

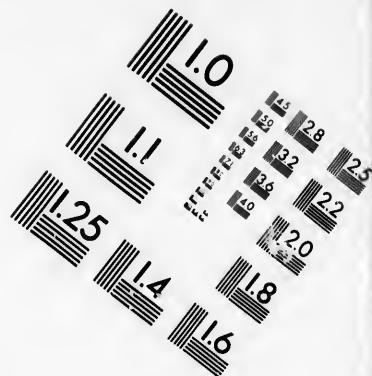
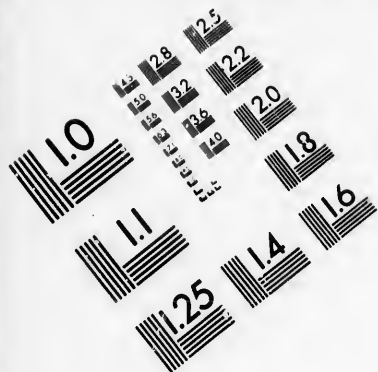
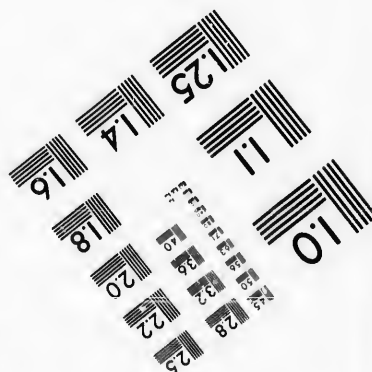
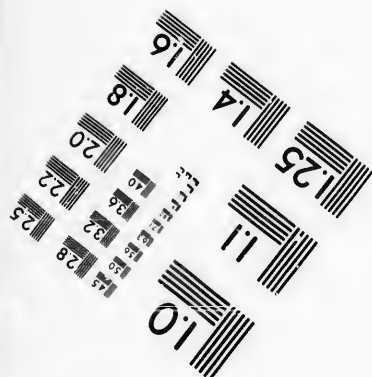
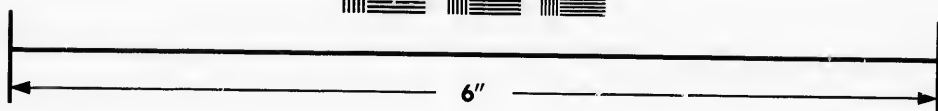
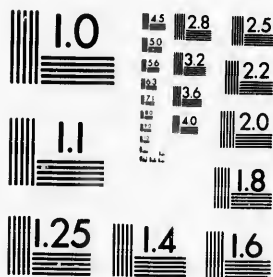


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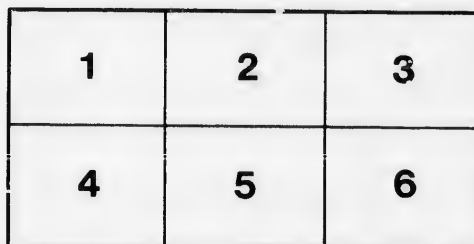
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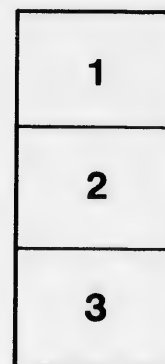
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A SERMON;
THE
PRAYER OF FAITH,

BY
REV. WILLIAM MACALISTER,

METIS.



MONTREAL:

PRINTED BY JOHN C. BECKET, AT HIS STEAM PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT,
38, GREAT SAINT JAMES STREET.

1855.

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P R E F A C E .

The following Discourse was preached in Coté Street Church on Sabbath, the 10th of June, 1855, during the late Session of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and has been published at the request of said Synod.

But for the earnest solicitation of brethren and friends, for whom the author has great respect, he would not have consented to put a production so very imperfect, into the hands of any individual, and his only consolation while now preparing the sermon for the press is, that if it cannot do much good, he feels assured that it will not do much harm.

Simple, and unpretending though it be, the writer can honestly say, that it was the result of many prayers, and that he sends it forth in the name of Him who loves to save and comfort His chosen people "by the foolishness of preaching," and who often prefers the stone and the sling to what may be considered better armour.

Montreal, June 14th, 1855.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH.

