form.

My own heart has been stirred and blessed as I have read again these studies in the prayer life of our Lord. They are just as fresh and timely as when they first appeared. Many readers will recall classes in which these lessons were given—not only at Portland but in a number of other churches. These truths gripped Brother Boll's heart and thus he could so speak as to reach the hearts of many others. He was a man of prayer himself.

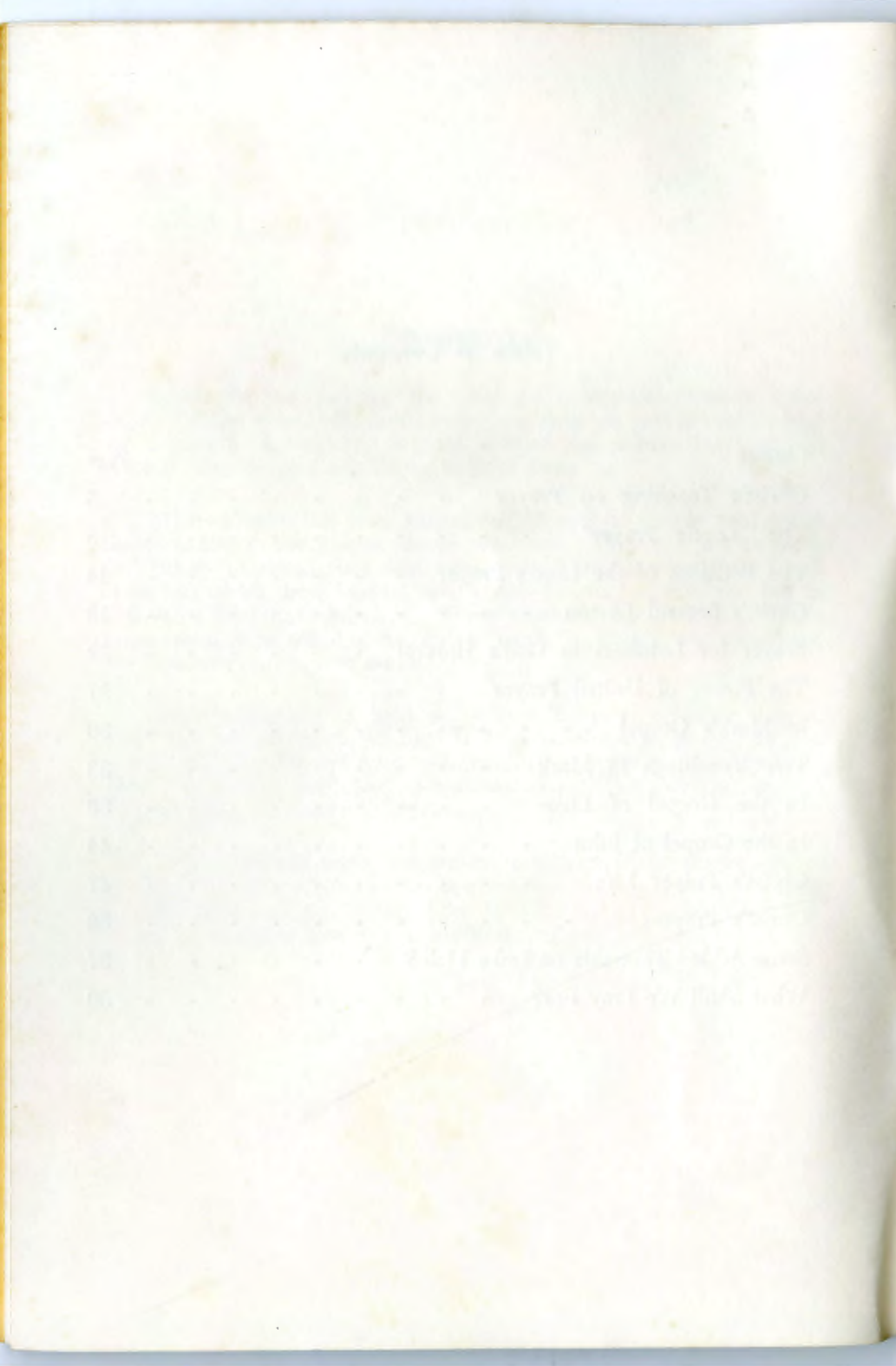
What better way to make our prayer life more effective than to sit at the feet of the Lord and let Him teach us to pray? In the prayer life of the Lord Jesus we see how completely He depended upon the Father and how completely the Father worked in and through Him in answer to prayer.

If these lessons serve to quicken and deepen the prayer life of the Lord's people, all of us who have worked on this Precious Reprint will feel well repaid. To the Lord be all the glory, who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous Light.

—Dennis L. Allen

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Christ's Teaching on Prayer - - - - -	5
The "Lord's Prayer" - - - - -	8
The Petitions of the Lord's Prayer - - - - -	14
Christ's Second Lesson - - - - -	18
Prayer for Laborers in God's Harvest - - - - -	22
The Power of United Prayer - - - - -	27
In Mark's Gospel - - - - -	30
Two Teachings in Mark - - - - -	33
In the Gospel of Luke - - - - -	36
In the Gospel of John - - - - -	44
Christ's Prayer Life - - - - -	47
Christ's Prayers - - - - -	52
Some Added Thoughts on Luke 11:5-8 - - - - -	57
What Shall We Pray For? - - - - -	59



CHRIST'S TEACHING ON PRAYER

Originally Published in *Word and Work*

There is much teaching on prayer and many wonderful prayers of God's saints are recorded in the Old Testament scriptures. But with the coming of Christ, prayer took on a new aspect and rose to a new spiritual level. His coming into the world brought with it a new revelation from God, and a new relation to Him. Gradually, step by step, on the basis of the new revelation of God did the Lord Jesus lead His disciples into a new prayer-life. The first teaching of Christ on prayer in the New Testament is found in the Sermon on the Mount; and there, also, we encounter a new and wonderful name of God which He taught to His disciples. This name was *Father*. Never before did His people address Him in such a way. Many great, loving, endearing, adoring names and titles are applied to Him in holy reverence in the Old Testament (as in the book of Psalms for instance) —but never once did the saints of old call Him "Father"—except in a few instances when He is called Father with reference to Israel, *nationally* (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). The message God sent to Pharaoh was, "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Exod. 4:22); and, again, in Deut. 14:1 it is said, "Ye are the children of Jehovah your God." But this relationship is always to Israel as a people in a national sense. No individual among them did ever directly and personally address God as his Father. But when Jesus came, He taught His disciples to call God "Father." The new relation of sonship came through Christ. "For to as many as received him"—"even to them that believe on his name"—"to them gave he the right to become children of God...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13). The name "Father" occurs first in Matt. 5:16, where He says to His disciples, "Even so let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Then again in v.45, "that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." And then repeatedly afterwards.

Christ's first reference to prayer comes in the course of His teaching on the necessity of sincerity and pure motive in religious acts—in alms, in giving, in fastings, in praying (Matt. 6:1-18). If, like "the hypocrites" they should do these things to be seen of men,

or to get praise and credit from men, it will count for nothing with God; but what is done as unto Him alone, the Father who seeth in secret shall recompense. So when you pray, don't do as the hypocrites, "for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men....But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee" (Matt. 6:5,6). This is lesson number one. Don't pray for show—to be seen (or heard) of men. Not that public praying is wrong, for the Lord Himself and His apostles prayed in public. But the purpose and motive is everything. God looks on the heart. Let your prayer—whether public or private—be *unto God*, with no other thought or object beside.

But a further lesson is here implied and included: namely, *the need of private, secret prayer*. No public praying, no joint praying at prayer-meetings or with family-group, as good and valuable as these are, can take the place of our own private, secret communion with God. Often a Christian will be heard saying, "I pray all the time; I pray when I am working, or going, or resting." This, if really so—if not merely an excuse—is very good indeed. Of course the Lord Jesus knew the secret of that. Nevertheless He found it necessary to get away from the crowds, to get away even from His own disciples, to get alone with God. For Him there was no closet, nor inner chamber; He had no door that He could close. But there was the wilderness, the friendly solitude of the desert, and the lonely mountain-height, where in secrecy and free from all distraction He prayed to His Father. And as for Him (and much more so) this is a spiritual necessity for every one of us. Alone with God—the world shut out—we are, as it were, face to face with our Father before whom we present ourselves, who seeth in secret, and who hears all our confession, our pleadings, our supplications and intercessions. And He rewards openly. For it would not be possible but that an hour of such communion with God must be manifest in the public life and work of the child of God.

Now follows lesson two. "In praying use not vain repetitions as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7). The Gentiles, in their ignorance, think that prayer is a sort of meritorious performance. And, of course, if that were the case, it would follow that the more prayers a man can put out, the more he will get for it. On that principle, they have devised "prayer-wheels," to multiply and manifold prayers indefinitely by machinery, as it were. So, like the prophets of Baal, they cry monotonously through the weary hours, "O Baal hear us, O Baal hear us." If only that sort of folly were confined to the "Gentiles"!

But—the Lord continues—"be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." But if He knows beforehand, why do we need to tell Him of our wants, why do we have to ask of Him—why pray at all? Simply because He has made blessing depend on prayer. He wants us to come and ask of Him that He may keep us in touch with Him, coming back to Him continually as our needs recur. This is God's way; and it is good, as all His ways are. Had He chosen to do so, He could have given us full abundance of everything at once and without our asking. The result would have been that we would have become independent of Him, and would have forgotten the Hand which bestowed the gift. For after all, God loves us. What loving parent would not want to keep up close and frequent contact with his children? So our Father in heaven keeps us coming back to Him for help, for comfort, for the supply of constantly arising needs, and every want of spirit, soul, and body. And our asking prepares us for the receiving of His gifts.

At this point the Lord Jesus gave His disciples a pattern-prayer—the "Lord's Prayer" as we call it—not that the Lord ever did, or could have been, using it Himself—but because He laid out its simple words and petitions for them.

The "Lord's Prayer"

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matt. 6:9-13.)

Already it was pointed out that this is not the "Lord's prayer" in the sense that the Lord Himself ever did so pray or could have. He never prayed on a common level with His disciples, saying "Our Father" along with them. There is evermore a distinction between the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, and those who have become sons of God through Him. It is not "Our Father," but "My Father" and "Your Father." "Go unto my brethren and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." (John 20:17) For the same reason He is never seen praying together with His disciples. He prayed sometimes in their hearing, and again by Himself apart, but never *with* them. The word His disciples were taught to use for asking is *aiteo*; but when He prayed, He (and He alone) used the word *erotao*, which denotes petition of a different kind. Nevertheless, He has not separated Himself from us, but we are "in Him," and it is through Him that we draw nigh to God.

But, some have thought that the Lord's Prayer is unsuitable for Christians today because it contains the petition "Thy kingdom come." The Kingdom (they say) has come already, and it is no longer in order to pray for its coming. That a great dispensational change has come since the Lord Jesus taught this prayer to His disciples is evident. The Lord Jesus went to the cross, and rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God, having received all power and authority; and the Holy Spirit was sent down from Him on the day of Pentecost. The full gospel—the gospel of the grace of God—began to be preached. Jesus was openly proclaimed as Lord and Christ, and inquiring sinners were bidden to repent and be baptized in His name, for the remission of their sins, and they should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the Lord Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer, none of this had come to pass. In those days indeed the promised Kingdom had not as yet come. The law was still in force. The Old Covenant had not yet come to an end, and the New Covenant had not yet gone into effect. The Church had not yet come into existence. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given (John 7:39). Christ's disciples today do stand on a higher plane of re-

demption, and in a nearer relationship to God than those did who followed Jesus during His personal ministry on earth. Is the form of the prayer which He gave them still suitable and proper? Should we in this new day pray after the manner He taught His disciples to pray before Pentecost? The question deserves consideration.

Let us weigh the objection fairly. Though fully accepting the truth that the Lord Jesus is King now, and that His redeemed ones have been delivered "out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13)—we need also to ask whether the Kingdom is in any sense yet future. True, Christ's people are in the Kingdom now. Their citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20) Here below they share their Lord's rejection, they are bearing His reproach. Will it ever be otherwise? Certainly not before Christ comes, for until then there is only "the way of the cross" for those who follow Him, not the hour of reign and triumph. But will the time ever come when the "kingdom of the world" shall have "become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," as announced in Rev. 11:15; or when "the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms *under the whole heaven* shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High?" (Dan. 7:27) Also, had not the Lord Jesus foretold that when the great signs of the end-time are seen men may know that the Kingdom of God is nigh? (Luke 21:31) Certainly, then, in that aspect, the Kingdom is yet future. And if the Kingdom is yet to have a future manifestation in the earth, is it not still in order to pray "Thy kingdom come"?

Others have objected to the Lord's Prayer because of the petition, "Forgive us our debts even as we also have forgiven our debtors." With this goes the Lord's appended comment, "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Now some have thought that this was law-teaching; for under grace, forgiveness is freely given to us and not conditioned on our forgiving others. The doctrine of the gospel expressed by Paul (they say) is, "Even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye."

