

PRAYING IS WORKING

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JAMES v. 13-20.

Is any among you suffering? *let him pray* (1). Is any cheerful? let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and *let them pray* (2) over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and *the prayer of faith* (3) shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another, and *pray one for another* (4), that ye may be healed. The *supplication* (5) of a righteous man availeth much in its working. Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and *he prayed fervently* (6) that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. *And he prayed again* (7); and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. My brethren, if any among you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.

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PRAYING IS WORKING.

I.

"Much prevailing strength has the supplication of a righteous man in its working."

Over half a century since Dr. Fleming Stevenson enriched the Church of God with his gracious book *Praying and Working*. But needful as is the lesson that prayer must be accompanied by all right effort, that book taught also, and impressively, the truth expressed in our own title. What is here written is to prove and illustrate the thought that praying is working, and not merely an adjunct to working. It is a form of working, and not simply a somewhat properly added to our efforts out of reverence to the Almighty; nor is it only an appeal for His blessing to prosper our labours. When a righteous man prays he works. For prayer in the spirit is one agency by which the Spirit of God effects through the believer His will, and is, indeed, a putting forth of His energy.¹

Moreover, praying is not only working; it is the very highest order of working.

(a) It is that work to which our glorified Lord is ceaselessly devoting Himself: "He ever liveth to make intercession."² It is therefore our closest and highest co-operation with Him; at once our most heavenly and effective work.

(b) Prayer is that work which by itself brings to pass results which all other efforts of man

¹ Eph. vi. 18; Rom. viii. 26, 7. ² Heb. vii. 25; Rom. viii. 34.

cannot effect. Elijah by prayer alone controlled the weather for three and a half years, prohibiting all moisture, both dew and rain.¹ Not all other efforts combined, of all mankind together, could so work.

(c) Again, prayer is the highest form of working because *it affects the heavens above*, and not only the earth-level.

The Scripture shows that the forces and operations of nature are under the domination of angels, holy and evil. If these do not regularly control those forces, they do so on occasion.² Prayer affects their doings in two ways. Firstly, being itself an effort of the spirit of man, it is a setting in motion of a force proper to that realm where the nature of being is spirit: "we wrestle against wicked spirits," and are thus an obstacle to their activities. And then, secondly, prayer is an appeal behind and above those heavenly rulers to the Supreme Ruler Who dominates *them*, and Who can suspend His rules under which angels ordinarily act. Not that man has warrant for direct appeal to angels; but prayer "moves the hand that moves the world," and can thus set in motion, and modify the workings of, those celestial powers.

Daniel "set his face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes"; and "at the beginning of his supplications the commandment went forth," and Gabriel was sent to instruct him.³ Later,⁴ Daniel was again in prayer, but no immediate response was gained. Therefore he, like Elijah before him, persisted in prayer, "watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication,"⁵ and

¹ I. Kings xvii. 1.

² Rev. vii. 1-3; ix. 14-15; Job i. 12 to 19, etc., etc.

³ Dan. ix. 3, 23. ⁴ Dan. x. 2, 3. ⁵ Eph. vi. 18.

with fasting. After three whole weeks the response came, and with it the explanation of the delay. There had been no delay on God's part: "from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard." But a mighty evil spirit, then guiding the destinies of the Persian empire, had obstructed God's messenger,¹ who could not proceed on his errand until reinforced in the conflict by Michael, "one of the chief princes" of that kingdom of the heavens.²

It is enough for our present purpose to note how the praying of a righteous man caused motion, and even commotion, in the spirit world. And here again is a result that no other effort of man could effect.

Since therefore the Christian's greatest influence is exerted by prayer, he must inevitably be at his weakest when prayerless, and be strongest when prayerful.

The circumstances in which prayer is the saint's resource, as indicated by James, are five.

(1) "Is any *suffering*? let him pray." The word covers an immense variety of painful conditions, being applied, for instance, to the manifold afflictions endured by Old Testament prophets³ and New Testament preachers.⁴ It thus includes persecutions. Under such conditions it is easy to doubt our Father's goodness, and to murmur; and this we shall do unless we pray. Hence our Lord, picturing His people as a defenceless and oppressed Eastern widow, "spake a parable to the end that we ought always to pray, and not to faint."⁵ One or the other it will surely be: either

¹ Obviously no human Prince of Persia could have retarded the great angel.

² Dan. xi. 13.

³ Jas. v. 10.

⁴ II. Tim. ii. 3, 9.

⁵ Luke xviii. 1.

we pray or we faint. The disciples in Gethsemane did not watch and pray, and so they succumbed to temptation, and forsook their beloved Master. But Paul and Silas, though bruised and bleeding, and painfully cramped in the stocks in a miserable dungeon, and with the uncertainty of the morrow to weigh down the spirit, prayed when they could not sleep, and soon were singing praises.¹

“ Ah ! whither could we flee for aid
 When tempted, desolate, dismayed,
 Or how the hosts of hell defeat,
 Had suffering saints no mercy seat ? ”

But prayer not only supports the heart while under trial ; it is an appointed means of deliverance therefrom, in such cases and times as deliverance is the will of God. Herod may imprison Peter within double doors, one being of iron ; and detail sixteen soldiers to keep him ; and they make escape impossible by chaining him to two of their number ; “ but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him ” ;² and on that occasion also prayer set in motion the hosts above, and Peter was delivered.

A few years ago only, a court in a heathen land ordered a missionary to hand back to heathen relatives a small child who had, by consent, been entrusted to her care, and who had truly turned to Christ as her Saviour and Lord. The long legal struggle involved ended thus in seeming defeat. But for her, as for Peter, prayer was made earnestly and perseveringly ; and by a marvellous series of miraculous interpositions deliverance was effected.

(2) Whilst all suffering is occasion for praying, this Scripture particularises one form thereof, namely, *sickness*, as a special opportunity for

¹ Acts xvi. 25.

² Acts xii. 5.

supplication. "The prayer of faith shall save him that is sick"; and

"If our faith were but more simple
We should take Him at His word."

In a remote part of South India a valued missionary was suddenly taken seriously ill at night. The complaint was evidently choleraic. The swift collapse, extreme coldness, and other symptoms were unmistakeable, and just when I reached the bedside the cramps and vomiting were setting in. Inquiring if he had at hand any remedy known to be useful, the immediate reply was: "I have the Lord to heal me; and He has been showing me to-night that I ought not to have occupied your mind yesterday with the unprofitable things of which I talked." Here, I thought, is that confession of fault to which James exhorts, and so I readily joined with others in the prayer of faith for recovery. An esteemed friend led in prayer, and asked specifically that the sick man might go to sleep. Nothing more unlikely at that hour could have been requested. But within fifteen minutes I saw him settle into a peaceful, natural sleep, in which he continued for five hours, and from which he awoke well. He rose during that day, and on the next day took his place as a speaker at a convention.

In a remote country district in Devonshire, where I once lived, I was one evening stricken down without warning by influenza, the fourth such seizure known. Utterly prostrate, and with severe nausea, my first thought was to send for some brethren to pray. But this being found impracticable, my wife and I prayed together; and faith was given to plead that there should be a prompt raising up to fulfil a preaching engage-

ment in a distant city the next day but one. In particular it was asked that the distressing nausea might subside. My wife rose, and at once left the room; but ere she had closed the door I recalled her to say that the nausea had instantly gone, and that I was already well.

To these sample cases numerous parallels are available. Many who adopt no such opinions as that sickness is always from the devil, or that it is sinful to use remedies or to consult a physician, nevertheless know experimentally the power of the prayer of faith in severe sickness.

