



The Lord Shall Answer.

Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am.—Isa. 58: 9.

"Not what we wish, but what we need
Thy sovereign grace supply;
The good unasked, in mercy grant,
The ill, though asked, deny."

One great stumbling-block to a beginner in the Christian race is the apparent fact that, in spite of God's countless promises with regard to prayer, it often seems to be entirely disregarded. Like the prophets of Baal we cry unto our God, and there is no voice nor any answer. People who fancy that prayer is a charm, a kind of Aladdin's lamp, which will lift them without effort over every difficulty, will soon give up praying in despair. God does not intend to do everything for us, He is too wise and kind to keep us always in the infant-school. His answer to a prayer for help is sometimes to give a harder lesson to learn—He will give us the help we need, no more.

"Where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug's to come,—that's all."

And yet, "Faith cannot be unanswered." God's promises about hearing and answering prayer must be true. God is not a man that He should lie, and we must not forget the fact that the evidence of our senses is not always to be depended on—even in such an everyday matter as the sun's apparent journey round the earth. Some day we shall certainly know that our prayers were answered in the way we should have chosen if we had been able to see the future.

But the promises are not without conditions. Let us study our Bibles, and find out what these conditions are. In the first place we shall discover that God's promises are addressed only to His loyal servants. It is those who honor Him, not doing their own ways, who shall be "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." It is to faithful servants that God is speaking when he says: "Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer." Our Lord says: "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Prayer is not a powerful weapon in the hands of God's enemies: "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."—Prov. 28: 9. "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood."—Isa. 1: 15. If we find, as Jeremiah vividly expresses it, that God has covered Himself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through, the reason may not be far to seek. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Then another reason for God's silence may be our weak faith. "Ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Would you not be astonished if a swift and complete answer to your prayer should be sent? Well, then, surely that proves that you don't really expect one.

But, even God's true and faithful servants do not find that prayer is a magical talisman with which they can work startling miracles, or make life a summer holiday for themselves and their friends. Moses earnestly pleaded with the Lord that he might be allowed to enter Canaan, and his petition was not granted—on this side of death. More than that, he was even forbidden to continue asking for it, for he says: "And the LORD said unto me, let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter." And yet, in spite of the apparent refusal, his petition was heard and granted, although God saw fit to hold

back the answer until after death. Moses had the high honor of standing on a mountain in the Promised Land, in company with the transfigured Son of God and the great prophet, Elijah. St. Paul, too, after asking thrice for the removal of some trouble, which he calls "a thorn in the flesh," seems to have been either forbidden to ask again, or else so filled with the joy of God's strength in his weakness that he ceased to wish it removed, and began, as he says, to "glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Was not that a grand foretaste of the fuller answer to his prayer, which was laid up for him in the eternal future?

We have great reason to thank God because He does not let us grasp the treasures He holds for us before the time. A father shows true wisdom and kindness when he refuses to put into eager baby hands the sharp tools or precious jewels which the child is too young to use or value. We have not been left in ignorance of the terrible mischief men can bring on their own heads by presumptuous, unsubmitive prayers. When the Israelites refused to be content with God's provision for their needs, scorning the manna which was exactly suited to their circumstances, and which had kept them in such health that there was not one feeble person among their tribes, they "provoked the Most High" until, in His just anger, He gave them the flesh they were so presumptuously demanding. They required meat for their lust—and they got it, to their sorrow. They had doubted their Leader's power, saying: "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" and, when He rained flesh upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea, of course they thought themselves very fortunate, having got exactly what they wanted. But it would have been far wiser to have trusted God to supply their needs in His own way, for He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls. May He never so answer our prayers! The plague which struck down their youngest and healthiest men while the meat was yet in their mouths, may not have been in any way miraculous. God knew all the time the danger of a surfeit of flesh in that climate, and if they had only been willing to trust Him, all would have been well.

These things are written for our edification—let us not fail to learn the lesson they would teach. But we need not be afraid to ask for the things which seem to us desirable and good—afraid, I mean, that God may be tempted to give them to us, even though they should be really harmful. If a child trustingly ask his father for bread, he will not receive a stone, or if he ask a fish, a poisonous serpent will not be put into his outstretched hands. Even so our Father, who knows perfectly what things are best for us, will not give stones or serpents to His trusting children, even though they may plead for them in the mistaken idea that they are treasures. Would a kind earthly father do such an unkind thing? As St. Paul said to the Roman Church, God, Who has not kept back from us the greatest conceivable Gift—even His own Son—may be trusted to give us all lesser good things. We really want the best gifts, those which will enrich us for all eternity—though we may not always know it—and God wants to give us these. No one ever yet said with all his heart: "Thy will be done!" and had reason to repent it. Let us thank God every day, at least as much for the prayers He seems to be disregarding as for those He is plainly granting. Perhaps, in a few months or years, we may thank Him far more earnestly for the former than for the latter.

"Far better we should cross His lightning's path,
Than be according to our kids heard,
And GOD should take us at our own word."

Though we may want anything ever so



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