Now it is quite true that this prayer was given while the covenant of the Law was yet in force. But we cannot fail to see that the Lord Jesus in His teaching also anticipated the day of grace, and that most especially when He spoke of His disciples' relationship to God. Over and over He calls God their Father—an unheard of thing, for in the Old Testament such a title is used only in a figurative sense or collectively, of the nation of Israel as a whole. But the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to say, "Our Father," and to call Him so personally and individually. He regarded them as already God's children, born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12, 13) Moreover

they were already a forgiven people; and their forgiveness was (as forgiveness must ever be) of God's free grace—no longer dependent upon any law observance, but as received through their faith in Him. "Already ye are clean," He says to them, "because of the word which I have spoken to you." (John 15:3) They were certainly not to merit their forgiveness by first forgiving their debtors. To them the words, "Even as I forgave you, so also do ye" applied, even as to us. But, if men who have been so freely and gladly forgiven refuse to forgive those who had trespassed against them—what shall we say then? The answer the Lord gives is plain: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Make of that what we will—only be warned lest on any pretext of "grace" you might hope to be forgiven while refusing to forgive those who have sinned against you.

It is not, however, that God only forgives on condition that we forgive; but our forgiving is really the natural and necessary *fruit* of God's forgiveness of us. A person who has believed and received the gracious forgiveness of God, will not, cannot, hold an unforgiving attitude toward those who have trespassed against him. If he does, he gives proof that either he has never in his heart appropriated the grace of God, or that he is a backslider who has "forgotten the cleansing from his old sins." And until he gets out of that condition and comes back to God, he cannot count on forgiveness for himself. "Thou wicked servant—I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou also have had mercy on my fellow-servant even as I had mercy on thee?" So spoke the Lord in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. (Matt. 18:32, 33) Really, it is good for your soul to pray the prayer just as the Lord Jesus taught it: "Forgive us our debts *even as we also have forgiven our debtors.*"

Looking over this wonderful prayer again we see that it is divided into two main parts—the former of which contains three petitions, the latter four—and that the first part is concerned with God's interests, whereas the petitions of the second part concerns (sic) our affairs. So it is God first! Surely that is significant. It is not that every prayer must necessarily begin so (though it would not be amiss if it did), but that in all true prayer God comes in for first and foremost consideration.

If we examine the great prayers of the Old Testament, we shall see how God and God's glory and honor are always put in the foreground. It was so in Moses' intercession for Israel (Exod 32); in Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8) in Daniel's prayer on behalf of his people (Dan. 9); the great prayer of confession and penitence in Nehemiah 9, and in all the prayer-

psalms. Those men of old pleaded the honor and glory of God's name, and put His rights and claims above all else, as here the Lord Jesus does in the Lord's Prayer. First of all, it is "Our Father who art in heaven...thy name...thy kingdom...thy will." The things of God come first, then our personal needs and desires. But if we so pray from the heart we do not thereby suffer any loss, for in the honor of His name, the glory of His kingdom, the fulfilment of His good will, all our highest hope and happiness are bound up.

The first of the first three petitions is "Hallowed be thy name." It is a prayer that God's Name be revered and held holy among men. It is not merely that the Name of God should not be used as a by-word as in common swearing and profanity, nor that it should not be used to establish a falsehood, as in perjury, which is the thing forbidden in the third commandment (Exod. 20:7). It means far more than that. God's Name is His character; and, secondarily stands for His reputation among men. That He should be truly known, that He should not be misrepresented, that His Name should not be despised nor blasphemed, but honored and exalted—that is the real point of this first petition. We know how jealous God has ever been for His Name, and how many things He does and has done "for His Name's sake." Upon the knowledge of and regard for God's Name hangs the hope and salvation of mankind; and all the work of our Lord Jesus is summed up in this, that He manifested God's Name to His own who were in the world, so that through them it might be made known to all men. (John 17:3, 6, 26)

The request of the second petition, "Thy kingdom come" is in its broadest and final sense a prayer that God may be given His place as the supreme and only ruler. This naturally leads to the third petition (for the fulfilment of the third will follow as the consequence of the first and second) —"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? Perfectly and absolutely, you say. But we must not get the idea that this is under compulsion, as though it were a penitentiary, where the inmates move by order and command in lock-step, like so many slaves and prisoners. There is no place in the universe where intelligent beings are so happy and so free as in heaven, yet no place where obedience is so perfect. There they obey God joyfully, wholly and wholeheartedly from love and not from fear. Will the day ever come when it will be so on earth? If not, why would the Lord Jesus have taught us so to pray?

Now from the lofty interests of God, in which really the happiness of all mankind is wrapped up, the great Teacher turns to our own individual and personal concerns. And, strange to say, He begins with the bread-and-butter question. We might have expected that He would have put our spiritual need, which is indubitably the greater and more important, first. But He knows

the pressure of our problems and the anxiety that so easily besets us; and He would have us know that He is not indifferent to our earthly and bodily needs. Here also the assurance that God can and will see to those needs is implied in the very prayer which the Lord gave us. He did not mean that we should ask in vain, but, as further on in the Sermon on the Mount He taught His disciples, He would have us to cast all our cares upon the Father in heaven: "Give us this day our daily bread"—not anxious about the future days, for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; yet, also, as Luke gives it, including all the future days: "give us day by day our daily bread."

The supreme spiritual need, the need of forgiveness, is brought forward in the next petition: "forgive us our debts." And we are to ask Him to forgive us *as we have forgiven our debtors!* So important is this point that, at the close of this prayer, the Lord again repeats it and insists upon it!

Now another petition—really two petitions that hang together—"bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This puzzles the mind of some. Would God lead anyone into temptation? Is it not written elsewhere that "God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no man"? (Jas. 1:13) True. But there is a difference between tempting a man and leading him into a place or a situation where he will be tested and tried. God does not do the one, but He does do the other that He may prove us, and test the genuineness of our faith and loyalty. He Himself does not tempt any man with evil, but He suffers us to be tempted—all of us, each one of us, at some time—but never (as Paul tells us) above that which we are able to bear, nor without giving us a way of escape. Yet it is unspeakably better to be kept from temptation. "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." How many a fateful temptation has been avoided by timely prayer! How many a battle has been fought and won in the secrecy of the closet, before ever it came to the field of conflict! So pray to be kept from temptation, for we dare not face it needlessly.

And with that goes the further request: if we do have to face it, may we be kept from sin! When by God's will we have to fight the warfare without and within, may we know the victory that comes by faith. "Each victory will help us some other to win."

We note a startling change here in the wording of the Revised Version, not merely that we be kept from evil, but from the Evil One. The word itself, as it stands in the original, does not decide whether evil in the abstract is meant, or a person, the Evil One, that great and terrible spirit of evil, who is called the devil and Satan.

The evidence favors the latter. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness—the armies of evil spirits—in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10-12) —and against him who has command of them, who is spoken of as “the prince of the powers of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). He is the real antagonist. And we are no match for him. Whether he comes as the serpent to deceive with “the wiles of the devil,” or with threat and brute force, as the roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour or—most awful of all—in the guise of an angel of light to mislead and entice us with charming lies, he is too much for us, we can only flee for refuge and defense to Him who has conquered Satan on our behalf. In no other way can we prevail. We do well to sing those old words:

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee,
Leave, O leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my hope on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring.
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.”

It is a serious matter, very grave, and fraught with heavy consequences. Foolish men may, but the Bible does never, speak lightly of Satan, but always in solemn tone. But those who seek refuge in Christ are more than conquerors through Him who loved them.

Now we look back over the Lord's Prayer, again we know that we have not exhausted it. It is just beginning to open up, and to unfold its significance and manifold application. Truly a child can lisp it, but the wisest and greatest of God's saints have not fathomed its profound depths. It is indeed (as someone has called it) “The prayer that teaches to pray.” How often, when the heart is dead and dry, and we cannot find how to pray, have we been led through this sweet and simple prayer into true, earnest petition, into thanksgiving and praise, into intercessions and supplications, into lowly adoration and worship!

The Petitions of the Lord's Prayer

As once again we survey the "Lord's Prayer" we note the all-important fact that the Lord Jesus taught us to address God as "Our Father." This (as has been observed before) is an entirely new approach to God. The saints of the Old Testament called Him by many an endearing name, such as "My God," "My Rock and my Salvation," "My Glory and the Lifter-up of my Head," "My King;" or, in contrition, "the great and dreadful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy." He is indeed all that, and evermore shall be, for He changeth not. But here is a new name, based upon a new relationship, which is granted to men through Christ. He is the *Father*. But only the children of God can rightly call God "Father"; and only they are children of God who are "born of God." Though all men are His "offspring," and all are the objects of His love and care, yet all are not His children, nor is God the Father of all. The right to call Him Father does not naturally belong to men. Nor have all the privilege of belonging to His family as His children; but, "To as many as received him (Christ), to them gave he the right to become children of God; even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12, 13.) "Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26, 27.) "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God," says John—"and such we are." (1 John 3:1.) And again, of such it is written that "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs." (Rom. 8:16, 17.)

It is on the ground of this relationship that the Christian can now approach the throne of grace and say, "Abba, Father," and, "Our Father who art in heaven." But to His children He is "*Father*," with all that that name implies—a Father infinitely better, kinder, wiser, more loving, than the best of human fathers that ever lived. "If ye who are evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:11.)

Let us mark also the fact that the Father is addressed as being *in heaven*. It is perfectly true that God is omnipresent—that He is everywhere—that He fills the heaven and the earth—that in Him all men live and move and have their being; that His power and glory is manifest in all nature and creation; and that His own dwell in God and God dwelleth in them. But God is also localized. Heaven is His abode and dwelling place. We are not to pray to God as being within, or round about us, but to the Father who is in heaven.

That is the safeguard against a false mysticism, and against pantheistic error.

And when we say "*Hallowed be Thy Name*" we are asking that God's name be held in holy reverence among men. Now in our praying the important thing is always that we *mean* it—that we call on God *in truth*—that our prayer be the utterance of the soul's sincere desire. The Lord Jesus did not teach us to say mere *words*, to be repeated by rote, parrot fashion, but He meant to create in our hearts the real desire for the things we ask. Our attitude in prayer is not that of mere well-wishers, as if to say, "Lord, we would be quite willing and pleased and glad to see Thy Name hallowed and to have Thy kingdom come and Thy will done on earth, etc." No—as we pray to Him we enlist with Him in His plans and in His program. When therefore I say, "Hallowed be Thy Name"—if I really mean it and want it, then the purpose to do all on my part that God's Name may be hallowed takes shape in my heart. I am lined up with the great end and aim of bringing God's Name to reverence and honor among men. And, is it not true that *a son* can bring more of honor or disgrace upon his father's name than anyone else? The nearness of our relationship to God makes us the custodians of His good name among men. Through us, and because we are His children, God's Name may be blasphemed in the world; and, on the other hand, we can glorify our Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:16.)

So, likewise, when we say, "Thy Kingdom come," we take our place as "fellow-workers unto the Kingdom of God." (Col. 4:11.) We can enhance the interests of God's Kingdom now, and what we do here can result in bringing in its final glory.

So, likewise, if I enter with whole-hearted purpose into the third petition, I will pray, "Thy will be done," and back of it will be the thought, "Lord, teach me Thy will" and "Teach me *to do* Thy will." (Ps. 143:10.) Thus, when I so pray, I will purpose to enter into the fulfillment of His good and holy will on the earth.

The next petition is that for daily bread. Anyone could see that it would be wrong for a man to fold his hands and refuse to do his work and obvious duty on the pretext of this prayer. If a man obtains a living by honest work, his daily bread is as much from God as if it had been dropped into his hands from heaven. But there may also come a time in a man's life when he cannot work, and when there is no earthly prospect for his sustenance. Will the prayer for daily bread hold good then, and will God, who has promised not to fail us nor forsake us, then see to our wants and needs? Yea—the prayer is valid then as much as it ever could be. "Therefore," says the Lord Jesus, "be not anxious what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on....Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor

gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?...And why are ye anxious concerning raiment?" (Matt. 6:25-32.) But someone may say, "We have to sow and reap and gather into barns if we want to be fed, and we must toil and spin for raiment." Very well—let us do so, for that is God's will. And if there come a time when there is no chance to sow or reap or gather, and when we cannot toil and spin, we can pray just the same, and with the same assurance. "For your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Whether we can see where it is coming from or not, He is always equal to the situation; and He would have us to trust in His care.

But, again—how the little prayer cuts into one's heart and conscience!—did He teach us to say, "*Our Father*"? And, "Give *us* this day our daily bread"? This first person plural compels me to think of my brother. It is not *my* daily bread only, but *our* daily bread I am praying for; and if I have it, and he has not, and if my heart is in this prayer—what would I do? "But whoso hath the world's goods," says John, "and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17.)