That God does not always immediately heal all infirmities is evident from the cases of Trophimus¹ and Timothy.² Some bodily weakness is permanent, being for spiritual benefit, and is cause for glorying;³ some is disciplinary, and can be relieved only by repentance, confession, and prayer;⁴ some is but the unavoidable wear and tear upon the physical machinery which is incidental to all strenuous effort. God will instruct prayerful hearts as to the nature of the ailment, and what measures, spiritual or medicinal, or both, are proper to each case.

(3) A third remarkable sphere in which prayer is able to work is that of *the weather*, as instanced in Elijah stopping and restoring the rainfall. Nor is this the only such instance in Scripture of a suspension of the workings of nature,⁵ nor is it without examples in later experience.

A minister of the Gospel upon going to a new sphere of service, conducted the first funeral in a drenching rain, and this in the winter. The conditions were dangerous to health, as well as unpleasant, and were also a hindrance to exhort-

¹ II. Tim. iv. 20. ² I. Tim. v. 23. ³ II. Cor. xii. 7-10.

⁴ Jas. v. 15, 16; I. Cor. xi. 29, 30.

⁵ See Ex. ix. 23, 33; Josh. x. 12-14; I. Sam. xii. 17, 18.

ations being given to the ungodly who often gather at the graveside. From that time, whenever a funeral was in prospect, prayer was publicly made unto God by that church, asking that rain should not fall during the interment. And during a period of nine years of ministry in that place, and for fifty successive funerals, held in every month of the year except the often fine month of July, that preacher never again conducted a funeral in the rain.

No other form of effort than prayer can so work.

(4) If the circumstances under which Elijah stayed the rain be considered, we are at once brought to the matter of the place and power of prayer in *affairs national*. The plainest intimation is given of the power which the righteous may exercise in public matters, and that prayer is their appointed means of intervention.

The king and people of Israel had forsaken God and turned to idolatry. In this connection let it be remembered that *covetousness* is idolatry,¹ and that so a nation may as certainly turn to idolatry by the worship of "empire" as its ideal, or by lust of territory or of wealth, as by the worship of demon gods or of images representing these. And all idolatry denies God His rights, and degrades men, and so falls under the severest judgment of the Almighty, Who only should be worshipped and served, and in honouring Whom men secure their own true good.

At such a time of spiritual apostasy and grave moral declension, Elijah intervened to secure God's blessing by securing the *repentance of the people*. And the great prophet's resource was prayer. Remonstrance and argument had failed; the queen had had the prophets murdered. Elijah

¹ Col. iii. 5; Eph. v. 5.

prayed, and prayed not for national victory, but for *national chastisement*; and this though himself and all the godly in Israel must suffer with the rest of the people. And only when judgment had done its needed spiritual work did he pray for temporal blessing. Sometimes stern measures are the only merciful measures.

In like manner, it was after seventy years of desolation for Jerusalem had passed over Israel for national sin that Daniel prayed for mercies and restoration,¹ and his supplications prevailed. For almost all those seventy years he had been at or near the head of affairs, sometimes, indeed, prime minister of the world-empires; but not so had he been able to secure the prosperity of his people and city. But when God's time came, prayer prevailed unto this end.

The active agent for the rebuilding of the city proved to be Nehemiah; and it was *after four months*² of *humiliation and fasting and prayer* that his opportunity came to gain the needed permission of the king of Persia. And even whilst standing before the monarch Nehemiah's habit of prayer persisted, for of that all-critical moment, while the king sat waiting for his immediate reply, he says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven; and I said unto the king."³

Again, Sennacherib's all but almighty armies had overrun Palestine, and the capital now seemed doomed. But Hezekiah, the king, went up into the house of the Lord and prayed, and officially urged other pious men to cry ceaselessly unto the Lord. To this public kingly appeal God's response was prompt: "Whereas thou

¹ Dan. ix.

² Neh. i. 1; ii. 1; Chislew was the third month of the civil year, Nisan the seventh.

³ Neh. ii. 4, 5.

hast prayed to Me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard thee."¹ And

“The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their heart but once heaved, and for ever grew still!”

“Thou hast prayed . . . I heard”—this is the all-important factor, and the uniform and dependable principle of God’s dealings. Had Hezekiah stopped at the military measures needed for the defence of the city, saying, “I have done all that is in my power; now I must leave the issue to God,” he would in reality have left the issue to Sennacherib. It was his personal and public appeal to God against Sennacherib that publicly, before men and angels, put the situation into the hands of the Lord of hosts.

God’s purpose for and methods with that section of His people named in the New Testament The Church of God, are quite special, though ever harmonious with His holiness and with equity; but His overruling of nations is as it ever has been, and is revealed mainly in the Old Testament, in such instances as have been cited. We notice one other case: that of the threatened overthrow of the great city of Nineveh.

There arrives a time when heaven’s justice can no longer tolerate iniquity, and sentence goes forth for the removal of the godless from the earth.

¹ II. Kings xix. 20.

This sentence is pronounced in that court of angels which overrules the doing of men.¹ And, as Ahab's case shows, no human *effort* can affect those decisions or retard the due execution of a decree there issued. But the *prayer* of the repentant to God can rightly influence those courts, by making it right for the Supreme Judge to suspend or nullify the sentence of the lower court.² For not punishment, but righteousness, is His delight; and when the lawless turns from his lawlessness, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.³ This is true for the individual,⁴ and also for a nation; and therefore was Nineveh spared upon the king, his princes and people, humbling themselves before, and crying mightily unto, God.⁵

Not in armies and fleets lies a nation's final strength: "a horse is a vain thing for safety; neither shall he deliver any by his great power."⁶ Angels can still destroy armies, and storms will yet sink fleets.⁷ Much is risked when statesmen and prelates deliberately urge a national violation of the law of the Sabbath, as during the late war. Nor can it be a way to the favour of the God and Father of Jesus Christ the Lord that an empire should take under its favour the one religion, Mohammedanism, that formally and fiercely denies to the Redeemer His personal glory as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. For the Father has decreed that all must "honour the Son even as they honour the Father";⁸ and for an empire to favour Islam, and to obstruct at all the spread of the Gospel amongst Moslems, as Eng-

¹ See Job i. 6; ii. 7; Dan. iv. 13, 17, 23; 1. Kings xxii. 19-23; Acts xii. 23.

² A plain instance is given in 1. Kings xxi. 27-29.

³ Ezek. xviii. 21, 23, 27, 28.

⁴ Dan. iv. 27.

⁵ Jon. iii. 5-10.

⁶ Ps. xxxiii. 17.

⁷ Ps. xlviii. 7.

⁸ John v. 23.

land does, is an offence against God and His Son which cannot but entail serious consequences.

It is for public repentance, humiliation, and supplication that God waits; but these avail to procure mercy and favour through the infinite merits of the Redeemer's Person and passion. For nations, as for persons, the prayer of the contrite has power. Only let princes and peoples remember this solemn word concerning an ancient monarch: "Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is but a noise; *he hath let the appointed time pass by*";¹ and let them seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near.²

(5) The fifth matter that James puts in connection with prayer is the *recovery of backsliding saints*. "*My brethren*" (the family relationship is asserted), "*if any among you*" (not the outside, unregenerate men of the world) "*do err from the truth*" (therefore the one contemplated had walked in the way of the truth, and had wandered therefrom), "*and one turn him back*" (the simple force of "to convert,"³ and therefore applied not only to the unregenerate turning to God for the first time,⁴ but equally to the recovery of an apostle from a dreadful lapse⁵); "*let him know that he who turneth back a sinner from the error of his way*" (a "sinner" is one who misses the mark or the road, the one who in the former and parallel phrase "errs from the truth," and so the cognate noun and verb are applied to wrong conduct by saints⁶) "*shall save a soul from death*"⁷ (for grievous sin by His children God not seldom visits with premature death; as witness

¹ Jer. xlv. 17. ² Isa. lv. 6. ³ Matt. ix. 22; xxiv. 18.