Matt. vii. 7, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

These are Christ's words. They form a small part of his sermon on the Mount, which, perhaps, was his first public discourse. It was in all probability extemporaneous; yet, it affords the most ample and satisfactory evidence of his heavenly wisdom, and perfect holiness, if it does not likewise afford proof of his divinity. We can scarcely suppose that any mere man, even though perfect, could, without previous preparation, utter so many profound, pure, and practical sentiments with so much ease and majesty.

The moral grandeur of Christ's sermon is hid, like the heavenly glory of his person and conduct, from the spiritually blind. You are aware that in the eyes of most men who were privileged to see Christ when on earth, he was "as a root out of a dry ground," having "no form nor comeliness;" whereas, his disciples "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;" so, to the profane and worldly, the sermon on the Mount, must be very uninteresting, if not quite repulsive; while to those who are of God, and who behold things in the light of life, it is seen to be most lovely and divine. To all the called and sanctified it is as numerous heavenly gems, skilfully set in a lovely casket; or like so many bright and variegated rays of heavenly light pouring forth from the glorious Sun of Righteousness. If the heavenly truths contained in this single discourse, were thoroughly understood by us, and so written on our hearts, that we should be constrained to act them out in our daily walk and conversation, we would certainly be most wise and holy, and could not fail to be both happy and useful

The discourse is not a long one, but it contains much truth, and in every form. We have in it many promises and exhortations, as well as many doctrines and precepts.

The text is an exhortation to a much neglected, but most important duty ; a duty which, if rightly performed, would with certainty be followed by abundance of heaven's richest blessings. Indeed, if discharged properly and universally, by every Christian and every Church of Christ, it would prove the effectual means of removing every evil, and of procuring every good. It would make every soul a heavenly temple, every family a sanctuary of peace and joy, and the world another paradise, fairer, brighter, and far more blissful than the one which sin destroyed. The duty to which we refer is, prayer, which we wish at present to explain and enforce, and in such a manner that our remarks may constitute an exposition of these few, but comprehensive words. "Ask and it shall be given you." The remarks which we wish to make shall be arranged under the following heads :

- 1st. The promise of the text.
- 2nd. The Promiser.
- 3d. The persons to whom the promise is made.
- 4th. The condition on which they may expect its fulfilment.

I.—We consider in the first place the promise of the text, and in doing so it may be well to direct your attention to the two following points—the object of the promise, or thing promised : and the certainty of the promise, or the fact, that what is promised shall be given.

I. The thing promised. "It shall be given." Because the pronoun is singular, and the text quite similar to one in Luke, which we shall read, and in which the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the subject of the promise, we are ready to imagine that the Spirit is the blessing promised in the text.

The parallel passage in Luke will be found in the XIth chapter. We shall read from the ninth verse.

“ 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.

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

“ If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone ? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent ?

“ Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer 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 ?”

The Holy Spirit is the subject of the promise in the above passage, and it is introduced by language quite similar to that of the text ; indeed, the language in both places is quite identical. But though the language is the same in both places, the promise is not. The promise, as found in Luke, was not a part of the sermon on the mount ; but, as appears from the beginning of the chapter, it was made on a different occasion. Of course, the promise of our text includes the Holy Spirit ; and we believe that He is the most important of all new covenant blessings, and that if He dwelt constantly in our hearts, and filled them with his holy light, life, strength and joy, we should have a heaven while on earth, and might be sure at death of eternal glory. But though the promise of the text includes the Spirit, it is, we believe, a general promise, pledging the bestowment of each blessing which every child of God may need, during every moment of his existence on earth. It pledges only one blessing for every succeeding moment, and the blessing most suitable for every child of God in any of the very varied circumstances of his checkered pilgrimage.

God, though infinitely rich, and most liberal, seldom bestows upon any of His children many blessings at once. He gives each child abundance, but in such a way that He keeps all his spiritual family perfectly dependent upon Himself, in such a condition that if they would get much