That the petition for forgiveness carries with it an obligation is plainly stated. It is, "as we also have forgiven our debtors." And afterward the Lord added the words: "If ye forgive men their trespasses; your heavenly Father will also forgive your trespasses; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14, 15.)

In the next petition I will be asking our heavenly Father to keep me out of temptation. How important and necessary is this prayer! We remember the word of the Lord Jesus to His sleeping disciples in Gethsemane: "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41.) So, you pray, "Lead us not into temptation." If that is a true prayer, expressing your heart's sincere desire—will you, then, on your part, *walk into* temptation, where you know it is? Certainly not. If I ask the Father to keep me out of temptation—do I not mean to say that I do not want to be lead into it, and that I will avoid it where possible, and will steer clear, so far as in me lies, not only of sin but of the opportunity and occasion? Therefore, if I pray, I am wholly committed against sin, and all its suggestions and inducements. Also, if I say, "Lead *us* not into temptation" it means that I have the same solicitude for my brother that I have for myself. If he is weak, if he is in danger, I will include my brother in that prayer. And surely, I would not myself lead him (or her) into temptation, or be an occasion of stumbling to him! The Lord Jesus did elsewhere say some very solemn things about anyone who would cause one of His little ones to stumble; and pronounced a woe upon the world

because of occasions of stumbling. "It must needs be that the occasions come,"—there is no help for that—"but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh." (Matt. 18:4-7.) What a heavy responsibility falls upon those that help their fellow-men to become drunkards, and upon the purveyors of the lascivious pictures such as often appear in popular magazines; and upon those who produce and present the licentious shows that corrupt the minds of our youth!

Finally, we ask to be delivered from the Evil One—not only from "evil," but from that evil spirit that rules and controls the world. Here only God can help us. Satan is far too mighty and too shrewd for us, and only our Lord who overcame him can safeguard us from his power. Hence this prayer. On our part we are to resist him. From the lusts and vices to which the flesh is prone, he tells us to *flee*. But, as to the devil—we are to *resist*. Yet not in our own power, but *by faith*. "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist stedfast in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). But, to do this, we must take up the whole armor of God—most especially the shield of faith, by which we can quench all the fiery darts of the devil; and that sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, with which our Lord once smote him in the mount of temptation.

It is a short prayer, and very simple. But it has a way of opening up more and more. It extends its meaning over all the Christian's life. All lengths, and breadths, all heights and depths are comprehended in its scope. And as we pray with a true heart, in fulness of faith, consciously and unconsciously we are drawn over on God's side and His ways; and as we receive from Him the answer to its petitions all our needs bodily and spiritual, are supplied. For "Prayer changes things," and that *on both ends*.

Christ's Second Lesson

Like the first, so this second lesson also is found in the Sermon on the Mount. The first teaching stressed the necessity of sincerity and singleness of motive in prayer (Matt. 6:5,6) and warned against the foolish views of the Gentiles, who thought that the effectiveness of prayer lay in the multitude of words—in which connection the Lord gave them the simple pattern of prayer, known generally as the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:7-15).*

The second lesson on Prayer is given in Matt. 7:7-11.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

With that follows an earnest assurance:

"For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

These words are perfectly plain and clear; even a little child can understand them. Yet do they not puzzle us? Many shake their heads and wondering ask, What does it mean? That we can just ask and receive? Surely the matter could not be so simple as that. Haven't we all, at one time and another, asked and failed to receive? There must be some conditions, some if's and but's behind this promise. If the Lord meant that we could simply ask and receive, why are prayers unanswered? So straightway we begin to cast about for reasons to explain this strange contradiction, and we pile up if's and but's so many as to snow the Lord's promise clean under, and practically nullify it. But look at it again; "Ask and it shall be given you...for every one that asketh receiveth...." Why if He had not meant it would the Lord have said such a thing? In threefold repetition, and three times repeated assurance He declares the sure efficacy of our prayers; and, as if that had not been enough, he re-inforces it with a similitude drawn from human parental love and applied *a fortiori* to the love of our Father in heaven.

"Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

*There is a still earlier reference to prayer in Matt. 5:44, where the Lord teaches His disciples to "pray for them that persecute you." By such an attitude toward their enemies they were to manifest their sonship and likeness to God, who bestows the gifts of His love upon the unjust as well as the just, upon the evil as well as the good. Read the whole passage—Matt. 5:43-48.

children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

How could He have used language more simple, clear, and strong, to urge us to pray, and to assure us that our petitions would not be in vain? But the promise seems to be wholly unconditional. Are there not conditions to it at all? Yes—there are some conditions, and they are implied in the very promise itself.

1. The first condition which is also the most difficult, and the one most generally disregarded, is simply *that we believe Him*. Of course we do not doubt His veracity—we wouldn't dare say such a thing, or even think it. For this He was born and came forth into the world that He should bear witness to the truth. Yes, we believe that His word is truth—surely we do. And yet—how hard it is for us to take His promise at face-value. Oh the doubts and fears that arise in our poor, weak hearts! We do indeed make our request known to Him, but “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” does not come. (Phil. 4:6, 7) Why not? We cast our burden before the Lord in prayer, and then pick it up again and go our way with it, as before. We cannot rest in His promise; we cannot trust Him to do as He said. Is it any wonder that we “ask and receive not”? “Let not that man”—that doubting man—“think that he shall receive anything of the Lord,” says James. (Jas. 1:7) With that unhappy father in the gospel story, we often must cry out: “Lord I believe; help mine unbelief.”

2. “But I asked for something in undoubting faith, and did not get it,” replies one. So would you set up this experience to discredit the promise of the Lord, and to deny His truthfulness? “Oh, no,” he would say—“but there must have been another reason besides unbelief in my case.” Likely there was. John puts in a qualifying phrase: “If we ask anything *according to his will* he heareth us.” (1 John 5:14.) “Yes, but in Matt. 7:7-11, the Lord says nothing about any such condition and limitation.” Doesn't He? So you think He meant that you could ask for something contrary to the will of God, and get it? That would be bad for you. (Ps. 106:15.) But look again at the promise in Matt. 7:7, 8. Did the Lord say, “Ask and you will get the thing you asked for?” No doubt often, yea, in most cases you will. But the Lord did not so commit Himself. Only one thing He made certain and definite: namely that your asking shall not be in vain. Here is what He said: “Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” Now this “it” is impersonal and indefinite; very much as we say “it rains,” or “it is warm.” What the Lord said was that if you ask you shall receive; and if you seek you will find; and if you knock a door will be opened to you; not necessarily that what you ask for you will receive, or that you will necessarily find the thing you are seeking, or that the special door at which you knock

will be the one that will be opened to you. By all preference, yes: if your asking is right and good; if your request can be granted for a blessing—surely the Father will rejoice to fulfill your actual petition. But He does not bind Himself to give anything and everything, always, for our asking. Yet the assurance is that you shall receive—and if not the very thing that in your blindness you may have asked, then a better thing instead. So ask—ask in faith—you cannot lose.

3. It will be seen that the whole meaning of the Lord's comparison turns not merely upon the Father's ability and willingness to give us for our asking, but on the fact that He *knows how* to give *good gifts* to them that ask Him. Even earthly fathers do this for their children. The point of the illustration of the loaf and the stone, of the fish and the serpent, lies in the similarity of these things. The son may mistake the stone for a loaf, and ask his father for it, thinking to appease his hunger with it: will the father then give him—not what he thinks he wants, but what he *really* desires? He will not give him a stone that looks like a loaf—yea, he may even give him a loaf, which, at first sight, might look to him like a stone—but it will be nothing less than good satisfying bread. "If ye then, being evil (for there is none good save One) know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him? How much more? By so much more as He is better than the best father that ever lived on earth.

4. Immediately follows in verse 12, what we call "The Golden Rule." Some have wondered why that was given in conjunction with this teaching on prayer, and they could see no connection. But there is indeed a connection. The blessings which God freely bestows upon His children—are they to be used up in self-satisfaction and for selfish enjoyment? Nay—if that were our aim, then, as James told us, such prayers would have to go unanswered. (Jas. 4:3.) The "good gifts of God" must issue in blessing to our fellow-men. He puts no restrictions on the good gifts which He will bestow; but they were given to enable us to live a new, a different, a Christ-like life. Many talk about the golden rule, as the true standard for human conduct. Few follow it. None *can* follow it in its high and true sense, but those who have first been blest—namely the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, upon whom He has bestowed His Spirit, and who have free access to His treasures for constant power and blessing. For the Golden Rule is summed up in one word—Love. "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19.) His love to us is reflected back to Him; and from us out to our fellowmen. "*All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets.*" For "love is the fulfilment of the law" (Romans 13:10). It does all that the law requires—and that "not in the oldness of the

letter but in the newness of the Spirit." And the Spirit is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

"Love has a hem to its garment

That trails in the very dust:

It can reach the stains in the streets and lanes,

And because it can, it must.

It dares not abide on the mountain—

It must come down to the vale,

For it cannot find its fulness of mind

Till it falls on the lives that fail."

And can *I* have such love as that? Well—do you *want* it? Then—"Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Prayer for Laborers in God's Harvest

Four times, at least, on different occasions, we read that our Lord was "moved with compassion." One of these instances is the background of His third lesson on Prayer. (Matt. 9:35-38.)

It was when He looked over the great throng that had followed Him from place to place (Matt. 4:25) that His soul was filled with a great compassion for them. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," says the wise man of old. But here was One who knew the bitterness of each and all, and how they were "distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd." The piteous multitude cried to Him with a mute appeal. They were lost, aimless, hopeless, as no less are the sinful masses of today. Yet there was a possibility for them. To His eyes the multitude appeared as a great harvest-field, which could and should be reaped for God. (Comp. John 4:35.) It was *God's* harvest field; and the gathered sheaves would be His.

Now here comes the astounding thing: these disciples were to pray and ask Him to whom the harvest belonged, to send forth laborers into His harvest! "The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest." Who ever heard of such a thing? Does the farmer whose fields of ripened grain are ready for the cutting, need to have somebody petition him to send men to reap his harvest? Is he not of himself ready and eager to see to it? Does he have to be urged by his friends and neighbors to gather in his grain? Certainly not. But here we learn something of God's ways, and the mystery of prayer. To the man of the world, the "natural man" of 1 Cor. 2:14, it does not make sense. They may have heard that "God so loved the world," and that He "would have all men to be saved," and that He is "not willing that any should perish." Would it not follow then that He would do all that can be done to save them? Why then pray for anything like that? Thus, for example, James M. Barrie, in his story of "The Little Minister"—when the little minister prayed for a poor, sick woman—remarks that God didn't need little ministers to tell Him what to do for a poor woman. But Barrie was wrong: God *does* need to be asked and requested for the needed help. It is the thing that many do not understand. "If you ask for something that is not according to God's will, they say, 'you may pray for ever, and you won't get it; and if anything is His will He will go ahead and do it anyhow, and you don't need to beg Him to do it.'" Thus reasons man. But the word of God shows that there are things—many things—that God would do, and can do, in answer to prayer, which He could not righteously and wisely do otherwise. In other words, that prayer really effects something.

The Father in heaven has ordained that it be so. He will not work independently of us—He must have our co-operation—at least to this extent that we shall make our appeal to Him, pray, beseech, intercede, ask, and “make our request known unto God.” (Phil. 4:6.) “But does He not know anyway?”—a puzzled one may object. Yes: we have already learned in a former lesson that “your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask him” (Matt. 6:8). Nevertheless we must ask. Our prayer is an essential link. “Ask and it shall be given unto you...and everyone that asketh receiveth.” It is also true that God’s response may exceed our asking, and that He is able to do for His praying child exceeding abundantly above all he may ask or think. (Eph. 3:20.)

This truly opens up a wide field of privilege—and responsibility. For if it is thus with prayer, and if we fail to pray—do we not hinder God in the good that He would do, and hold back the blessing which not only we, but our friends, neighbors, our nation and country, yea, and the nations of the whole world need and should and could have? (1 Tim. 2:1-4.)

But now let us get back to our lesson. Here then is God’s great harvest-field. But how few are the laborers! Everywhere, from every mission-field, comes the same lament: how great is the opportunity, how great is the need, how few the helpers and workers! What should we do in view of this heart-breaking situation? God says, *Pray*. That is first, and must come first. We are apt to overlook that first thing. When by some inspiring missionary-talk or by some stirring report from foreign fields the zeal for missions springs up in our hearts, probably the first thing we think of is to send money. That seems like doing something—and really it is important in its place. Then perhaps we look around for someone who will go—or we hear of one who is minded to go, and we want to get behind that and help push it through. Or, to do something big we want to put on a drive to raise a million dollars to send the gospel overseas; or we plan a great campaign and regiment a squadron of young folk, enthusiastic and adventuresome, to go and invade this or that great missionary field. Or it may even be that one of us is seized with a desire to go himself, and tells the church of his intention, and perhaps makes a tour of the churches to stir up interest. Anything, everything—things good and laudable, or measures that are more or less questionable—only so we get things going and the gospel is sent over to the heathen. And all the while the first and chiefest matter, on which all else depends, is overlooked, or barely noticed.