⁴ Acts xi. 21.

⁵ Luke xxii. 32.

⁶ Rom. xiv. 23; I. Cor. viii. 12.

⁷ N.B.—It does not say that it is *eternal* death that is here in view.

Ananias and Sapphira cut off in the very assembling place of the church;¹ or the danger in which the incestuous Christian at Corinth stood of the destruction of the flesh,² but which he escaped through prompt contrition;³ and the weakness and sickness and death of others in that church because of gross misconduct.⁴ And therefore, as a sample case for prayer, the Apostle John says:⁵ “If any man see his brother sinning sin⁶ not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. *There is sin⁶ unto death*: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin; and there is sin not unto death.” The judgment of worldlings is, in general, deferred to the great final assize of the universe, but God in mercy chastens His children now⁷): “*and shall cover a multitude of sins*” (for if a believer be thus cut off in an erring, unrepentant state, then must he give account of the evil at the judgment seat of Christ,⁸ and much shame will he then feel;⁹ whereas repentance and confession lead to pardon and restoration, and his sins are thus covered up by the atoning blood of Christ, and will no more be remembered by God).

How exceedingly blessed, therefore, shall they be who find grace to recover a wandering brother! But this holy service requires an uncommon measure of prayerfulness. For the heart of the wanderer oft becomes proud and hard, and evil

¹ Acts v. ² I. Cor. v. 3-5. ³ II. Cor. ii. 6-8.

⁴ I. Cor. xi. 29, 30. ⁵ I. John v. 16, 17.

⁶ The indefinite article of our versions is here really equivalent to the definite article, and is better omitted, as in Greek. It is not some one particular sin only that is in question. Three immoralities are covered by the cases mentioned above: lying, incest, and gluttony.

⁷ I. Cor. xi. 32; I. Peter iv. 17. ⁸ II Cor. v. 10.

⁹ I. John ii. 28.

spirits labour zealously for his complete overthrow, and prayer alone has energy to defeat this combined opposition.

But persistent, and especially united, prayer has such energy. It works grandly in this sphere. At a prayer conference the case was mentioned of a young man then dying in a neighbouring city. The son of truly godly parents, he was himself drawn to Christ when eleven years of age, and until his eighteenth year had made quite distinct progress in the divine life and service. An unbelieving relative then led him astray, filling his mind with doubts concerning all things sacred, until he seemed wholly blinded by the agnostic fog into which he had wandered.

I was greatly struck by the general, maintained, and intense prayer to God that this case called forth, and my heart was conscious of a distinct intimation that I was to visit this young friend. At the first interview, though we were entire strangers, his heart was opened, and it became evident that the gracious Spirit was rendering him dissatisfied with his state. (What honest heart *can* repose on negations? How can one rest on *nothing*?) But his mind was simply interpenetrated in all its processes by suspicions and uncertainty. The inspiration of Holy Scripture, its teaching of eternal judgment, the need or value of the Atonement, the idea of a triune Deity—these, and every other item of the Bible scheme of truth, had become as unimaginable to him as Professor Huxley declared them to be to himself.

The simple suggestion was made that he should leave alone all the accessory detail, and confine his attention to the one central problem, namely, whether Christ is indeed a living Person, and is accessible. That point settled in the

negative would necessarily dispose of all the rest; that settled in the affirmative, the secondary questions would be illuminated. This course he took with an honest and good heart; and the immediate and expected issue was the fulfilment of the assurance that "whensoever [the veiled and blinded heart] shall turn *to the Lord*, the veil is taken away,"¹ and he passed the remaining weeks of his life in a frame of mind as peaceful and joyful in the Lord as the former darkness had been miserable.

When sitting with him at that first interview one was conscious that the difficulties lay wholly in himself, and that the enveloping spiritual atmosphere had been relieved from the oppressing influence of wicked spirits. Their obstructing efforts being restrained, it was comparatively easy to help their captive and for him to accept help. *To gain this relief is all-important,*² and this prayer effects; of which the following is a further instance, only concerning an ungodly man rather than a backslider.

I was brought into contact in South India with an elderly Englishman, of long residence in the East, one who had lived a dissolute life, and was resolutely hostile to religious subjects. For months we occupied adjoining rooms, yet only once did I succeed in introducing religious topics; and then, after but a few minutes, he closed the conversation by laughingly saying, "You missionaries are clever beggars: you deserve to succeed: I made up my mind that you should never talk to me about these things, and yet here you are at it."

¹ II. Cor. iii. 16.

² "No one can enter into the house of the Strong One (Satan), and spoil his goods, *except he first bind the Strong One.*" (Mark iii. 27.)

On the eve of my leaving the country, and burdened in spirit with his state, I resolved on journeying specially to his town to make one further attempt to reach him. On arriving, the monsoon rain was pouring steadily. When I reached the bungalow where I was to stay it was just the breakfast hour, and an inward discussion arose as to whether I should, as inclination prompted, go in and refresh myself after the journey, or trudge on through mud and rain and first see this man. I finally decided to go on. He met me with unusual cordiality, and, to my great wonder and delight, in a very few minutes we were engaged in close, personal converse as to his life and eternal prospects. The change in his attitude was altogether extraordinary; but on my return to the place whence I had started the explanation was found. Shortly after I had left, a lady, who also was deeply concerned as to this godless man, had gathered twelve other praying workers, and for over two hours these had continued in steadfast supplication for this one case and concerning my interview with him. They had commenced praying just before I had to decide whether to breakfast first or no, and had continued in powerful intercession until a little after I had left him, although they had no knowledge as to what part of the day I might be with him.

Such concentration of supplication may be compared to “ barrage ” artillery fire, by which a desired objective is isolated from opposing forces, and thus is the more easily relieved or captured. We would not unduly press a preposition beyond its normal force, but let it be remarked that when our great Advocate spoke of a spiritual conflict in which He had intervened by intercession, He said to the subject of that conflict, “ I made

supplication *around thee* " (*περι σου*);¹ and so, though Simon was suffered, for his own good and for his after usefulness to weak brethren, to be severely mauled in the battle, his faith, being protected by his Lord's intercession, was not finally overwhelmed. A high privilege does the Captain of salvation share with His faithful followers in enabling us to take hold of shield and buckler and stand up for the help of the oppressed : a blessed thing it is to be able to draw out the spear and stop the way against those who pursue after souls for their ruin.²

¹ Luke xxii. 32.

² Psa. xxxv. 2, 3.

II.

Did no other Scripture exhort and encourage to prayer, the foregoing passage alone should lead the saint often to bend the knee: were no other affairs than those now before us under the influence of prayer, well worth while it is to pray: but in truth there are no matters outside of its scope and influence.

Consider, for example, its place in the working of the corporate life of a local church.

In a certain church a large number of members had determined to change the general tone from spirituality to carnality, by introducing secular amusements and the like. After a long period of difficulty, a special gathering was proposed at which this party should meet the senior brethren for discussion. The leader and life of the worldly-minded section, a naturally impetuous man, seized eagerly on the proposal, and evidently purposed that the occasion should be turned to the fullest advantage. But the godly gave themselves to prayer; and on the very day appointed a serious sickness attacked that brother's family, and he could not attend the meeting, which proved without him an entire failure from his point of view.

