

The Philosophy of Prayer.

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IN the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of Mark, and the twenty-fourth verse, we have five verbs which express the deepest and highest philosophy of prayer, namely—Desire, Pray, Believe, Receive, Have.

First, Desire. All prayer begins with desire. It is a profound expression. It is not a mere wish, but a desire that springs from the very depths of our being including our understanding, affections, sensibility, and will. This is the very core of prayer. In the eighth chapter of Revelation, we have a divine symbol of prayer.

The language of symbolism is stronger than that of literal speech. There we behold the angel of intercession, doubtless the Son of God Himself, standing with the censer of priesthood receiving our prayers, mingling the incense of His own intercession with them, and presenting them to the Father. Then the censer is filled with fire from the altar representing the power of God, and poured out upon the earth. In answer to this prevailing intercession, there follow convulsions of the most extraordinary character, represented by the thunder of God's power and the earthquake that tells of the dissolution of nature, in answer to the power of prayer.

The prayers of the saints are full of imperfection, but the intercession of Jesus cleanses them, and makes them effectual, and they come back in a rain of fire, and thunders of power. In the eighth chapter of Romans we have another picture of prayer representing another Intercessor, namely, the Holy Ghost, who inspires the prayers of the saints, while the Lord Jesus presents them. Thus we have two Advocates, One on earth to generate our prayers, the other in heaven to effectuate them, while the Father, upon the throne, receives them and answers them.

The desire, therefore, of which Jesus speaks here is not a mere caprice begotten of our lusts, but a holy outreaching, born of the Spirit of God, and carrying in its bosom the pledge of its own answer. It reaches God because it came forth from God. It is, therefore, necessary, in order to true prayer,

that there shall be a condition of true holiness. How can a man who is living in the world and saturated with sin have a true prayer or ask anything according to God's will? "Without holiness no man shall see God." There is a vision of God now which comes to the holy heart, and which is only possible to the pure.

There was a time in my own life when I turned my back on the thing I had counted gain, and entered into a deep spiritual union with God, and there came to me not only a profound blessing in my own soul, but the things I had long asked for came to pass. If your prayers are not answered, beloved, look carefully and you will find some lack of obedience, some need of deeper holiness in purpose of life. When a man is conscious of Christ's indwelling it makes him too proud to sin. When I realize that Christ is mine, it makes me a hundred miles higher, and I can live a heavenly life and look down upon the world below me. This will explain why often our children are unsaved. Mrs. Booth used to say to the Lord: "I will not have a child that will dishonor Thee."

I remember a lady, the mother of a son eminent in public life, who came to me begging me to pray for her son. I asked her why she wanted him saved, she said because she could not bear to think of not meeting him in heaven. Then I said, "You are willing that he should live for seventy years in this world, if only you can be sure of meeting him in heaven at last; your desire is a purely selfish one." She saw immediately her mistake, and she went to God and implored Him to save her boy that he might live to glorify her Saviour; and it was not long before he became an earnest, consecrated Christian.

Second. The next condition of prayer is to believe. In the previous verses it is put even more strongly. Believing prayer is represented as a great fiat, and having in it a kind of creative authority and power. He says, "We shall say to this mountain, be thou removed," and it shall be done. In the parallel passage in Luke the figure of the sycamine tree is used. In Mark, it is the mountain.

The sycamine tree represents some deeply rooted principle of evil, which

can be pulled up at the command of prayer; the mountain represents a mass of dead, inert matter; but in both cases prayer is represented as the command of one who acts in the name of God, and claims with His authority that it shall be done. Have you ever noticed that when the Lord Jesus was teaching the disciples about love and forgiveness of one another, they did not say, "Lord, increase our love," but "Lord increase our faith?" It is faith that brings the love. When the pebble gets in between the stone of the grist mill, the miller does not put his finger in to pull out the pebble, but he lets a double force of the water power upon it, and in a few moments the pebble is ground to powder.

George Holland, of England, found himself with five hundred of the waifs of London, looking to him for bread. For a while he tried to raise the necessary funds by the usual processes, but after he had shaken his apple tree until there was not an apple left on it, and the starving boys were staring him in the face, he called the boys around him, and together they told their heavenly Father of their need. It was not long before the door-bell rang and there was a cart full of barrels containing cooked meat from a number of hotels and boarding houses, enough to supply all their wants for a good while. After they got the barrels in, a gentleman looked in, and seeing so much meat, said, "Now all you need is bread to go with this meat;" and sure enough, before an hour another cart was at the door with barrels of bread, and ever since the Lord has been feeding His trusting children, and the work has been going on by believing prayer.

When our hearts go out toward others in tenderness, we instinctively shrink from the public gaze; and the command of Jesus to "enter into thy closet" is only a command to follow out natural instincts. We may lead in public prayer, and still obey the spirit of the command: but we violate it the moment we begin to indulge in the endearing epithets which are usual in displays of kittenish affection, or when we begin to mouth our sentences with a view to receiving our reward from men.—Bible Reader.