The first thing to do is to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest. For He alone can do it. Although the missionary obligation rests upon every member of the church, all can not and must not go. The Lord has set members in the Body as it pleased Him; and not all are evangelists or teachers or pastors

or missionaries. Therefore pray—and in answer to true prayer laborers will be raised up for the harvest; and such of His servants as should go, will go. Moreover the Lord of the harvest will see to their support—for if He has raised them up He will sustain them, not only physically, but spiritually, with comfort and boldness and power, that they may bear fruit and that their fruit may abide. And fear not, He will do it.

The harvest is plenteous, the laborers are few. What shall be done? God needs men. For how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? Pray therefore—and God is able of the very stones, as it were, to raise up laborers after His own mind to go forth into His harvest-field to gather precious souls for Jesus. And then give freely and some more, and again, and all along. For this is supernatural work. God's reapers must invade Satan's domain, and they will feel the sharpness of the conflict with the principalities and powers, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. But they will also be able to say, "Thanks be unto God who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh known through us the savor of his knowledge in every place."

In the end, when the Lord comes, those who tarried with the baggage and those who went down to the battle; those who sowed and those who reaped; those who stayed at home and prayed and sacrificed and those who went forth to declare the good tidings among those who had never heard—all who in whatever way co-operated with Him in His great work—all of His true servants will rejoice together in His presence; and the recompense of their work of faith and labor of love will be surpassingly sweet.

In nothing is the saying truer, "Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain that build it," than in the work of missions. Neither money, nor zeal and enterprise, nor ability, wisdom, management, organization, nor anything else man can furnish will accomplish that work. Human energy and genius can put a human project through, but not so with the work of missions. It is a Divine work, and the "Lo, I am with you" is an absolute, indispensable factor in it—for the work of the missionary is a spiritual warfare. It is a positive and determined invasion of the power of darkness, the domain of Satan. In this effort you encounter the principalities and powers in their own usurped realm. In no other effort are we so constantly and utterly dependent on God. In saying this I am not denying the value or necessity of man's labor. In any case the man must do the building. Yet the fact is that "Except Jehovah build the house" all man's work is vain.

Take it at its very beginning: only the Lord of the harvest can send forth laborers into His harvest and he must be interceded with to do so. It is His work through us. It is our work, but only as He does it through us. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." What therefore? shall we go? or send? or give? Nay—"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may send forth laborers into the harvest." Note how He reserves to Himself all rights and authority. He is the Lord of the harvest. The field is His, the harvest is His, the laborers are His and are to be sent forth by Him. Yet, note too how He will do nothing without us. When we want it from the heart, when we are that much in earnest, and approach Him with true petition, He will send forth laborers into His harvest. What an arrangement this is in which God makes Himself dependent on us—our faith, our prayer—for the accomplishment of His own work which His heart yearns to see done; the while He makes us utterly dependent on Him for the very beginning, prosecution, and final success of it! We cannot even pick and send a laborer; and God will not send one till we ask. No work binds men and God into closer partnership than the work of missions—which explains the strong reflex power of such a work upon the spiritual condition of those who faithfully do it.

"Pray ye the Lord of the harvest!" For He alone knows who is fitted to go on so great an errand, and he alone can fit them and send them. It is a mistake to say that all who can go should go. Many whose circumstances would permit them to go, lack important qualifications, spiritually and otherwise. God no more wanted all to go to the foreign field than he wanted all to be apostles or teachers or prophets. God still sets members in the body as it pleases Him. Just as He forms beforehand the wings of the butterfly in the chrysalis for the day and the hour when the shell shall burst and the new creature that comes forth must make its way through the air, so He has under peculiar preparation servants for this and that work—perhaps most especially for this greatest of all works. Them He moulds and fashions and endows, and providentially trains and develops; them He stirs up in ways of His own, and lays on them the burden and urgency of the work, and sets an open door before them; yea and them He supports and sustains. And these things He does in answer to prayer. Let the people of God omit this vital touch, and though they may elect and select men and educate and send them and pay them, the works will never measure up to God's design. It falls short of the real thing. And let men and women go, on what motive I know not (and perhaps they themselves know not)—though they accomplish much good, a most essential thing will be lacking in their mission. But when earnest children of God cry to Him concerning this matter, there will be men and women fitted by Him who will offer themselves willingly; and there will also be means and ways found to send them forth, and God's guidance to the proper field at

the proper time, and a great will on all hands to sacrifice and to suffer until the glorious work be done.

The Power of United Prayer

In Matthew's gospel there are yet several other precious teachings concerning prayer. One of these comes in connection with directions as to the church's united and concerted action in matters of discipline. The Lord adds to that a general word, applicable always, everywhere, for the encouragement of His own. "Again I say unto you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19, 20).

A deep saying, and full of meaning! Private prayer has its own place and value, and nothing can take the place of it (Matt. 6:6). But a petition made by two or more people jointly has a peculiar force of its own. As in the O. T. promise—"One of you shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight"—so here, as to prayer, the effectiveness of petition is intensified where two or three join in together. "If two of you shall agree," He says. The Greek word is *sumphoneo*, "symphonize": as if to say, when two or three together join in a symphony of petition unto God, without jarring note of discord. It is more than mere passive agreement between those who pray. The two or three are to pray in unison of heart, each with the same earnestness of desire as the others. Such prayer must be and will be answered. It needs not be said that the conditions which always attach to prayer, are implied here also; but these limitations are not meant to cast doubt on the efficacy of prayer. The conditions of effective prayer are directive and constructive, not destructive; and no prayer of faith is ever lost.

But these who thus pray in concert must be of His own; and, it is assumed, of course, that they are "on praying terms with God." They are gathered together, two, or three, or more, *in His name*—that is as His people, representing Him before God. The phrase is not merely "in His name," but, literally, "unto His name"—as if they had gathered around His Name. This can only mean that their recognition of His Name—their faith in who and what He is—is what drew them together to pray. The sure efficacy of such prayer is due to the fact that on such an occasion, in such an assembly, the Lord Jesus Christ is present; "there am I in the midst of them. Hardly would it be a common, casual request that would so draw them together unto the Name of the Lord Jesus; but it would be when hearts greatly burdened and troubled, or otherwise deeply concerned, as for the condition of the church, or the need of the world around them, or some personal distress and emergency, that they would be so drawn together to unite in fervent supplication. Such prayer must and will have its answer, saith the Lord.

Another teaching is contained in one sentence, short, but how meaningful! It was in Gethsemane. The Lord Jesus had brought three of His disciples nearer than the rest; and to them He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; abide ye here and watch with me." "And he went forward a little, and fell on his face and prayed....And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour? *Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*'" (Matt. 26:38-41). As recorded in Luke (22:46) "Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

Once before, in the Lord's Prayer, had Jesus taught His disciples that by prayer they might be kept, not only from sin itself, but from the temptation to sin—"Lead us not into temptation." And that were an immeasurable boon and advantage. For none of us can count on our ability to withstand temptation; and though it must sometime be faced it is better far, when so it can be, that we be not tempted. Hence this prayer. In answer to such petition, we can escape many a trial and test.

Now this was the great crisis—the hour of the Evil one and the power of darkness (Luke 22:53b). Satan had desired to have them that he might sift them as wheat (Luke 22:31). They might yet escape the brunt of the great temptation by prayer. But a strange drowsiness (was it only natural?) came over them, and the Lord who wanted them to watch with Him found them sleeping. "Prayer is better than sleep," says even the Muezzin's call. And there is a time when all hinges upon timely prayer, and when sleep is fatal. Thus the apostle Paul admonishes Christians, in order that they might be able to stand "in the evil day" to watch unto prayer (Eph. 6:13, 18). The hour of Gethsemane was a time of supreme spiritual peril, and prayer was just then the paramount necessity. But the disciples slept. They might have avoided the force of the great test that was coming, had they prayed. They were indeed devoted and loyal to the Lord Jesus, but the flesh was weak, as in all of us it is. Prayer takes hold on the power of God; only in the power of His might can we stand and prevail. The second time the Lord returned to them, and found them sleeping; and when He came the third time He said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Arise, let us be going: behold he is at hand that betrayeth me." Which meant, "It is too late now—you may as well sleep on. See, already yonder comes the traitor with his horde." Prayer-time was past. Prayer must be made in its time. Men may sleep away their golden hour, and often do. Many do not pray till it is too late. And, oh what sorrow and heartbreak they might have been spared! Even if by the mercy of God there be forgiveness and restoration, how much better to prevent a fall than to have the broken bones healed afterward!

Before we leave the gospel of Matthew we must note one short sentence found in the Lord's great prophetic discourse, the "Olivet Sermon" (Matt. 24:25). It is not the prophetic import of Christ's sermon that concerns us here, but a thing He said incidentally about prayer—a word so casually dropped as to seem only an incidental remark, and yet of far-reaching and tremendous significance. Here it is:

"And pray that your flight be not in the winter, nor on a sabbath."

It is difficult to explain this saying without going into the whole prophetic context, which here we cannot do. Sufficient it is to note that the Lord is here warning His disciples of a terrific danger, and that He points out a special event which must be the signal to them for instant flight. In a related passage this event is the encirclement of Jerusalem by a hostile army. (Luke 21:20, 21.) Whatever the occasion, the flight must be immediate and swift, if they were to escape the threatening disaster. If their flight were in the winter it would be hindered by weather and floods, or even by snow and ice. If it were on a sabbath, the gates would be shut, and with no means of transportation available. Without inquiring further now as to when or how such a situation would arise, let us notice just this one point: In answer to the disciples' prayer the time and season of the impending catastrophe can be changed. Their prayer would alter the decisions of the enemy, change his plan and strategy and the time of his action, and the movement of the hostile army. We are almost tempted to ask, Does the Lord really mean that? Is it possible, is it thinkable, that the prayers of a few poor people could have such a vast result? Evidently so. Here then we learn something of the power and possibilities of the Christian's prayer. He, to whom His children pray, holds the hearts of kings in His hand. (Prov. 21:1.) In answer to the petition of His people the history of the world may be changed; wars and conflicts deferred; disasters avoided; and much suffering and distress spared to them, and, incidentally, to their fellow-men, because of their prayers. Hence also the apostle writes, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior...(1 Tim. 2:1-3).

The present hour is full of grave forebodings and Christians have indeed great reason so to pray now.

In Mark's Gospel

The instances of Christ's own personal praying we mean to take up later in a special study; but one instance given us in Mark is so much a direct lesson on prayer that we must notice it here. It is found in Mark 1:35.

"And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed." Here let us note (1) the circumstances; (2) the time and occasion; and (3) the place of this praying.

1. It had been a full and busy day at Capernaum. At the synagogue (for it was the sabbath) He had taught and cast out an evil spirit from one who was possessed. Then, with James and John, He went into the house of Simon Peter and Andrew. There He healed Simon's wife's mother who lay sick of a fever. The word of this healing power spread over the countryside, and at even, when the sun was set, they brought to him all who were sick and all the demons from all the neighborhood. "And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick" (Matthew tells us that He healed them all, Matt. 8:16) "and cast out many demons." How deep into the night His labor continued and how worn and exhausted He was when finally He found a little rest, we are not told; but we can easily surmise.

2. But early in the morning, "a great while before day" He rose up and went out to pray. Clearly prayer meant more to Him than physical rest, however much the rest was needed. And why was prayer urgent at that particular time? Prayer is always urgent, if we but knew it. But sometimes there are special reasons.

It was the rise of the first wave of popularity. "All are seeking thee," said Simon and the rest of the disciples. No doubt *they* were pleased and thrilled. But to the Lord Jesus that was an urge to prayer. On another occasion, when "great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed of their infirmities," it is written that "he withdrew himself in the deserts and prayed." (Luke 5:15, 16.) How great is the danger of popularity to the church, to the preacher, to every Christian! When a good, humble servant of the Lord sees the success of his efforts, and when men and women are pressing around him, thanking him, praising him, admiring him; influential and powerful friends are rallying to his support; newspapers are taking note of him and giving him high place and commendation—unless the grace of God powerfully upholds him, that man is as good as done for. The siren voice of popular acclaim will inevitably alienate his heart from undivided loyalty to his Master. You say that Jesus was in no such danger? But was He not tempted in all things

even as we are? It was but the renewal, in another form, of Satan's suggestion, "All these kingdoms will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." If only God's servants today could recognize their peril in popularity and flee for refuge, wisdom, and strength to the throne of grace before they are enmeshed in the blandishments of the world's favor. But the Lord Jesus "departed into a desert place and there prayed." Then He said to His disciples, "Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth." (Mark 1:36-39.) This was the Divine guidance that came through humble prayer.