Again, in a certain heathen land a serious difference arose in a very large circle of missionaries. It threatened to issue in a public cleavage, and this before the native Christians and the

heathen. The centre of the trouble was a wholly sincere but very determined man, one always difficult to persuade or turn. For months negotiation and prayer had proceeded, in view of the annual missionary conference before which the matter would come; but to within two weeks thereof no sign of reunion was seen. The tension was great, and forbearance was much taxed.

At that point three friends joined for a half-night of prayer, seeking general reviving. About midnight their hearts were powerfully drawn to deal with this special matter, and they found great liberty in spreading out the whole case before the Lord. They specially committed to Him for His definite dealing those mainly responsible, and in particular the beloved worker who had precipitated the crisis. Nor did the spirit of intercession cease to impel them until they were fully assured that the situation was mastered, and that the Lord would effectually intervene.

The conference duly met, and for six long sessions, occupying two whole days, discussion proceeded, but without result; and at the close the feeling expressed was that matters must take their course. But one of those who had prayed that night was convinced to the contrary. He had observed that throughout those wearying hours of debate a remarkable restraint had been upon all, so that, in spite of the acute feeling existing, not a speaker had said any word which hurt another. He therefore pointed out that the Lord's ideal for His Church is a oneness that the world would see, and be impressed;¹ and that the Lord could be trusted to bring this to pass, if faith did not fail, but patiently waited upon Him.

The next morning the subject was unexpectedly resumed, but without any progress to agreement

¹ John xvii. 21.

being apparent. But shortly, to the amazement of nearly all, the very brother who had brought about the crisis said that, *contrary to the wishes of those who thought with him*, he had resolved, for the sake of peace, to desist from the course upon which he had thought it right to enter! The happy result was restoration of harmony: and the Spirit of the Lord, being no longer grieved by dissension, was shortly able to show the solution of the original matter of disagreement.

The following circumstances, which formed perhaps the earliest such lesson in praying that I had, are recalled from memories of twenty-four or more years ago. I was then a worker in a certain Y.M.C.A. The Committee arranged for an address by a well-known higher critic. As this address was to be given to the Bible Class I then led, my duty to protest was clear. The Committee peremptorily rejected the appeal that was organised, and the appointment was confirmed. One evening, after conversing sadly with some friends as to the defeat of our stand for the truth, I was walking to my lodgings, when suddenly, in the street, there was brought before me, almost as by a voice, the promise, "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,"¹ accompanied by the direction, "Go back to Mr. M—— and ask him and his wife to agree with you in asking that —— shall not come as is arranged." Never before had I had such an experience; but I went back, and we together presented the request. About three weeks later there appeared in the local papers an announcement that the ecclesiastic in question would be unable to keep the engagements in that

¹ Matt. xviii. 19.

city; and the reason was entirely unique. An epidemic of typhoid was raging in the assize town of his county, and the Judges decided to hold the courts elsewhere. They fixed upon his city, and upon one of the days when he was to have been away; and it became his duty to conduct public worship as the customary opening of the assizes, and he could not leave.

Turning now to the details of gospel service, we remark that it seems evident from the Bible narratives that the Apostles and early pastors and evangelists received no stipend or guaranteed income. It is equally clear that they did not appeal to men for money for their own needs, neither to the Gentiles¹ nor to their converts.² Paul at times supported himself by working at his trade; but whence came the funds for his frequent and extensive journeyings, often by sea, and continuing over so many years? How was the rent of his hired house paid during the two years of his first Roman captivity?

These are the kind of matters that harass so many earnest minds, and in so many quarters retard the work of the gospel.

First let it be remembered that those early preachers thought it part of their lot and privilege to suffer hardship with the gospel, as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. And for the rest of the question, let the answer be sought in the heavy apostolic emphasis on prayer as the believer's sufficient resource. These men believed that the silver and the gold are the Lord's. Their infallible Scriptures had assured them of this,³ and that He can turn the streams whithersoever He pleases.⁴ To Him therefore they applied, taking

¹ III. John 7; Acts xx. 33. ² Acts xx. 34. ³ Hag. ii. 8.

⁴ II. Chron. xxv. 9; i. 12.

it for granted that so faithful a Master can be relied upon to supply to His servants all that is really needful and good.

And at this late date in the Church's history there are still found those, and they number some thousands,¹ who go about the work of God, in home and foreign lands, following the same plan. And we know from observation that their work is not behind any in quality, extent, or blessing.

Even apart from any organisation whatever faith and prayer are effective. A certain preacher of the gospel in England, one having no private means, concluded that God had called him to service in India. He made no appeal for funds, save unto God; but by the time that it was needful to pay the deposit on the passage money, enough was in hand for this, and by the day that the ticket had to be completed, this was possible. He reached his destination in India, among strangers, with tenpence to the good, *plus* the promises of God and a peaceful heart. In a few days he unexpectedly met a business man who had been a playmate of his boyhood. This friend, knowing nothing of his then need, asked him to accept a sovereign. And thus from place to place he journeyed, serving the Lord in India, Burma, Egypt, Tunisia, and Switzerland; almost always with a nearly empty purse, yet always finding a well of salvation as required. For four and a half years was such service continued, in addition to nineteen years in this land; and were the whole story, in only its financial aspect, recorded in detail, it would be a testimony indeed

¹ The China Inland Mission has about 1,000 workers, to whom no income is guaranteed, and there are numerous other societies whose members go out on the same understanding. The Open Brethren foreign missionary force alone numbers about 750 workers.

to the faithfulness of God, the power of prayer, and the feasibility of the Lord's methods of gospel labour. But this story scarcely needs to be written, for much adequate testimony of the kind is available in such lives as those of George Müller, Hudson Taylor, and others.

Yet perhaps one incident may be recorded to the glory of God, and for the encouragement of faith. This worker was in Egypt in August, 1914, at the outbreak of the late war. Immediately war was declared all foreign exchange stopped. Having but little money in hand, and the receiving of money from abroad being all but impossible, a day soon came when his funds were reduced to the sum of fourpence halfpenny. Of this none knew but God, and to Him constant prayer was made. That very evening two letters were received. One of these contained a draft for fifty pounds, the history of which, as afterwards transpired, was as follows. Immediately war was declared, a kind friend, then in Switzerland, thought of the probable difficulty of the one in Egypt, and desired to send money. But shut up in Switzerland, and there likewise short of funds, it seemed impossible to do this, since no banks would grant credit or give foreign drafts. But this friend remembered that a gentleman, then in England, had some money at his credit with a certain *commercial* house in Cairo, and wrote to him to send an order thereon. The postal delay involved at that time of disorganisation, did but serve to hinder the arrival of the help till faith and prayer had been fully tested and strengthened.

But this was not all. In that period of financial stringency it took a few days for the firm to cash the draft, and this left no provision for those days. But this detail God had foreseen, and had afore-

arranged the supply, by moving another loving heart in England to post, *so as to arrive by the same delivery*, a British postal order for five shillings. This being payable at any post office (probably the only paper money negotiable at that time), just met the temporary need. Let not unbelief again ask, Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?¹

Nor is the gracious readiness of our God to hear the cry of His children in matters monetary limited to the affairs of directly spiritual work.

A Christian lady was proprietress of a dress-making business. Having no spare capital, and her customers being of a certain social class that almost invariably took unjustifiably long credit, she was not seldom in straits.