and regularly, they must "pray without ceasing." His gifts are bestowed, one after another, moment after moment. And, as He bestows his favors in a gradual, so He also gives them in an orderly manner, according to a plan that has been arranged and fixed from eternity, and from which, because the result of infinite wisdom and goodness, He never needs to deviate, and will not do so. As He never gives all the seasons of the year at once, or summer before spring, or harvest before summer; so He never bestows at once all the blessings which are provided and prepared in Christ for any of his people. These blessings are all bestowed in their proper order, and at their proper time. He would sooner give flesh and wine to infants as their daily food, than give strong spiritual meat to those who are but babes in Christ. We all know that He never gives glory before grace; sanctification before justification; the pardon of sin before faith in Christ. Yet He is not more orderly in the bestowment of these, than in the bestowment of all other blessings: hence, no one need expect the higher blessings of the divine life till he has received those of a lower character, that are preparatory to the safe possession and enjoyment of the higher. For example, those who have not been brought, by divine grace, into a most humble, penitential and confiding condition, are not prepared for intimate fellowship with God, and should they ask the blessing earnestly, it would not be granted. God will not grant even the smallest temporal blessing as a token of his love before He has made the person on whom He would bestow it, a child of his spiritual family. There is not a moment but He is ready to bestow on each child of His great family some one blessing; the very blessing which he or she most needs at the time. Of course, it may be a small blessing, as compared with others which have been received, or may yet be obtained, but it is the very best for him or her at that moment, and should be cheerfully preferred to other blessings, which may be thought more valuable. The special blessing which each Christian needs, at any one period of his life, is the very blessing, we believe, that is promised in the text. If asked for aright, it would be given, and should, therefore be asked in faith. The blessing may be temporal in its character, or it may be spiritual: it may refer to this life, or to the life yet to come.

It may be small or great, a personal blessing or a family one, or one having relation to the church, the nation or the world ; but whatever be its kind or extent, if it is the blessing needed in present circumstances, and promised, if asked for aright, it shall be given ; yes should it be, not to the half, but to the whole of God's kingdom ; nay, though it be the full and eternal possession and enjoyment of God himself, which is the very greatest of all great blessings.

2. For, observe, the promise is sure. The text does not say, ask, and it may be given ; or ask, and you shall very likely obtain ; no, but, ask and it *shall* be given you. The promise is sure ; no room is left by it for hesitation or doubt ; and the Christian should ask the blessing with the most perfect confidence.

But, it may be asked, how can the Christian know what the particular blessing is, which he specially needs, and which God is ready to give at the present moment ?

Before answering this question, we would here state our conviction that many, very many Christians, really know not what they should pray for. They are so self-willed, have so little of the Spirit, and are always kept at such a distance from God, that they cannot possibly know His mind regarding them at any moment ; and, therefore, cannot know the thing which, upon the whole, is best for them at present. They must always pray in the dark, or if they do so with any confidence, their confidence must be of a very general character. They can never know that they will get the precise blessing for which they feel inclined to pray at any time. Yet, we would have you to observe, very specially, that though they do not and cannot pray in faith, their prayers are neither sinful nor vain. Being Christians, their prayers are sincere, and because offered in the name of Christ, they shall find acceptance, and shall obtain a favourable answer of one kind or another, and sooner or later. It would be well if all who profess to be Christians prayed even in this way, but it is not the best way of praying. The highest style of prayer is that by which we pray for what we would be sure to get--when we ask in faith and receive what we ask.

It has been said, that at least any spiritual blessing for which we have Gods promise, may be at any time asked with confidence, by any Christian. We could not say so. The assertion does not, in so far as our knowledge extends, accord with Christian experience. It is quite certain that every spiritual blessing promised shall be obtained at one time or another ; but the question is, will the particular spiritual blessing that is asked for at any time be given when asked for ? This is what we cannot readily believe. Would a back-slidden Christian get pardon from God, if he asked it before repentance ? Would the Christian that is not distinguished either for humility or zeal, and not burdened with great affliction of any kind, get very intimate fellowship with God if he asked it ? Or should a Christian ask for an amount of wisdom, courage, or patience, that his circumstances do not require, would he get it ? We feel assured that he would not : nay we are persuaded that no Christian who is unfaithful to the little grace that has been bestowed upon him, will get a great increase of grace, should he ask it both earnestly and confidently.