Aside from the special occasion of this prayer, we must note the time when He so prayed. It was "in the morning, a great while before day." That is a good time to pray! The mind is fresh. The work of the day is before us, with all that may come with it. And indeed we know not what a day may bring forth. We need guidance for the coming day and protection; wisdom also and strength to stand. In the morning it is well to say, "Lord, keep thou the door of my lips"; and "keep thou my feet." "O Jehovah, in the morning shalt thou hear my voice; in the morning will I order my prayer unto thee, and will keep watch." And "in the morning shall my prayer come before thee." (Ps. 5:3; 88:13.) Were not these the words of the psalmist prophetic of the prayer-life of the Lord Jesus Christ?

3. Now, as for *the place* where Jesus prayed. It was in a desert place, where He could be alone with God. To His disciples He had said, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee" (Matt. 6:6). But He Himself had no chamber to which to retire, nor any door that He could shut. So He sought the wilderness where He might commune in solitude with His Father. "I pray all day long," say many good folk; "I pray when I am washing the dishes, when I clean the floors, when I attend my children," says a burdened mother; and "I pray at my work when I am busy in the store," says a working man. Now that is good, and only good. We should do that by all means. As a devout poet expressed it,

"We need not wait for the longed for peace

Till our journey is o'er and our labors cease;

We can rest in the midst of our busiest day

If the Master meets us on the way."

Very true; and certainly our Lord knew how to do that. But He found it needful to get away from the multitudes, and from His disciples, to be alone with God. And do we not need that also? Can we not find a few moments, if we have not more time, when and where in privacy we can pour out our hearts before God? Let us

make time, and seek the opportunity for private, secret prayer.
It will pay us richly. Yea, and we *need* it!

Two Teachings in Mark

Mark records but little of Christ's oral teaching; but we find two wonderful passages in which the Lord Jesus speaks on the theme of Prayer.

The first was called forth by the failure of the disciples to heal the demoniac boy. The whole account is given in Mark 9:14-27. The father had brought the demon-possessed boy to the nine apostles (while the Lord, with the other three, was in the mount of the transfiguration); and he appealed to the disciples "that they should cast it out: *and they were not able.*" This in spite of the fact that the Lord had shortly before given them "power and authority over all demons." (Luke 9:1.) Yet they failed. Why? We shall see.

When Jesus came down and was told of this failure, He said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?" And He cast out the demon with a word. Afterward the disciples came to Him privately and said, "Why could not we cast it out?" (Matt. 17:19.) The Lord answered, "This kind can come out by nothing save by prayer."* To get the full import of this saying it must be taken in connection with another word, spoken at the same time, and recorded in Matthew. Why could they not cast out this demon? In Matthew Jesus says, "Because of your little faith." (Matt. 17:20.) In Mark it is, "This kind can come out by nothing save by prayer." There is then a connection, an interrelation, between faith and prayer. Faith makes prayer effective (Jas. 1:6). On the other hand, by prayer faith is strengthened. If they had had faith enough they could have cast out the demon; but even then *only by prayer.*

Here we learn some new things. Even though the Lord had committed power to His disciples, they could not use it because of their lack of faith; and their lack of faith was in turn due to lack of prayer; as, no doubt, their lack of prayer was due to lack of faith. That explains much of the powerlessness of the church and of individual Christians today.

This was a special case—specially difficult. That much is implied in the Lord's word: "*This kind* can come out by nothing save by prayer." There is a distinction between demons. Some are worse than others (Luke 11:26). This demon was exceeding vicious and defiant (Mark 9:20, 26). Only by special prayer could such a demon be cast out. No case was beyond the Lord's power. Nor was this case

*"And fasting" is added in the King James Version. These two words are not fully attested by the manuscripts. Nevertheless, fasting, though never commanded in the N. T., is always in order, especially in connection with earnest and intense prayer.

even beyond the power of the disciples—for had He not given them power and authority over *all* demons? But it required faith. “Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, ‘Remove hence to yonder place’; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20). But such faith comes by prayer—and that is more than bare asking for faith (as in Luke 17:5). In communion with God, as we draw near to His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16) and as in spirit we look upon Him in His sanctuary, to see His power and His glory (Ps. 63:2), our faith grows strong. Thus prayer increases faith; and faith leads on to prayer. Prayer and faith—what power of evil can stand against this?

Again it is Mark who transmits to us another precious word of Christ concerning prayer.

The barren fig tree, full of pretentious leaves, but void of fruit—so emblematic of the professing people of God then (and too often, now), had withered away under the curse of the Son of God. It was His only miracle of judgment, and executed not upon any human being (John 3:17) but upon a tree, for an example and a warning for ever.

The disciples were amazed at this demonstration of the power of Christ’s word, and called His attention to the withered tree. “And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you. Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, ‘Be thou taken up and cast into the sea’; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, *All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*” (Mark 11:22-24.)

Our natural reaction to such a statement and such a promise is one of—shall we call it, unbelieving wonder—as Sarah laughed when she heard the Divine promise of a child. “Can this be true?” We need not—must not—ask that sort of question, when Jesus Christ speaks. “But are there no limitations to this?” Well, some of us preachers, who are so afraid of “fanaticism,” have hedged these promises around with so many if’s and but’s that the Lord might as well not have made them at all. However, there are some limitations. Of course, there must be. One question often asked is whether the mountain’s being cast into the sea is meant to be literal, or a figurative expression. Well, either and both—depending on the circumstances. None of the apostles, not even Christ Himself, ever made a mountain remove. There was never any occasion for such a thing. But if in line with the will and purpose of God, such a thing had needed to be done (as when Joshua asked that the sun stand still) it could and would be. But obviously the meaning of the

"mountain" is some great hindrance and difficulty; as says the prophet: "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." And that "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Zech. 4:6, 7).

The same limitation applies to the wide promise as to prayer here given. It must be according to God's will. (1 John 5:14, 15.) But that is after all no limitation. All that is right and good and truly desirable is included in the will of God. It excludes only what is harmful, evil, unwise, undesirable. (Ps. 84:11.) To pray according to God's will is to pray in faith, according to God's word and promise. That is why He says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7.) These promises are not to be nullified, but believed in and acted upon.

That there is a limitation of these promises in the attitude and status of the one praying we surely understand. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear," said David (Ps. 66:18. See also Isa. 59:1, 2.) And therefore also, attached to this very promise is an admonition of the Lord: "And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive if ye have aught against anyone; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive your trespasses." (Mark 11:25.)

So "prayer can do all things that God can do." "If thou canst do anything," said the father of the demoniac boy to Jesus. "If thou canst?" answered He: "All things are possible to him that believeth." And the man straightway cried out, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief." And so do we feel when we see how great and good is the power of God to usward, and, alas, how little we have realized it, believed it, and acted upon it.

In The Gospel of Luke

In "Luke" there is much reference to the prayer-life of our Lord Jesus, but only a few passages of direct teaching concerning prayer. But the teachings on this theme in Luke's gospel are of very special and peculiar weight and meaning. The first of these is found in Luke 11:1-13. It grew out of a request by His disciples. He was praying at a certain place (Comp. Mark 1:35-37). The disciples stood reverently by till He had finished His prayer; then asked Him to teach them to pray, "even as John also taught his disciples." We must not infer that they never prayed. The devout Jew of that day made much of prayer. Moreover, these disciples had themselves originally been disciples of John, and by that great and good man had been taught to pray—even as they said. But when they witnessed Christ's praying they felt that after all they knew little or nothing as yet about real, true praying. Hence their request: "Lord, teach us to pray." It was a good petition, for them and for us, and the Lord would not turn it down. It implied the honest confession that, for whatever fault or reason, they knew not how to pray, and needed Christ's teaching. None could pray like Him; none could teach like Him. When we come to Him with pretense of any sort He cannot help us; but when we come empty-handed and make our appeal on the ground of our simple need, He gives liberally and upbraideth not.

In answer to their request, the Lord gave them three lessons on prayer. First of all, again, the "Lord's Prayer"; but (as the R. V. shows) here in an abbreviated form:

"When ye pray, say, Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we ourselves forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation."

Here after the recognition of God—His Name, His Kingdom—the rest of the prayer concerns ourselves: the daily bread, forgiveness, protection from temptation. This was lesson number one.

Now comes lesson two: prayer for others. The first prayer is based on our filial relationship to God—a child of God speaking to his Father. The second lesson takes us up a step higher: here it is friend communing with friend. But how could this be said to be prayer on a higher plane? The relationship of child to the Father is, of course, fundamental. But children and parents are not always and necessarily friends. To be sure they should be. But friendship means fellowship, mutual understanding, co-operation. Friends work together for one aim, with one soul, hand in hand. Now even the children of God, even when they have fellowship with Him in the light,

may yet need to learn the full lesson of fellowship. "Ye are my friends," said the Lord Jesus, "if ye do whatsoever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant knoweth not what his lord doeth"—does not enter into his lord's plan, nor does his master take him into his confidence and tell him all his business—"but I have called you friends; for all things I have heard from my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:14, 15).

Now this second lesson is based upon friendship. In the parable which conveys this, three friends appear. There is first the middle friend—that is the disciple. He has a poor friend out in the world; and on the other side he has a rich Friend, who, in the parable, represents God. Now to this middle friend comes a late and unexpected visitor, a friend of his, at midnight, from a journey, tired, footsore, and hungry. I must feed him. But, alas, I have nothing to set before him. What shall I do? Ah, I have a friend who has everything. To his house he goes to rouse him up at the midnight hour (a thing one would not dare to do, unless it be indeed a friend) to beg the loan of three loaves. The wealthy friend seems disinclined at first, and does not want to be bothered. But the friend who has come to his rich friend for help is not to be put off; he keeps on knocking and asking, at the risk of straining that friendship—until at last he gets up and gives him the bread he wants. The rest—how he joyfully returns to his home, where his hungry friend is waiting, and sets the food before him—we can supply for ourselves.

What does it mean? Well—this is nothing else than a picture of our cooperation with God in the great work of saving and blessing men. The weary hungry friend who comes to me for help—he is my unsaved brother, my unsaved neighbor. He may not come to me with a request for help—few will do that; but there is the mute appeal of his lost condition. What can I do for him? How often have we felt empty and perplexed in the face of this need! But wait—I have one recourse—and really, in spite of all appearance of unwillingness, I know quite well that I am working in line with His interests when I come to Him for help. His reluctance in the parable only illustrates the fact that I may not always get all I want at the first simple asking. But I will. Only let me persist—He must, He will, rise up and give me all I need. Even a human friend—even if he did not do it for friendship's sake, will, if I keep on, grant me my request, if only to get rid of me. How much more shall the Father in heaven who desires my sinner-friend's help far more than I do rise up to grant my request?

Now my wayfaring friend could not himself have gone to my rich friend's house with such a request. He is a stranger to him, and has no access to him at all. But *I* can go to Him, because He is my great rich Friend, and I am His friend. Thus in my near and dear relationship to my Father in heaven, I have become the living link between

Him and the souls He longs to save and bless. The second lesson therefore deals with "*intercessory prayer*."

For the third lesson the Lord falls back on the filial relationship. He repeats again words He had spoken on a former occasion, but with a notable variation.

"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:9-13.)

In the light of what went before, this must mean "Ask—and keep on asking till you receive"; "Seek, and keep on seeking till you find"; and "Knock and continue knocking till the door is opened." It means not only prayer, but persevering prayer. The answer is sure. You are not running uncertainly, nor fighting as one that beateth the air. Your Father knows what you want and need, and His answer will be a good answer. In my blindness I might even ask for a stone, thinking it a loaf; or for a serpent, mistaking it for a fish; or a scorpion, which when curled up resembles an egg; but if even an earthly father knows how to give the right gifts to his children, shall not your Father in heaven know how to answer your heart's real desire with "good things"?

No, not merely "good things." Our Lord now goes beyond the promise which He gave in Matt. 7:11. Here He says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"—as if all other "good things" were summed up in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This has provoked some controversy. Many think that such a prayer would be out of place now. The Holy Spirit, they say, came once for all on Pentecost. All who believe in Christ, all who obey the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Acts 2:38, 5:32) receive the Spirit. If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. The matter seems conclusive: we need no longer ask for the Holy Spirit now. He is here. He abideth in you. Is it not enough? That may seem conclusive, but there is something more to be said. The fact that the Christian has the Spirit (else he would not be a Christian) does not preclude a further reception of the Spirit. Those who were "filled" on the day of Pentecost, were filled again when a new crisis arose (Acts 4:31). Also the fact that some brethren were specially designated as being men "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts

6:3, 5; 11:24) implies that not all Christians could be so spoken of. Hence also the exhortation in Eph. 4:8—"Be not drunken with wine ...but be ye filled with the Spirit." "Christ in you" is the common possession of all Christians who are "in the faith," and not "reprobate" (2 Cor. 13:5); yet Paul prays for the Ephesian brethren that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). The gift of the Spirit is once and for all; it is also a continuous gift (1 Thess. 4:8). The sacrifice of Christ also was once for all, never to be repeated; for "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). But we go back to that cross again and again for cleansing and forgiveness.