One Saturday morning this lady went before breakfast to an intimate friend, to whom she confided practically every business perplexity, to say that she found herself without money to pay the weekly wages. She knew that her friend could not find the eight pounds needed, but she besought his prayers. She said that her work-hands needed their pay, that she had never before had to send them away unpaid, and that she felt that to do so would be to the hindering of her testimony to them concerning Christ. Prayer was very definitely offered that God would help. And the way He did so was singularly to His own praise. Had a local customer come to the shop and paid an account, that would not have been at all striking, or very clearly an answer to prayer. But this did not occur. By the early afternoon post a customer who was away from home sent £10, and these special features lent wondrous interest to the remittance :—

¹ Psa. lxxviii. 19.

(1) The lady (who was afterwards the wife of a then well-known General) was one who had always taken very long credit. This time, the goods had been only just delivered.

(2) Accustomed not to pay promptly when at home, it was most unlikely that she would concern herself with a, to her, small and new account when at a considerable distance on holiday.

(3) Prayer had been offered in the early morning; the post-mark showed that the letter had been posted shortly after that hour of prayer.

(4) Such customers generally remitted accounts by cheque. Had this usual practice been followed on this occasion it would not have met the need, since the bank was closed before the letter arrived. But she sent bank notes, which were easily cashed. And so exactly does God work in answer to believing prayer, that the supply came within the very hour that preceded the closing of the workroom.

If it be said that God does not always so deliver, but sometimes delays His help, or even allows His people to suffer need, it must be asked if there is not a cause.

The writer has had such experiences. Partly from want of funds he was once detained for three months in an Eastern city at which he had planned to stay but three days. During those months only a few shillings reached him, and expenses went on accumulating. That detention resulted (1) in very distinct and lasting blessing to a group of needy native Christians; (2) in developing patient waiting for the Lord in a not too patient spirit; and (3) in a remarkably encouraging proof that God well knows how the handful of meal can long be kept from vanishing into nothing, and can fill the barrel to the full when the right hour has come.

Thus by the want and the delay most blessed ends were served, and, moreover, (4) God's servant was kept from going into a Bithynia to which he was essaying to depart.¹ "And *therefore* will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and *therefore* will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you : for Jehovah is a God of judgment [He does not act capriciously and without due reason]; blessed are all they that wait for Him."²

Oh learn to trust My changeless love,
Though love may seem to cease.
To faith the darker of My paths
The fuller are of peace.
Yea, all My ways all-perfect are,
Though stones and thorns annoy ;
For steep ascents lead up through clouds
To sunlit realms of joy.

And if I keep thee waiting long
I have not thee forgot ;
And pangs of sorrow bring to birth
Rich joys earth else knew not.
And know, the more I win thy love,
The more I thee shall test ;
For thus My best beloved friends
I fit to share My best.

And when seasons come that we seem wholly unable to explain, let it be remembered that such are the very best of occasions for gratifying our Father's heart by trusting Him in the dark. Dr. A. T. Pierson used to speak of a ladder of prayer, up which faith ascends by the rungs of experience, and the highest rung of which is when God does not even say No to our requests, but leaves us in silence and darkness.

¹ Acts xvi. 7.

² Isa. xxx. 18.

The most awful hour that eternity shall ever know was when He Who had never been denied a request was constrained to exclaim, "I cry, . . . but Thou answerest not." But it was at that moment that faith rose to its supreme height, for the Son of God, denied and forsaken, immediately justified God for so treating Him, by declaring, "But Thou art holy."

We are exhorted to pray concerning all things.¹ The details over which we do not pray will be ordered by our poor wisdom and be dependent upon our but limited resources. But when affairs are definitely committed to God, and His guidance is awaited and followed, then is secured the inestimable advantage of matters being ordered by His perfect knowledge and power. Great is the gain of this in those items of life which, being small, are oftentimes very fretting to the spirit.

A Christian man, needing to move to another dwelling, spent much time searching for a house, and found none. At one that was advertised he decided not to look, since he was well aware of the dilapidated condition of the buildings in that district. After long fruitless searching, he decided that he could better serve God with time and strength, saying to a friend that their heavenly Father surely knew where was the place of His choice, and that he would now commit the matter to the Lord, and await His promised guidance. *Within one hour* of this decision a lady casually met him who also was house-hunting, and who said that she had just looked at a new and lovely suite of rooms, and would have taken them had they not been too many and large. These were viewed and found very convenient. It was the house that it had been thought useless to see!

¹ Phil. iv. 6.

Some time thereafter it was needful again to move; and again, at the desire of another, time was spent in fruitless visits to houses. Once more, and earlier than on the former occasion, it was decided definitely to commit the need to the Lord, and count upon His promised aid. *That same afternoon* a friend called who had never before done so, and who knew nothing of the need, but who knew of the very place of the Lord's appointment.

Again, this same household had been plagued with a succession of indifferent domestics, a cause of long worry and friction. When ten or twelve such had come and gone, it was resolved to risk no more trouble by "leaning to thine own understanding," but in this also to "acknowledge Him," expecting Him graciously to "direct."¹ *The next morning* a lady introduced a servant who proved a great and lasting comfort, remaining for years, and only leaving to be married.

How gracious is our heavenly Father to concern Himself with these items of the lives of His children! How wise and blessed are we when we appeal to Him, and count upon Him!

And since life is so largely made up of such small and personal matters, it is manifestly necessary that we should pray concerning everything, for thus only can the habit of prayer become so natural as instinctively to operate when life's more serious affairs develop or its emergencies have to be met. We must "*in everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known our requests unto God." This practice brings a deep tranquillity of heart—and this, in time, to even a naturally impetuous spirit—by preserving a rest-giving assurance of the presence of the Almighty One, Whose care and

¹ Prov. iii. 5, 6.

power are so often shown. "The Lord is at hand: in nothing be anxious," becomes an experience and a possibility; and so the peace of God—that calmness which is God's own state of mind because of His consciousness of being always equal to every occasion—guards the heart and the thoughts in Christ Jesus.¹ "O Lord," said a dock labourer, "thou knowest the wicked men with whom I have to work, and how dreadfully they do tempt me. I need Thee every hour, yes, every minute, Lord; and I thank Thee *Thou'rt always handy.*" The man (I knew him well) who thus talked with his God, and found Him a "very present help" on the quay-side, was one who never missed either of the two weekly prayer gatherings, and who sought his Divine Father about every detail of life.

¹ Phil. iv. 5-7.

III.

But our Scripture, we must specially note, lays down three primary conditions of successful prayer: (1) it must be "supplication"; (2) this must be made by a "righteous" man; and (3) it is the "prayer of faith" that has power.

(1) Supplication is an intense word. Of its meaning and force there are two chief examples.

Jacob, after twenty years absence, is returning home.¹ As he neared the old regions conscience made him afraid. He had deeply wronged his brother: was Esau still nursing that dread resolve for deadly vengeance? The messengers he had sent to him had returned with the ominous tidings, "Thy brother cometh to meet thee, and *four hundred men with him.*" For what possible purpose could such a host of desert warriors be needed save to eat him up, with all his substance? Occupied with such gloomy thoughts, Jacob is passing the night alone, when suddenly, out of the shadows, a form springs upon him in fierce attack. Did Jacob imagine it to be an assassin sent in advance by his wrathful brother? He throws himself into the struggle; and all the night the conflict rages, until at dawn the Angel, by supernaturally crippling Jacob, reveals Who he is.