“The secret of the Lord” must be with us if we would be very successful in prayer. We must know his mind in regard to us at any given time. How can this be known ? In no other way, we answer, than by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Romans viii, 26, 27. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” We would be inclined to endorse the following statements which have been made in explanation of the above passage. We are persuaded that they perfectly accord with the general experience of distinguished Christians, and throw light on the manner in which they are taught by the Spirit in regard not only to the way in which prayers should be offered, but also in regard to the object to be prayed for. “We are compassed with infirmities : we know but little of ourselves : we know not what is coming upon us : we know not Satan’s position or design : we know but little of God’s provision or intention * * * * *

But though thus infirm, Jesus is touched with a sympathetic

feeling for us ; and the Holy Spirit is given to assist us. He teaches us what we want ; leads us to the precious promises ; furnishes us with the prevailing plea ; excites us to pray, and assists us in prayer. He produces the ardent desire ; bestows the wrestling power ; and warms the affections while pleading ; gives us such a keen sense of what we need, and such an ardent desire after it, that unutterable groans are begotten, to which God attends."

The following texts show that the apostles and early Christians, could, and really did pray in faith for specific blessings, and must therefore in one way or another have been instructed by God in regard to such blessings.

Mark xi. 24. "Therefore I say unto you, what things soever you desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them."

This text no doubt has reference to the working of miracles, but we have no proof that it refers exclusively to such extraordinary things. It refers to "what things soever" the disciples might desire. They would just get whatever they asked, and no doubt because their desires were brought into unison with the purposes of God, by divine teaching.

James i. 5. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him. But let him 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." Christians that had no wisdom, though they found themselves placed, in the providence of God, in circumstances where wisdom was essential to faithfulness, might be sure that it would be granted to them if they asked it. In their circumstances they would dishonour God if they did not ask in faith—with the fullest confidence that the blessing which they so much needed would be given.

1 John v. 14. "And this is the confidence that we have in 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 have the petitions that we desired of him."

John speaks here in accordance with the general experience of Christians in his day, and from his statements we are, it is presumed, warranted to infer :

1st. That Christians then knew often, if not generally, the things which they could ask from God with confidence.

2d. That their prayers were in unison with his will.

3d. That praying thus, they were confident they would get what they prayed for—so confident, that they felt, even while engaged in prayer, as if they had obtained the things prayed for. And if Christians in the days of the apostles could pray thus, why may Christians in these days not do so? May Christians of this age not be as resigned to the will of God, and as devoted to his service? May they not as certainly and as fully crucify the flesh, and as constantly and joyfully live in the Spirit, wishing to have no will of their own but to please God in all things? And if they can be brought into this resigned and devoted condition, may they not expect divine guidance, and more especially the counsel of the Lord in regard to prayer, the most important duty in which they can engage? Is not such guidance absolutely needed and positively promised?

The Spirit is promised as our monitor, and in the fulfilment of His office He is surely as ready to guide us into every duty as into all truth. If we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, does he not promise to guide our steps—give us counsel regarding every step we must take in the closet, as well as in the church and the world? “Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way.” “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” And surely the following promise will be as readily fulfilled in the experience of Christians, when they would know what the Lord would give them, and do by them in answer to prayer, as in relation to anything else. “Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left.” If the Spirit now fills the place of

Christ as the constant companion, and kind, familiar, and considerate friend of the members of the church, and if they can be filled by Him as the early Christians were so filled, that they may be considered one with God; can any one doubt for a moment the possibility of receiving from Him such counsel, when engaged in prayer, that they may know what they should pray for?

Here it may be asked, how does the Spirit make known to Christians the will of God in regard to the things for which they should pray? Does He speak to them by an audible voice? Certainly not. Is it by sensible impressions on their minds, constraining them to pray for specific things? We do believe that many of God's people are thus impressed, and that those far advanced in the divine life—who are entirely resigned and devoted to God—who have been enabled by grace to subdue their own carnal activity of mind, and wait upon and walk with the Lord in the most humble and confiding frame of spirit, can very readily discern the softest, most gentle influences of the Spirit; but such impulses are not the ordinary way in which they come to know the things for which they should pray. They have far better and safer guidance in the matter by the heart, conscience, and reason, when they have been sanctified, and are imbued and directed by the Holy Spirit. When the heart is brought into a resigned and godly condition, the conscience made very tender and active, and the reason brought into such a state as to be able and disposed to take the most enlarged and impartial view of their circumstances. Christians, depending upon the secret influences of the Spirit as their monitor, will not in ordinary cases find it impossible to fix upon the blessings which in present circumstance are most for the glory of God and their own highest interests; and should they not be as certain as they would wish to be when they begin to pray, they may receive more of the counsel of the Lord as they proceed with prayer. If the mind is in the right direction—viz., praying for the right objects, and in a proper spirit—two things are often, perhaps, usually experienced—the soul is drawn nearer and nearer to God, and God seems to draw nearer to the soul.