In view of this, and with this fundamental understanding, there is no reason why a child of God may not pray for the Holy Spirit today.

And when we are filled with the Spirit—if the Holy Spirit has His place and power in our hearts, we shall have something to set before our poor friend who comes to us in his dark midnight hour. For "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control."

In Luke 18, He has more teachings for His disciples. There may come times (He implied) when prayer seems vain—when day after day, or even year after year, our requests are presented before God, and no answer comes. At such a time, if there should be such a time, the important thing is to continue undaunted in prayer and not to give up.

"And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke 18:1.)

The parable is of a judge "who feared not God, and regarded not man." To him a poor, helpless widow, who was wronged by some adversary comes day after day seeking judgment against her oppressor. For a while the judge is utterly indifferent and unwilling. Time after time he sends her away, no doubt swearing and declaring that he will have nothing to do with her case. But every time she comes back to him again with her plea. This finally gets on his nerves; and though he fears not God nor regards man, he says within himself, "because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming."

And what is the application? That God is like this judge, caring nothing for us and our troubles, and before He will do anything will have to be worn down by the persistence of our petitions? Far from it! The illustration is by contrast. "Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge *his elect*, that cry to him day and night, and yet he is longsuffering over them?" If a callous, hard-hearted judge will finally yield to the unremitting petition of a

widow that is nothing to him—how much more will the loving Father in heaven answer the prayer of His own people who cry to Him day and night? No, their prayers were not unheard. They avail much in their working, though for the time their effect be not seen. At the right time "He will avenge them speedily."

This lesson on prayer is really a part of the Lord's prophetic teaching in Luke 17:20-37. The Pharisees had asked Him "when the kingdom of God cometh." After answering them in short fashion, the Lord addressed His disciples. He told them of troublous days to come when they would desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and should look in vain. He foretold the conditions that would prevail in the world prior to His appearing—that it would be as it was in the days of Noah, and in the days of Lot, and warned His disciples unto instant readiness when that day should come. Then, without a break, He gives them this parable, "to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." Here is a clear intimation to them that the coming of the Lord may be much later than they might expect. How much later He did not say, and His hearers would hardly think beyond their own lifetime. But, as always, the Lord left the time indefinite, so that His own might always be looking for Him, expecting Him; and praying, like John in Patmos (Rev. 22:20), "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

In the meanwhile, His people, like the poor widow, hard beset by the evil adversary, look for Him, and cry to Him for help. In long, anxious nights of persecution, in wars and famines and pestilence, in the troubles and trials, physical and spiritual, with which Satan afflicted them—how did they long for Him and His return! "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence...to make thy name known to thy adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!" (Isa. 64:1, 2.) And would their prayers hasten that day? God works all things through the prayers of His people. For many centuries have His saints, times innumerable, sent up their petition, as the Lord had taught them to pray: "Thy kingdom come." Is not the kingdom come? Oh yes—His redeemed ones are in His kingdom now (Col. 1:13). But their citizenship is in heaven; while on the earth Satan is still the prince of the world and its god, and he deceives the nations, and holds sway over the mass of mankind. And so will it be till after the seventh trumpet is sounded and the great announcement is heard, "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." (Rev. 11:15.)

"Our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned,

By the many still neglected, and by the few enthroned.

But soon He'll come in glory, the hour is drawing nigh,

For the crowning day is coming by and by.

"O the crowning-day is coming, is coming by and by,
When the Lord shall come in power and glory from on high.
O the wondrous sight shall gladden each watchful,
waiting eye,

For the crowning-day is coming by and by."

Will the prayers of God's people count unto that end? Surely they will. When in the great drama of the end the seventh seal is opened, the prayers of the saints, long held in reserve, come in for remembrance (Rev. 8:1-4).

So let the poor widow unweariedly make her plea; her God has heard her. When the answer comes—we know not how soon it may be—it will come speedily.

"Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, will he find faith on the earth?" Will there still be those, who hoping and trusting, continue stedfastly in prayer? Yes, there will be such; not many perhaps, but some. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive, who are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16, 17.) Until then, He exhorts us, let us continue in prayer and not faint.

It must not be forgotten that the lesson of persevering prayer applies to all prayer. It is not always, nor often, that answer is so long delayed; often the answer comes with surprising swiftness, but if it tarry long, let us continue to pray and not faint. If it is right to want a thing, it must be right to ask for it; and so long as it is right to pray for a thing, it is right to continue asking until the answer comes.

Immediately after the parable of the Unjust Judge by which He taught the value of persistence in prayer, the Lord added yet another lesson. This was spoken to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought"—the sort of religionists of which the Pharisees were outstanding examples in Christ's time, but which are not altogether rare in our days. Pride of any sort bars our access to God. There are three chief sorts of pride: social pride, intellectual pride, spiritual pride; and the ugliest of these is the spiritual. The Lord had never any need to resort to fiction for His parables; and in this case also He simply portrayed what happened, was happening, or might happen, any day. "Two men

went up to the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, the other a publican." The Pharisee "stood" and "prayed thus with himself" (as though his prayer had stopped there). And here is what he said:

"God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get."

Now, indeed, it is something to be thankful to God for, if we have been kept from gross transgressions, and if we have not fallen into depths of sin and wickedness. To whatever circumstances this be due—whether to early training, godly parents, favorable environment, faithful, loving friends, or good teaching—it was of God's mercy. For all of us have the seeds of crime in our fleshly nature which, under certain circumstances, would break forth in deeds of wickedness. Like the psalmist, we have, every one, cause to thank God that He has "delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." (Ps.116:8.) But it was not in such a humble spirit of thankfulness that the Pharisee prayed—nay, he was praising himself and commending himself, and setting himself up as some superior specimen of humanity, as one who was well worthy of God's notice and favor. Such is the "old Adam" when he becomes "good." A little boy coming in from school said, "Just think, mother, I am the best boy in school." "Well, good," said mother—"did the teacher tell you that?" "No," answered sonny, "I noticed it myself."

But the worst of it was the Pharisee's contempt for the publican. It is ever the mark of the proud self-righteous that they compare themselves favorably with others, and look with disdain upon those who do not come up to their standards of excellence. And in that Pharisee's heart there was no concern, no pity, no compassion, no regard for such people as "this publican." Plainly the Pharisee did not know himself nor did he know God. Is it possible that there may be some modern "church-people" who are like that in their attitude toward the sinful and erring?

Not like the Pharisee who stationed himself boldly at the front—the publican in deep sense of unworthiness, stood afar off, and would not lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner." He had nothing to say for himself, no plea to make, except this plea for God's mercy. Someone has said that there are just two kinds of folk who approach God: there are those who say, "Something in my hand"; and those who say "Nothing in my hand I bring." The publican came near by the lower road.

And what was the Lord's comment on the matter? It was brief and simple: "I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Once more in the gospel of Luke does the Lord Jesus have a word on prayer. It is at the close of His prophetic sermon (Luke 21:5-36). He had foretold and forewarned His disciples of the terrors that should befall the world introductory to His coming in glory—yet making a distinction between His own, and those who are of the world. For, as Paul told Christians in 1 Thess. 5—"God appointed us not unto wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:9) —so here: when these terrible things of His prediction shall *begin* to come to pass (He tells His disciples) "look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke 21:28.) But with this reassurance he adds a warning:

"But take heed to yourselves, let haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come on *you* suddenly, as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every season, *making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things and to stand before the Son of man.*" (Verses 34-36.)

It is here that prayer counts—"supplication," that is earnest, fervent prayer—and this will avail to their escape out of the calamities and distresses which will come upon the world. The words our Lord used here are very strong and emphatic; literally rendered the concluding words would read thus: "(that ye may) be *stationed in front of the Son of man.*" We could hardly fail to connect that with the precious promise of 1 Thess. 4:16, 17, and the warning, yet encouraging, words that follow after it, in 1 Thess. 5:1-10. These who are "caught up" do indeed "escape all these things that shall come to pass," and they "shall stand before the Son of man," to behold His face, and to be with Him for ever. And to this end we must watch and pray.

In The Gospel of John

In John's account of Christ's public ministry (John 1-12) we find no explicit teaching on prayer. Not until the evening of the betrayal in the Upper Room where He opened His heart to His disciples in loving farewell talks (John 14-16), does he begin to speak to them on this great theme. The first reference is John 14:13, 14. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name that will I do."

This promise, as it stands, is unlimited: "whatsoever," and "anything" they may ask for shall be done for them—He will Himself do it. But the limitation lies in the words "*in my name*," here twice repeated. What does that mean? It can not be merely a pious phrase used in the closing of our prayers. It is bound to mean far more than that. To ask in His Name is to ask in His behalf, on His authority. It is, as it were, the signing of His Name to a check which we draw on the Bank of Heaven, where His infinite wealth (the unsearchable riches of Christ) is deposited, available to our use. Manifestly none may dare sign His Name except he had been given the right and authority to do so, and then only if the check be drawn in the interest of his Lord and of His work. For when we ask in His Name we act representatively for Him, in His place, as identified with Him, as though He Himself were asking, and were Himself, through us, calling for the honoring of His rightful claims, the cashing, as it were, of His own drafts from His own funds. This is what it means to ask in His name.

We may now think that this closes the door on most of us. Who could have the right to so ask "in His name"? And how could we know that what we are asking is in line with His will? Would not this exclude many things that lie heavy on our hearts—things we need, things we desire so deeply, things we long and wish for? May we ask for personal blessings, our homes, our friends, our loved ones, our plans and hopes? Yes, of course we may, but could such prayers be presented *in His name*, and with assurance of His certain answer? Thus our timid hearts might find—not an open door, but rather a barrier in those qualifying words, "*in my name*." But the Lord did not mean to debar any of us, not even the humblest and least and neediest, from this promise; nor did He mean to refuse us any good thing. As in the sweeping promises of Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:1-13—so here, all good is comprehended in His gracious word. For, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32.)

But it is to be noted that in this Upper Room teaching, the Lord has a special point of view. He is about to leave His disciples and return to the Father. Then He would leave in the world to administer His goods; to carry on His work during His absence. It is with special reference to this *work* that this "whatsoever" promise to believing prayer was given. The works that He did while on earth, shall they do also; yea, greater works than these shall they do (John 14:12). The question would at once arise, "How could we do such things?" The word in verses 13 and 14 is the answer. By the "greater works" the Lord did not mean greater miracles than those which He had wrought, but greater effectiveness in the Father's work—as when Peter turned 3000 to the Lord on Pentecost; and after that, everywhere, sinners were converted. But such a work cannot be accomplished by human ability: the power must come from God, and by prayer. Where man's power alone is at work, only human results will follow—as, alas, too often it is seen. But God's work can be done only in the power of God; and it is only by prayer in Jesus' name that this is received.

In perfect harmony with this is our Lord's next reference to prayer in that "Upper Room Discourse." It occurs in the midst of the parable (the allegory, rather) of the Vine and the Branches (John 15). In this wondrous picture, the Lord Jesus sets forth in a few simple words what would take volumes to expound. He sets forth His relation to His disciples; His relation to the Father in this work; the Father's part in it; also His disciples' relationship to Him, and what must be their first concern in regard to the same; and finally, the purpose and object of the whole arrangement. It is a simple and beautiful picture: a great Vine with many branches; God the Father is the Gardener who planted the Vine and tends it. The Vine is the Lord Jesus Christ; the branches, vitally united to the Vine, are His disciples. The Vine does for its branches what any vine is intended to do: it provides life and sap and power for the branches—its own life and power, which it gives out to them constantly. The Vine keeps nothing for itself: all it has flows out to the branches. The branch abides in the Vine, receives its life-fluid and transforms it into *fruit*, which is the great final aim and object of it all. He points also to the consequence of failure in this matter: if the branch fails to bear fruit, and if the branch does not abide in the Vine. This, and much else, is shown forth in this precious picture.

Now the thing to be noticed is the *voluntariness* that runs through the whole scheme. The Gardener acts upon His own will and initiative. The Son gladly and willingly yields Himself to become the Vine. The branches do not spring of themselves as in nature: they are *men*, who have come to Jesus for life and were joined to Him. These do not abide in the Vine automatically, as helplessly grown into it, like the natural branches of natural vines. It is by choice

that they have been accepted, and now it is their one great duty and concern to abide in the Vine. He exhorts them to abide, and warns them of the result of non-abiding. And, again, notably—the fruit does not grow of itself; it is borne of purpose, with patience, in earnest and loving will and effort. Neither does the sap of the Vine run out into the branch of itself; it must be sought and asked for. There is where the teaching on prayer comes in: “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done unto you.*” All that you need for fruitbearing will be supplied to you by the Vine. Yet you must *ask for it*. It is there, provided for you; and if you abide in Him you may have it all in abundance. By His words which are to abide in you, you may know what to ask, and how to ask. Upon these two conditions, and on your asking depends your power to bear fruit. Granting that you are “in Christ,” (for apart from Him you can do nothing) and that you are abiding in Him, your fruitbearing still depends on your *asking*; but if you abide in Him and His words abide in you, your petition meets with the fullest response: “Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (See also v. 16.)