We not seldom hear of "wrestling with God in prayer." Is there warrant for the thought? Just so long as Jacob wrestled he hindered God. It was

¹ Gen. xxxii.

crippled Jacob that secured the blessing. Much of God's dealings with us has to be directed to reducing our strength and exhausting our self-confidence. Did not Hudson Taylor say that when God resolved to open inland China to the Gospel, He looked around to find a man (himself) who was *weak enough* for the purpose?

But of Jacob crippled, halting, weeping, no more able to wrestle but only to cling, it is said "he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and *made supplication* unto him."¹ What a picture! what a lesson! In imminent peril from Esau, and in utter helplessness; he felt the situation intensely: and thus was begotten that *supplication* which has prevailing strength. That night was wrought the miracle that the next day disclosed—the thorough changing of Esau's heart from revenge to forgiveness, from hatred to love. It is when we feel deeply that we pray powerfully; and herein pre-eminently is that word true, "When I am weak, then am I strong."²

As long as we can with complaisance contemplate our friends, and even our loved ones, going a godless road to perdition: as long as things temporal are to us more urgent than things eternal: as long as it affects us little or nothing that Christ's Church, for which He bled, is harried by wolves, and paralysed by agnostic, theosophic, and pantheistic poison-gas, let loose by demon foes: as long as the novel and the newspaper are more attractive than the Bible, and the office and the fireside are preferred to the prayer-closet and the prayer meeting—so long we shall be little stirred in spirit and our prayers will be but formal and weak.

But *supplication* affects the conditions on the higher plane of the universe. We get a pro-

¹ Hos. xii. 4.

² II. Cor. xii. 10.

portionate result to the effort put forth. It *costs* to pray effectively.

It costs *time*. We read of the Son of God that on special occasions "He *continued all night* in prayer to God," and of Samuel that he "cried unto the Lord all night."¹ On into the night the church prayed for the deliverance of Peter. Very notable are the words of William C. Burns, who in his day opened the windows of heaven and saw floods of spiritual blessing fall: "The great fundamental error, as far as I can see, in the economy of the Christian life, which many, and alas! I for one, commit, is that of having too *few* and too *short* periods of solemn retirement with our gracious Father and his adorable Son Jesus Christ." Would God that among the rank and file of church members there were more of the type of one known to us. Poor, hard-working, with a long family, and herself but weakly, she gained strength, bodily and spiritual, at the mercy-seat. A lady calling at the door was informed by her small boy that his mother was at home, but not to be seen, for, said he, "she is saying her prayers, and mother never lets us disturb her when she is saying her prayers." "And do you think she will be long?" asked the visitor. "I am afraid she will," was the artless answer: "*mother takes a very long while saying her prayers.*"

A preacher of the Gospel became deeply troubled that he saw few conversions. The people of God were growing in grace, the church life was harmonious; but souls were not added to the Lord. Concerning this he diligently sought the Lord, Who presently said to him: "The Apostles said that they would continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the Word: you have given

¹ I. Sam. xv. 11.

yourself to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. Now put these things in My order, and see what I will do." Obedient unto this heavenly instruction, the preacher rearranged his life, in the home, in the study, and socially, so as to give practically two days in each week to waiting upon God, with some measure of fasting. Immediately the power of the Lord was with him. Souls began to turn to the Lord, and this from amongst the same persons who had formerly been unmoved. And this continued a permanent experience, so that, without any outward excitement, or even special missions, he was never but a few weeks without some definite conversion over which to rejoice.

“ To wait on God no time is lost :
Wait on; wait on.
To grind the axe no labour's lost :
Grind on; grind on !”

And to pray costs *strength*, whilst it renews strength. It involves pain and strain, and this sometimes too great for words—the Holy Spirit maketh intercession for us (and within us), with groanings which words are unequal to expressing.¹ The Lord Jesus groaned in the task of releasing a captive from the grip of him who had the power of death²; the Spirit groans in His desires for the will of God and the people of God: and such as know aught of the deeper, mightier fellowship of their Lord, groan with His groaning, and succeed with something of His success, or rather He, by His indwelling Spirit, groans and He succeeds in and through them.

For He Himself is the great Exemplar of that supplication which prevails. “In the days of His

¹ Rom. viii. 26.

² John xi. 33-38; Heb. ii. 14.

flesh [He] offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him Who was able to save Him out of death.”¹ It is not said that He cried to be saved from dying, but to be saved out of the death state into which willingly, though with unspeakable horror, He was descending. He went down into death; and as in Gethsemane He descended into that “pit of tumult,”² He cried to be brought up out of it again; and small wonder was it that He was then “in an agony” and “prayed more earnestly: and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.”³

This was supplication in its intensest effort; and the result was commensurate, even triumph over death, and escape from Hades and the tomb—the Resurrection itself was an answer to prayer!

The first that I knew experimentally of this type of prayer was upon seeing that a beloved friend and servant of God was being subtly hurried into a course that would have ended in open disaster and dishonour to the Lord. Deeply stirred by the prospect, I was constrained to wait on God with a desperation never before felt, and to persevere in prayer night after night; and presently the intense satisfaction was reached of feeling and seeing that the attacking tempting spirits were being driven off, that the net was broken, and that their prey had escaped.

Not with God have we to wrestle: He is ever eager to bless. Were it our Father alone with Whom we had to do, prayer were a pure pleasure. But our wrestling is against wicked spirits,⁴ and stern is the fight to which they compel us when we seek that the will of God be known

¹ Heb. v. 7.

² Psa. xl. 1, 2.

³ Luke xxii. 44.

⁴ Eph. vi. 12.

and done. Epaphras was driven to “agonize” with “much labour” when praying that fellow-believers might “stand fully grown and fully assured in all the will of God.”¹

And he who would be strong in the Lord must consent to be weak in himself, for the Lord’s strength reaches full display in our weakness.² “‘God hath chosen the weak things.’ He has not *made shift with them*—taken them because there were no others. No! He hath chosen them.” (Mrs. Booth.) The men that count for most in the great world’s affairs, the self-sufficient and self-reliant, are of small use to the Lord. They cannot pray to much purpose, whereas the supplication of a righteous man has much prevailing strength in its working.

(2) And therefore we must inquire what the righteousness is that is here demanded. And the history of the man chosen as an example of prayer shall teach us; for Elijah was a righteous man for the purpose of succeeding in prayer. (a) When appealing to God for blessing, he based his claim on the virtue of an atoning sacrifice: “he built an altar in the name of the Lord.”³ His attitude was that of the taxgatherer mentioned by our Lord,⁴ who stood before the altar of sacrifice confessing himself sinful and wholly unworthy to be noticed by God, and cried, O God, for the sake of the victim that has made propitiation, having bled and suffered in my place, have mercy on me.⁵ He who would be accepted by the Holy One as righteous, must from the commencement disclaim any supposed righteousness of his own, and must accept as a gift that righteousness of God which is

¹ Col. iv. 12, 13.

² II. Cor. xii. 9.

³ I. Kings xviii. 30, 33.

⁴ Luke xviii. 9-14.