UNANSWERED PRAYER

There is comfort and assurance to those who believe God, not in answered prayer only, but in *unanswered* prayer also. To illustrate—David prayed for his sick child. For seven days he lay on the ground, fasting and praying. The child died, and David rose up, comforted in the will of God. If he had not prayed, he would never have known but that the child might have been spared had he appealed to God. He *did* appeal, and when the little one died, he then knew that it died by the will of God. And, knowing God as he did, he could be satisfied; for His will is ever good, loving, true and kind. So with us. We pray earnestly for something. If it is denied, should we be less thankful? For we need be no less assured that His loving hand is directing our way. We have prayed in faith, so let us be assured that God has heard. No prayer of faith can ever be lost. If He has refused the immediate good we asked for, it was because a better thing is in store for us. Do not fail to trust Him.

Christ's Prayer-Life

We have followed our Lord's teaching on Prayer as given us in the four gospels. Now let us reverently observe Him in His own praying. Is it not strange that He, the Lord, the Son of God, should have to pray? Is it not said that "the Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into his hands"? (John 3:35.) Did He not Himself say, "I and the Father are one"? (John 10:30.) What need was there for Him to pray? The answer lies in Christ's humanity. When He became man, He took a man's place—and that is the place of dependence on God. It behooves man to look to God for everything, and to obtain all things from God by prayer. God's wisdom must guide Him; God's power must enable and sustain Him, and all He needs and desires must come to Him from God in answer to prayer. This place of perfect dependence on God the Lord Jesus took that, in this as in all other respects, He might be made like unto His brethren.

The recorded instances of His praying are many. I have counted about twenty-odd of special references: three in Matthew (one more if we reckon Matt. 27:46); three in Mark (to which may be added Mark 15:34); eleven in Luke, where the *Man Christ Jesus* comes into special view; four in John. And these are only indicative of His praying, not by any means the only instances. So, as a Man, He lived and worked and did all things on a basis of prayer.

Nevertheless, there was something different and distinctive in His praying. He prayed in the hearing of His disciples, but He never prayed *with* them. Though truly and really one of us, He never lined Himself up in joint petition with other men. He never said "Our Father" along with His disciples. His was a special and unapproachable relation to God. As on that resurrection-morn He said to Mary Magdalene, "Go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John 20:17) so He observed this distinction always. We are indeed His brethren, and His Father is our Father also; but we are children of God *through Him*, and He is the Son of God in His own right and nature. Though He identified Himself with us, there must also be that particular aloofness—as in Israel's journeyings there must always be a distance between the ark and the following people.

There is also a difference in the character of His petitions. Men *ask* of God—where the Greek word is "aites," never used of Christ's praying (except by Martha's mistake, John 11:22); but *He* makes request (the Greek word "erotas," used only of Christ's praying, and

in John's gospel only). Nevertheless He prayed fervently, humbly, earnestly. "In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears...and having been heard for his godly fear." (Heb. 5:7.)*

*The passage reads thus: "Who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear...." Some have imagined that Christ was afraid of dying before He could accomplish His sacrifice for us on the cross—an idea which, in the light of John 10:18, is impossible and absurd. But knowing He was going into death, in all the terrible sense that word can hold, He prayed to Him who was able to save Him out of it, and to bring Him back in a glorious resurrection. (See marginal note in the Revised Version on Heb. 5:7.)

WHEN JESUS PRAYED

Looking over the records of Jesus' prayers, let us mark them briefly.

When He came forth from the waters of baptism, He was praying. (Luke 3:21.)

After the busy day (Mark 1:35) "a great while before day"; and when beset by multitudes (Luke 5:16) He prayed.

Once He prayed all night: before choosing the Twelve (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46.)

At Caesarea Philippi (Luke 9:18).

At the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28).

The prayer of thanks in Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21.

"At a certain place" (Luke 11:1).

At the tomb of Lazarus. (John 11:41, 42.)

A "sentence prayer": "Father, glorify thy Name." (Jn. 12:27.)

His intercession for Simon Peter (Luke 22:32).

The great "highpriestly prayer" of John 17.

The threefold prayer of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39-44; Luke 22:41-44).

The prayers on the cross: (1) for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), (2) for Himself (Matt. 26:46; Luke 23:46).

WHY DID HE PRAY?

There is much here to think on. It is evident as a Man the Lord Jesus had nothing, and would have nothing (though He could have had)—nothing of His own: all He had of life and power and wisdom He obtained from the Father. In our adoration of Him as the Son of God from heaven, it is hard for us to realize how utterly He emptied Himself (Phil. 2:7) when He became man. The modernistic “Kenosis” theory (so called from the Greek word meaning “to empty”) according to which Jesus was a fallible man, limited in knowledge and understanding, is thus shown to be false—for because He had utterly emptied Himself, it follows by that very fact that all He said and did was of the Father. He never spoke from Himself (John 7:16, 18; 12:49, 50). He never acted upon His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. All His physical and mental powers were exclusively at the Father’s disposal. There was never anything of selfwill or independent action in all that He “began to do and teach.” He had a will of His own—but it was evermore subject to the Father’s will. (Matt. 26:39.) Of Him it was written, “A body didst thou prepare for me...then said I, Lo I am come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will O God” (Heb. 10:5-7). He was in the Father, and the Father in Him. Therefore He was the Father’s perfect Messenger and Representative. What He did, God did. What He spoke was God’s word. Himself was the Word. He that had seen Him had seen the Father also.

Such a life may seem to us to be unnatural, even abnormal. That is due to the fact that we have never seen or known a truly normal human life. Jesus was the only normal man—therefore (according to God’s intention in man’s creation) He bore the perfect Image and Likeness of God.

All this explains, in so far as we can grasp it, the prayer-life of our Lord. For every crisis, yea, for every step, He pleaded to the Father for wisdom, guidance, and strength. And in this He is the great Example to all God’s children. Christians venture forth into the affairs of life, often without a thought of their need of God’s guidance and protection. We get ourselves into trouble, and then—yes, *then* we call upon Him for help and deliverance. And He, being gracious and merciful, helps us out of our predicaments. (Ps. 107.) But how much better is an ounce of prevention than a pound of cure! How much better is a fence around the top of the precipice than the merciful help of the ambulance at the bottom! Looking back over the past we can see that often it was some trifling accidental thing that changed the course and current of our lives. How many know the bitterness of the word, “It might have

been." A chance meeting, a small circumstance, almost unnoticed at the time, and everything is different from then on.

"The pebble in the streamlet scant,
Has changed the course of many a river
The dew-drop on the tender plant
Has warped the giant oak forever."

How can we afford to go out a single day without prayer? For we know not what is before. "Keep thou the door of my lips"—said the psalmist; and how we need that protection. And "keep thou my feet"; yea, and my heart, for out of it are the issues of life. And "lead us not into temptation," the Savior taught us to pray. The Lord Jesus prayed and prayed. If He needed to do so, do not we? "None could pray like Him; none could teach like Him." "Lord, teach us to pray!"

Christ's Prayers

The communion of the Lord Jesus with His Father in heaven was unclouded and constant. Specific instances of Jesus' praying are mentioned always for some special reason. When face to face with a crisis in His work and career, we see Him praying. Thus, when He came up out of the waters of baptism, as Luke tells us, He came up praying (Luke 3:21). When He must choose His apostles, He spent all the night before in prayer (Luke 6). At Caesarea Philippi, before putting the great decisive question to His disciples (Matt. 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-20) He prayed. On the mount of Transfiguration, where the great demonstration of His power, His coming, His majesty, honor and glory was to take place (2 Peter 1:16-18) He prayed. "He went up into the mountain to pray;" and "as he was praying he was transfigured before them."

CHRIST'S INTERCESSORY PRAYING

"Intercession" is prayer on behalf of others. The outstanding Old Testament example is the intercession of Moses on behalf of guilty Israel who had brought condemnation on themselves by flagrantly breaking the solemn covenant which had been ratified only six weeks before, when they made and worshipped the golden calf. It is evident that but for Moses' prayer on their behalf, the whole nation would have been consumed in the fire of the wrath of God. He said to Moses, "Go get thee down, for thy people that thou broughtest up out of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it....And Jehovah said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiffnecked people; now therefore let me consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation" (Exod. 32:7-10). Moses' quick ear caught the invitation implied in this speech. The fate of the nation, he saw, depended upon him: if he would "let God alone," their doom was sealed. Instantly he set himself not to let Him alone (Ps. 106:23). When judgment is due and there is no intercessor—when no man qualified and acceptable to stand before God could be found to avert that judgment, the judgment must fall (Isa. 63:5,6; Ezek. 22:30,31). Moses had access to God. "Thou hast found favor in my sight, and I know thee by name" (Exod. 33:17). And he pressed more and more for a perfect knowledge of God in order that his intercession might be right and effective (Exod. 33:13,18). How much the intercession of Moses for his people availed, how he not only saved them from destruction, but step by step regained for them all their forfeited privileges will be seen in the narration of Exod. 32-34.

If the intercession of Moses availed wonderfully—how much more should not the intercession of the Son of God avail when He lifts up His prayer before the Father's throne on behalf of His people? "Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25.)

One instance of Christ's intercession for His own while on earth is found in Luke 22:31, 32: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren."

The hour and power of darkness was near at hand. Satan had gone in before God (comp. Job 1, 2) and had asked to have Christ's disciples that he might "sift them as wheat." The demand was not refused. ("Satan has obtained you by asking." R.V. margin.) The Lord Jesus, foreseeing the test and trial that was about to befall His disciples, prayed most particularly for one of them—the key-man, against whom He knew Satan would launch his fiercest attack. For Simon especially did He make supplication: not that he should not be sifted and tried; nor even that he should not fall, but *that his faith fail not*. Simon (he didn't call him Peter this time) did fall badly. Under the ruin of such a failure, a man might easily lose all hope and sink into spiritual paralysis and despair. But there was the intercession of Jesus. Simon rallied. His faith revived, and it was a humbler and much chastened disciple that three times confessed his loyal devotion to the risen Lord, and was reinstated that day on the shore of Lake Tiberias (John 21).

THE "HIGHPRIESTLY PRAYER"

The great prayer of John 17 is chiefly a prayer of intercession. The long-looked-for hour when the Son should be glorified had come. With holy satisfaction, the Lord Jesus reviewed His work. "I have glorified thee on the earth," He said to His Father, "having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Then He prays, not for those only who had come to Him during His earthly ministry, but for all those who should afterward believe on Him through their word (v. 20). He prays not for the world, but for His own (v. 9). And what does He petition for them at the Father's throne? Two things:

1. That they might be kept. "I am no more in the world, and these are in the world.... While I was with them I kept them in thy name, and I guarded them.... But now I come to thee.... I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one." (Vs. 11-15.) These are those whom

Jude calls the "kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1).

2. But the object of that keeping and of all the prayer is *that they might be one*. Four times (five times in the King James Version) this petition recurs. "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are" (v. 11). "That they may all be one; even as thou Father art in me and I in thee; that they also may be (one) in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them that they may be one even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me" (vs. 21-23).

Many questions may arise here. But without attempting to answer them, let us simply observe what the Lord said in His prayer. Let us note,

- (1) Who it is that is to be thus united.
- (2) What kind of unity it is that He speaks of.
- (3) How that unity is to be effected.
- (4) What the effect of it is upon the world.

The answer to item (1) at once eliminates the idea of a federation of religious sects and bodies, although no doubt the world would (and will) hail that as the long desired "Christian Unity." It cannot be a union of all sorts. It is the oneness of those mentioned in vs. 2, 6, 11, 14, 20—the men whom God gave Him out of the world. Only those are included in Christ's prayer.

2. The answer to item (2) shows that the oneness contemplated is a vital and essential oneness—like that of the Father and the Son (vs. 21, 22); Christ in them, the Father in Christ, that "they may be in us" and may be "perfected into one" (vs. 21, 23). This is something more than doctrinal agreement. It evidently means more than having their names on the same church-book.

3. In looking for the answer to item (3) we find that this unity is effected by the Father's keeping of them (v. 11), through Christ's prayer (vs. 20, 21), and by Christ's bestowing His glory upon them (v. 22).

4. Finally—as to the effect on the world—it does not say that the world will behold the unity of Christ's people, and will thereby be convinced of the Divine mission of Jesus Christ. That has never been the case, nor ever can be. The eyes of the world will not behold such a unity. So long as the enemy can sow tares among the wheat, so long as there are erring children of God and children of the devil mingled in the congregation of Christ, some division is

inevitable (1 Cor. 11:19). It was so in the days of the apostles. "They went out from us," says John, "but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). There was division. The world would not be able to judge between the one side and the other. The world would look on and say that "they are divided among themselves." More evil than those who went out, were those who "crept in" (Jude 4)—"false brethren, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:4). And these cause division. Nor does the inspired apostle hold out better prospects for the future. "I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30).