⁵ ἱλάσθητι (hilastheeti).

obtained by faith in Jesus Christ the Righteous One, Who by the shedding of His precious blood, is the propitiation¹ for our sins. (b) Elijah was righteous because he stood rigidly for God and His rights. He espoused the Lord's cause against the whole nation. King, queen, princes, priests, prophets, and people were on the one side, Baal's side: Elijah withstood them all, though alone as far as he knew. He would not follow a multitude to do evil.² The righteous enquires not whether a cause is popular. Elijah was by no means perfect in an absolute sense. Nay; the Scripture emphasizes that he was of like feeling and infirmities with others; and he failed just where others would be likely to fail under his circumstances. But he stood publicly for God; and that put him in the right and gave him, on the ground of atonement, a right to be heard in heaven. He walked in the light he had of man's duty to God, and thus the blood of atonement kept him, before God, cleansed from sin, and he and God had fellowship together³ as to the times and how to meet them. They who seek to serve God *and* go on with the world (as Obadiah), and they who preserve a judicious obscurity (the 7,000), are the people of God, known by Him in grace; but they do not stem the tide of sin, nor prevail unto the mastering of dire situations. Such have but little power in heaven by prayer or on earth by action.

For evermore it is true that "if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear";⁴ and equally certain it is that "the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry."⁵ It is largely in our own power to frustrate or to secure the answers to our prayers.

¹ ἱλασμός (hilasmos). I. John ii. 2.

² Ex. xxiii. 2.

³ I. John i. 7.

⁴ Psa. lxi. 18.

⁵ Psa. xxxiv. 15.

(c) Elijah was righteous, from the point of view of prayer, because he asked for right things. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,"¹ even with the upright.² They who walk habitually in the light with God are given to see things as He sees them. Guided by what He says (in His Holy Word), they come to His mind about matters. Thus their prayers, being directed by His Word and Spirit, are harmonious with His will,³ and often more perfectly so than they at the time perceive. "And this is the boldness which we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."⁴ The Lord had plainly said that should His people turn from Him, He would withhold the rain.⁵ Elijah prayed for this to be fulfilled, the inviolate Word being his guide and warrant. But how should he, being in hiding out of the land, get to know how far and when the judgment had sufficiently effected the merciful purpose of humbling the people that blessing could be restored? Of this he received secret intimation from Him Who searcheth the hearts: "And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah. . . . I will send rain upon the earth."⁶ Thus do the Word of God and the Spirit of God instruct the man of God as to the will of God, so that his prayers and labours may be a co-working with God.

Our Lord's parable of the importunate widow is highly illuminating.⁷ The scene is a court-house; an earthly picture of that court of justice in the heavens to which the Word of God so often refers.

¹ Psa. xxv. 14.

² Prov. iii. 32.

³ Rom. viii. 27.

⁴ I. John v. 14, 15.

⁵ Lev. xxi. 10 · Deut. xxviii. 23

⁶ I. Kings xviii. 1.

⁷ Luke xviii. 1-8.

There God sits on the throne judging righteously and maintaining the right.¹ The suppliant widow represents God's chosen ones, on earth despised and oppressed, as was their Lord in His day. The adversary is the Devil, as Peter tells us.² Oppressed by him the widow is helpless, unless she can move the strong arm of the law to action. The Church, and the individual saint, are powerless save as they secure divine intervention. We *must* pray, or the oppressor triumphs; for we are no match for him except through Jesus Christ.

But when the widow resorts to the court, so does the adversary.³ He is "the accuser of the brethren"; and because he persists in his attack we must persist in our appeals against him: God's elect must cry "day and night." And here lies the reason why the righteous only can pray successfully. The unrighteous in life or desires defeat their own cause, for their ways and their case will not bear investigation, but rather give to the adversary a true ground of appeal against them. The law cannot help the lawless. God cannot aid the elect to do what is not His holy will: they must be able to cry, "*do me justice of mine adversary*" (ἐκδικέω, see R.V. marg.).

But the righteous, having right on their side, may depend absolutely upon God's own righteousness. Sooner or later He will, because, being God, He must cause "judgment to return unto

¹ Psa. ix. 4.

² ντίδικος (antidikos), an adversary at law. Here, and at Matt. v. 25, Luke xii. 58, II. Peter v. 8, only.

³ Rev. xii. 10, and see again Job i. and ii., and Luke xxii. 31, ἐξαιτέω (exaiteo) to demand that one be given up to punishment.

righteousness,"¹ and this He will more certainly do since it is His own chosen and beloved people who cry unto Him, and this for the right to be done. "For the Lord is righteous; He loveth righteousness: the upright shall behold His face,"² that is, stand with confidence in His presence.

That God is long-suffering over His elect is true. And this is mainly (a) that the godly may be perfected by trial;³ (b) that godless men, and the world as a whole, may have the longest possible respite for repentance;⁴ and (c) that the vast and complex affairs of the heavens and of the world of mankind may develop according to His eternal foreknowledge and the unalterable laws of His justice and mercy. The stages of the coming of His kingdom are foretold by God in His Word, and happy are the enlightened who patiently watch the aforetold developments, especially those proceeding before our eyes in these great times.⁵

But when the court at last acts, events move quickly: God will "do justice speedily"; and this His people who have waited for Him have constantly observed. Thus also it will be in the world-wide judgment and purging at the consummation of this age. That will be a period of literally unparalleled tribulation; but for His elect's sake God has determined it shall be brief,⁶

¹ Psa. xciv. 15.

² Psa. xi. 7.

³ Heb. xii. 1-13, etc., etc. See especially the Book of Job, and the Divine comment thereon in Jas. v. 10, 11.

⁴ II. Pet. iii. 9, 15.

⁵ For example, the simultaneous reopening of Egypt, Palestine and Assyria, as foretold by Isaiah (c. xix.) 2,600 years ago. And this is set in connection with the coming again of the Lord (ver. 1) and the promised era of universal blessing (vv. 24, 25).

⁶ Matt. xxiv. 21, 22.

and so He will act rapidly when once He shall arise for the salvation of His people. "In your patience ye shall win your souls [or, lives, *mar.*]"¹

All things rise toward crisis; whether individual matters, or those of the church corporate, or the affairs of heaven and earth entire. And they control the crises who pray mightily and perseveringly, and in harmony with the will of God. For then Christ Jesus, our great Advocate before the Father, can guarantee a truly "complete"² salvation—from judgment deserved, from the power of sin, and from the adversary who accuses and oppresses. But who are they for whom He can so wondrously prevail? They are described as those who "*draw near unto God* through Him"—that is, to praying saints who use His all-powerful name. The parties to the case must appear in court with their advocate, or they largely tie his hands. Christ's high priesthood is in order that we may resort unto God, not to render it immaterial whether we pray or not.

(3) And lastly, it is the prayer of faith that prevails—that is, the supplication of the righteous man who *expects* the promised good. "George Müller believed, and because he believed; prayed; and praying, expected; and expecting, received. Blessed is he that believes, for there shall be a performance of those things which are spoken of the Lord."³ That man of faith well said that faith holds in our transactions with God a similar place to that which money has in our dealings with men. Our neighbour passes to us that which we desire in exchange for money; but God grants our requests if we come to Him with true heart confidence.

¹ Luke xxi. 19.

² Heb. vii. 25 and Luke xiii. 11 only. See R.V. marg.

³ Dr. Pierson, "George Müller of Bristol," 92.

In his celebrated Lectures on Revivals of Religion, Charles Finney inquires when is it our *duty* to believe the promise that God will do that which we ask? He replies that we ought to believe that God will do a certain thing *when we have evidence* that He will do it. For man *cannot* believe a given thing without having what he regards as proof thereof. Mr. Finney then discusses the supremely important question of the various kinds of proof available by which we may become convinced that any given thing is the will of God; and shows that once it is known what the will of God is, we are forthwith under a positive and unevadible obligation to believe that God will do that, in answer to our request.