Far from justifying the divided state of Christendom—these passages are given simply to set forth the facts as they have been, are now, and will be, until "the time of the harvest." Never till then will the world see the spectacle of the church united in Christ Jesus, in such a unity as the Lord described and prayed for. But if so, how can the world be brought, by the oneness of Christ's people, to believe that God has sent Him? Not by *seeing their unity*, but by the spiritual force and power of those, be they few or many, who are thus united one with another and with Christ.

In this unity, every faithful child of God can and ought to have a share. Into this we must enter, for this we must work and strive. And whether they be few or many, the Lord knoweth them that are His. Those who maintain this ground in faith and love are in God's sight united, whatever may be the respective pretensions of prestige or number of the sects and parties of Christendom.

"Numbers is no sign that we should right be found,

But few were saved in Noah's ark and many millions drowned."

Two other features of the great prayer we must note, both concerned with the men whom the Father had given Him.

(1) They were chosen and called out of the world—"sanctified"—i.e. separated and set apart from the world unto God. The words which the Father had given the Son, He gave to them (v. 8). The immediate result was that the world hated them because (by the reception of the word) they were set apart from the world: "they are not of the world even as I am not of the world" (v. 14). Yet He prays not that the Father take them out of the world: He has a work for them in the world. "As thou didst send me into the world so sent I them into the world" (v. 18, see also 20:21).

(2) The great work of Jesus toward His disciples was to reveal the Father to them (John 1:18). "I have made known unto them thy Name." That work was not finished, for He goes on to

say, "I will make it known." The outcome of this gracious work would be twofold: (1) that "the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them;" and (2) that "I (may be) in them." (v. 26. Comp Eph. 3:14-19.)

His love for His own is such that the present absence cannot endure forever. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24). The full, final fulfillment of this petition is seen in 1 Thess. 4:14-17.

BEHOVED IT NOT THE SON OF MAN TO PRAY

Because the attitude of prayer is the attitude of humble dependence upon God and a man's acknowledgment of his own emptiness and inability, and represents his coming to God to be supplied out of God's infinite fullness, therefore the attitude of prayer is fit and proper and becoming to *man*. It is in the Gospel of Luke that the *manhood* of our Lord Jesus Christ is most especially emphasized. It is in Luke who occupies himself specially with Christ's mother, the miraculous conception, Christ's birth, his childhood, his natural growth and development; who relates the one incident of His boyhood that is given. In short, Luke treats on His human descent and humanity. The Gospel of Luke is the gospel of the Son of man. It is eminently fit, there, that Luke should also be the one to tell us most of the prayer life of our Lord; for as man ("in the days of his flesh" —Heb. 5:7) it behooved him to walk in constant and humble dependence on the Father, and therefore, to *pray*. He came up praying from the water of baptism. (Luke 5:16.) And as if it were directly the result of that night's earnest communion with God, it is stated a few verses below: "All the multitude sought to touch him; for power came forth from him, and healed them all." (Verse 19.)

It is Luke alone that records that on the occasion of the memorable question, and Peter's great reply. "He was praying apart" (Luke 9:18), and that His direct purpose in going up into that exceeding high mountain was "to pray"; and that "as he was praying" the fashion of His countenance was altered and His raiment became white and dazzling. In all of the Gospels His prayer life is touched upon—how He prayed all night, or "at even," or in the morning "a great while before day"; but in Luke most abundantly. For Jesus the Lord, having emptied himself and taken upon himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself and took a man's place, which is the place of obedience and service, of dependence on and communion with God, filling His emptiness from the Source of all power and grace.

Some Added Thoughts on Luke 11:5-8

"It came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place," His disciples probably coming upon Him and standing respectfully by till He was done, "that when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray." In response (for He never refuses a sincere petition, but "giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not") He gave them that simple little prayer, commonly called "the Lord's Prayer"—properly, too, for He is the author of it—petitions so simple that a child may lisp them, so deep and all-encompassing that the ripest spirit may lose itself in its depths and find in them the expression of his highest wants. Surely if that is the way to pray, we all have time and words enough to pray to God. If we have not learned the secret of praying for hours, and, as the Lord himself, all night long—we may yet pray, and that effectively and acceptably, in the few words Jesus taught us, if we make them our own, utter them from the heart, and direct them with true purpose to the Father. For we are not heard for our much speaking. But it has been well pointed out that between the simple beginnings of prayer and the great mystery of communion and intercourse with God to which it leads and in which it ends, there is all the difference that exists between the rippling little mountain stream and the vast deep sea into which it flows.

Immediately after the giving of the Lord's Prayer, the Lord added a parable to teach persistence and importunity in prayer—the parable of the friend at midnight. "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth." (Luke 11:5-8.)

It is to be noted here that whereas the prayer just given is on the basis of sonship, this teaching assumes a basis of friendship. For surely the petitioner in the case presumed enough in going to a friend's house at midnight with such a request. He would certainly not have been so presumptuous as to do that if he had not been on a footing of friendship with the man whom he dared to disturb. Now our coming to God with a certain kind of request depends on our friendship with him. Abraham was God's friend, and God was Abraham's. God was Abraham's friend first, and took the initiative; and Abraham fell in with God's advances and became

God's friend. Thus the friendship was made complete. Now friendship means common interest, means of fellowship and cooperation, and that involves communion. Because Abraham was His friend, Jehovah revealed His secret purpose regarding Sodom to him. And Abraham understood. So, because God told him what impended, and because Abraham had certain interests in Sodom (and really Abraham's interests were God's also), he launched forth into a remarkable intercession, a series of petitions both humble and bold, reverential and yet almost impudent (Gen. 18).

The friends of God can do such things without fear of offense; and in doing them are really cooperating with God, for He must have intercessors, that He may show His mercy because of them. Now we also, on the same principle as Abraham, by faith and by obedience, are his friends; and on that account we have common cause with our Lord. He tells us His plans and purposes beforehand. (John 15:14, 15.) We seize the opportunity and intercede according to His good will, importunate even to "shamelessness."

What Shall We Pray For?

PRAYING FOR BLESSING TO BLESS OTHERS

While the petitions of the Lord's Prayer are chiefly for ourselves, the friend's petition at midnight is for himself, *for the benefit of another*. It is indirectly intercessory. A friend of his has come from a journey. The man is hungry. He must give him something to eat, but he has nothing to set before him. He has a friend near, however, who has bread. So to him he will go, and keep asking and knocking till he gets what he needs. The case is urgent, and the appeal proportionately earnest and continued. Now even a human friend (making all allowance for the limitations of human friendship) will yield to such an attack, if not for friendship's sake alone, at least to be rid of the constant bother. And the unspoken inference is: "How much more shall our rich Friend in heaven grant us what we plead for!" For we, too, have *friends* round about us here and there—acquaintances, associates, relatives, wayfarers—unhappy, unsaved; hungering, though unconsciously, for the Bread of Life. And how often have we felt impotence to help their case and had nothing to set before them! What shall we do, therefore, but go to the Friend who has all and delighteth to give, and obtain from Him the where-withal to set before the needy friend that has come to us for help? If such is your request, then keep right on with good courage; be not put off by any delay. Your cause is God's cause in this matter. Your interests are identical with God's. It is a matter of partnership. The answer *must* come; it *will* come. And, mark it, He will give to *you* that you may be able to give to the other, He will bless you that you may be a blessing. For the bread you give to the hungry friend shall be first of all yours, and your own highest happiness and salvation shall come to you in just this endeavor to obtain from God the blessing for others.

The Lord draws the conclusion: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And that is, in the context light: Ask, and keep on asking; seek, and keep on seeking; knock, and keep on knocking. "For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Whereupon he falls back upon the Fatherhood of God toward those who through Christ are His children. For He is not a Friend only; He is also a Father. And what father among men would mock the request of his child by giving him that which cannot satisfy his real desires and would even be harmful? Human nature is an evil thing; but even so they would not be guilty of such an act. "*How much more* shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Matthew, in the parallel passage, has "give good things;" but in Luke (as if

every imaginable good thing were summed up in the gift of the Holy Spirit) it says that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to His children that ask Him.

IS IT PROPER TO ASK FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There has been some dispute among Christians whether now, seeing that the Spirit came on Pentecost to abide with us forever, and seeing that every child of God has received the Holy Spirit—whether it is proper now to pray for the Holy Spirit; for Luke 11:13, above referred to was spoken *before* Pentecost. Could that prayer be intelligently offered now? The difficulty lies only in the assumption that because the Spirit came there is no further scope for praying for the Spirit; and since we all received the Spirit when we became children of God, there is no further need in regard to that point. Certainly the event of Pentecost (the descent of the Spirit from heaven) cannot be repeated. But note that on Christians already in possession of the Holy Spirit the apostle enjoins the commandment: “Be filled with the Spirit.” (Eph. 5:18.)

Now a commandment always gives scope for prayer, especially a commandment which involves the obtaining of something God alone can supply. If, for instance, we are commanded to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might,” it is then in order for me (while not neglecting other necessary steps) to pray that God may so strengthen me with His own power and might. (See Col. 1:11.) The very commandment makes prayer to that effect proper—yea, and necessary. So here also. If God says, “Be filled with the Spirit;” the way is open for me to say, “Father, fill me with thy Spirit;” and that with the assurance that He will hear and not withhold. For the Spirit may always be received in greater fulness. Some days after Pentecost the apostles and disciples found themselves facing human opposition and persecution. They realized then the great need of the hour—the need of *boldness*, that they might not shrink from declaring the word, and they united with their company in a simple, earnest prayer for boldness. (Acts 4.) And God answered. The place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they (although they were the very ones that had been baptized with the Spirit on Pentecost) *were all filled with the Holy Spirit.* “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit” on Pentecost, but now they are filled again. And what was the result? They had prayed for boldness. God gave them a new filling of the Spirit, which is elsewhere described as not being “a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and love and discipline.” And immediately it is added: “*And they spake the word of God with boldness.*” (Acts 4:31.) And that was *after* Pentecost.

The Picture of Our Days

Three parallel passages in the gospels (Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21) present a prophetic picture, as it were, foreshadowing the lot of the church, in a hostile world until Christ comes again.

The Lord Jesus had fed the 5,000, and had sent His disciples ahead across the lake of Galilee. In each account there is the intimation that Jesus had promised to come to them—though, *how* the disciples could not have known, for there was no other boat than the one in which they set out (John 6:22). However, that they did expect Him to come to them is clearly implied in Matt. 14:2 and Mark 6:45; and in John 6:17 we read that “it was now dark, and *Jesus had not yet come to them.*” Where was He? Well, after dismissing the multitude, whom He had fed, and after sending the disciples “to go before Him to the other side,” He “went up into the mountain apart to pray.” The disciples in the meanwhile were rowing hard against a contrary wind. (“The sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew.” John 6:18). About the fourth watch of the night, from His high place, the Lord saw them battling, “distressed by the waves” and “distressed in rowing,” and *He came unto them walking on the sea.* How they were troubled when they first saw Him, and how their fear was turned into joy and peace for them (“be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid”) and how His advent brought them instant relief and release from their distress and hard labor, is related in Mark 6:51 and John 6:21.

It is so today, and so it has been through all the long years of the church's history. Evermore she has had to battle against a hard wind, and her progress has been painful and slow. In the meanwhile, her Lord has been absent, on High, praying—praying for them. The first watch of the night (6 to 9) passed thus; the second watch (9 to 12) also, then the third (12 to 3). But in the fourth watch the Lord took knowledge of their toil and distress, and came to them, in a way most unexpected and wonderful. Thus He speaks to us also: “Watch, therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even (which is the first watch of the night), or at midnight (the second watch); or at cockcrow (the third); or in the morning (the morning watch, from 3 to 6); lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” (Mark 13:35-37.)

The night has been long—so long; and the rowing has been difficult. Surely we are in the fourth watch. If the signs mean anything to us, surely the coming of the Lord is at hand.

The writer of a poem, which appeared reprinted in a little magazine (The "Prairie Overcomer") has caught the vision, in the following beautiful words:

"The roaring sea of nations in upheaval,
The Church afloat upon the angry foam
The Lord, a Watcher, sees her toil, her peril,
And in the fourth watch of the night He'll come.

"Midnight has passed; eyes strain through inky darkness,
But see not yet the shining of His face:
Lest hearts should fail, or Hope should fold her pinions,
The morning-star in yonder heavens we trace.

"The morning star gleams on the rolling billows,
A radiant light amid the angry storm;
Within its beams we toil in rowing, saying,
'In the fourth watch, perchance, we'll see His form.'

"In the fourth watch—so toil a little longer,
Battling against the wind, the storm, the tide.
How soon we shall forget it all, beloved,
When, with our Lord, we reach the other side."