Now the ground of this faith, this assured expectation, is the *promise* of God, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”¹ It was by having steadfast regard to the promise of God that Abraham’s faith grew stronger and stronger at the same time as the unlikelihood of the event increased; so that when the thing promised had become an entire impossibility, he had become fully assured that it would come to pass.²

Rebels have no claim on their sovereign, nor sinners on God. Consequently we can only expect as much as God of His mercy sees fit to promise us. But it is our duty to expect *that*, and the whole of that. The supposition that God cannot be trusted to keep His word of promise is blasphemous. Faith consists in expecting that He will keep it, and in *acting accordingly*: “Go thy way; thy son liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, *and he went his*

¹ Rom. x. 17.

² Rom. iv. 20, 21.

way.”¹ Elijah believed that God would perform His word of judgment; and having asked God to do so, he forthwith announced to the king the coming drought, thus publicly staking his whole standing and reputation as a prophet upon God’s faithfulness.

Faith therefore (1) is created and sustained by “looking unto the promise of God”; and (2) being thus certain of His will, faith then ventures on God by taking such steps as His will requires. George Müller learned assuredly that God meant him to care for orphans, and he proceeded with arrangements for doing this though having no funds at call. Hudson Taylor knew that God would have him lead missionaries into Inland China, and he took the required steps expecting that funds would be provided as needed. Neither waited for money to be in hand before committing himself to the God appointed business.

Had Elijah spoken thus to the king before being sure of God’s will, presumption would have led to disaster. But had he timidly or prudently refrained from speaking to Ahab, true faith would have been wanting. For faith does not at its own will embark on a sea of adventure, but faith does venture to walk on the sea at the call of God. Faith ventures all, but risks nothing; for there is no risk in performing the will of God. “By faith Abraham when he was called”²—not before, but then—“went out,” on an errand seemingly very risky, but actually wholly safe.

Since faith arises from and depends upon the promises of God, they who deny the authenticity and veracity of Holy Scripture render vital faith impossible. Any question as to the authenticity of a bank-note, or any ambiguity as to its words,

¹ John iv. 50.

² Heb. xi. 8.

forbids trading therewith. Who of the destructive critics of Scripture has been renowned for ventures of faith? Who is so bold as to say in one breath : " I deny or doubt that these words are from God, but I shall claim that He stand to and fulfil the promises they give " ?

(3) Further, true faith disowns any title drawn from supposed merit of our own. But then it finds a holy boldness, proportionate to its humility, by basing its appeal for blessing upon the prevailing merit of Christ Jesus, the Son of God. The saint finds no reason in himself why God should regard his prayer, but he perceives abundant reason in what Christ is to the Father. " For how many soever be the promises of God " (and they are " precious and exceeding great," and cover every possible contingency of human experience, present and eternal), " in Christ is the Yea "—that is, God looks on Christ, and says, Yea, for the sake of My all-worthy Son I can and I will fulfil every promise I ever have given : " wherefore also through Him is the Amen "—the suppliant too looks on the Son of God, and sees in Him such abundant merit that he is able to say, Amen ! that is, *it shall be so* !¹ And this confident expectation works out " unto the glory of God through us."²

¹ Gen. xv. 6, Abraham " amen-ed God." So David, speaking of his house, " Thou, O Jehovah, hast blessed, and *it is blessed* for ever " (I. Chron. xvii. 27).

² II. Cor. i. 20. It is worthy of remark that the R.V. renderings enrich each of the chief passages here considered. *E.g.*, Luke xviii. 1, the " they " in place of " men," fixing the application to disciples, who only can pray powerfully ; and the margin " Do me justice " (ver. 3) showing that one who prays must have right on his side. Luke xxii. 31, the word "*asked* to have you " in place of " desired," showing that Satan had actually applied to God. We do not always ask for what we may desire. And the margin, " obtained you by asking,

Thus every favour comes to us as Christians on precisely the same condition as first secured us God's pardon. "Your sins are forgiven you *for His name's sake*"¹ is the initial assurance that faith grasps. And all further blessings which await our acceptance we are to acquire on the same ground, even as our Lord, ere He left His followers to face life and service and peril without the comfort and protection of His visible presence, seven times over said, "Ask in My name, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."² He who presents another man's cheque, asks for payment *in the name of that other*. And the bank cashes the cheque according to its own estimate of the value of the name at the foot, and without regard to the financial status of the person presenting the draft.

It should be stated that the writer can personally guarantee every one of the incidents of answered prayer before given. More striking examples could doubtless have been gathered from published sources, but the course followed has been taken advisedly, so that (1) the facts may be unquestioned and recent; and (2) that these pages may add somewhat to the ever-increasing

is even more illuminating. II. Cor. i. 20, above: "how many soever" hints at the vast number of the promises, as "all the promises" fails to do: whilst the rest of the verse is made singularly intelligible. Jas. v. 16, "supplication" suggests at once the parallel with Hos. xii. 4 and Heb. v. 7, and the addition of "in its working" greatly strengthens the thought. Rom. iv. 20, 21, Abraham not only did not "stagger," he did not even "waver," and he "waxed strong" in faith, that is, grew ever stronger, until he reached "full assurance."

¹ I. John ii. 12.

² John xiv. 13, 14; xv. 16; xvi. 23, 24 (twice, once by implication as above), 26.

volume of testimony to the faithfulness of God and the efficacy of prayer. And he has ventured to use some personal experiences, principally that every reader, however humble and consciously unworthy, may be emboldened freely to use the name of the Lord Jesus, and expect and secure the interposition of God. For none who shall pray will exceed in utter unworthiness him who here magnifies God for His mercy and faithfulness, unreservedly adopting as his own the words of Jacob : " I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant." ¹ And if such things as are before set down may be gleaned from the experience and observation of but one believer, what extraordinary power must needs reside in the whole Church of God by means of supplication !

Prayer therefore, to be successful, must be—

(1) That of a righteous man : one who is living habitually in conformity with all that he knows of the will of God, and who is ever seeking fuller knowledge thereof as revealed in the Word of God.

(2) It must be of that type which is termed " supplication," and which involves earnest insistence, such as that of the man who went to his friend at midnight seeking bread, ² and would not be denied; and resolute persistence, like that of the widow urging the court to act.

(3) It must be the prayer of faith, even that which confidently expects the answer. This faith is gained by asking for that which God has indicated as His holy will, since He has promised that this shall be done; and it is maintained in energy by paying steadfast regard to the merits of Christ and the faithfulness of God to His promises.

¹ Gen. xxxii. 10.

² Luke xi. 5.

May God grant that to reader and writer there may be henceforth fuller meaning in the familiar call, Let us pray !

They who believe that to pray is to work will not neglect other godly efforts, but they will put the first and final stress upon the effort of praying. Such shall surely find that our God is verily the One "Who worketh for him that waiteth for Him,"¹ the "God that doeth wonders,"² "the living God, Who now, as well as thousands of years ago, listens to the prayers of His children, and helps those who trust in Him."³ For has He not said, and shall He not make it good, "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and inaccessible, which thou knowest not"?⁴ The margin "fenced in" suggests a strongly stockaded camp, or a well-defended city, as Petra the rock city of Edom, which was deemed impregnable, and concerning which the soldier-king cried, "Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom?"⁵ God Who led David thither in triumph, causes other trustful, prayerful hearts to reach the inaccessible goal toward which He leads. He can always do something greater than the greatest we have known, but He wills that we inquire of Him that He should do it.⁶

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen."⁷

¹ Isa. lxiv. 4.

² Psa. lxxvii. 14.

³ George Müller.

⁴ Jer. xxxiii. 3.

⁵ Psa. lx. 9.

⁶ Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

⁷ Eph. iii. 20, 21.