When Christians feel that they have in this way got into the presence of God, and have His ear, "whatsoever they ask, they know that they have the petitions they desire of Him." We would have you to remember distinctly, that God does not guide His people as He does the material worlds that move in their orbits, by a power that they cannot resist, nor does He guide them by instinct as He does irrational creatures, but in a manner that accords with their position as rational and accountable beings; yet this guidance of the Spirit by a sanctified nature or a pure heart, tender conscience and a heavenly enlightened reason, though somewhat indirect, is as truly from God as if He spoke to them in an audible voice; and were all the members, faculties, and affections, of our nature perfectly freed from sin and filled with the Spirit, it would be complete, and no perfectly holy Christian could be at any loss to know, at any period, what the blessings are for which the Lord would have him to pray. Even as things now are, (and we believe no man is perfect or can be so while in the flesh, though by continuing to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we can make a nearer approach to it than many seem to imagine)—if Christians were but comparatively perfect, they would not have the difficulties which they now have, in fixing upon the objects for which at any time they ought to pray. Indeed, if ordinary Christians would just remember that God bestows His blessings in an orderly manner, it would relieve them of a good deal of perplexity on this most interesting and important subject. For example, as God does not in general make His people useful till He has made them zealous, those that are slothful should pray to the Lord to make them zealous, before they presume to ask to be made useful. As no one can be zealous in the divine service without ardent love both for God and man, every Christian should pray for love before he prays for zeal; and as there can be no love without faith, and no faith without conviction of sin, and no conviction without knowledge—knowledge of the character of God, law of God, the relation of man to God, and the obligations necessarily resulting from this relation—and as knowledge cannot be obtained without truth, and very much serious reflection upon it,

those who would obtain conviction of sin, faith, and the love of God, must begin by the prayerful study of the truth as revealed in the word of God.

II. We are now prepared, under the second head of discourse, to speak of the Person who makes the promise—who says, “Ask, and it shall be given you.” Had he sufficient knowledge of the character and purposes of the “Hearer and Answerer of prayer” to speak thus? Had he authority to do so—can his word be relied on?

My dear brethren, Jesus is the promiser. The only begotten and well beloved son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father—he alone knows the character and will of God, and was sent from heaven to earth to make them known. Moreover, it is for his sake that any prayer finds acceptance, and is answered. Nay, he himself is the answerer of every prayer. He is now at the right hand of God, “over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” “All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.” He is “the truth.” He could not lie or deceive.

The above facts are quite sufficient to inspire the utmost confidence in Christ; but, there are other facts which, though not necessary to increase our confidence in the glorious promiser, are very gratifying and encouraging to those who put their trust in the blessed Redeemer, and who desire to receive out of his fulness, even ‘grace for grace.’ They are :

1st. His constant presence with his people. “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Earthly benefactors who could aid Christians, and would be delighted to do so, if they were at hand, may be so very far away that it would be vain to look to them for help, or even for sympathy. It is not so with Jesus; he is always by the side of his people; on their right hand, and on their left; around them and in them. His eye is never off them for a moment. He is always within call, and stands ready and pledged to give them every blessing they really need. O! my brethren, what a comfort this, how unspeakably consoling and encouraging is the solemn and delightful fact. O! that Christians would continually remember the fact, and endeavour at all

times to realize the presence of Him who is their hope, and their all.

2d. Christ's infinite and unchanging love for his people. From eternity his delights were with the sons of men. He loved them more than the joys and honors of heaven, which he cheerfully relinquished, for a time, for their sake. He loved them more than his life, which he laid down, amidst shame and sorrow, for their salvation. The love of Jesus for his people, is a mysterious love ; there is nothing to which we can compare it ; there is no way by which we can comprehend or fathom it. Brethren, it is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea ! If the love of Christ for his people is infinite and unchangable, what may they not expect to receive from him in answer to their prayers of faith !

3d The close and tender relations by which Christ is bound to his people. He is partaker of their nature ; a son of man as truly as he is the son of God. He is our kinsman and brother, and has all those warm, tender, anxious feelings that members of a holy family have for each other. He is husband, and never was earthly husband so considerate, sympathizing, faithful, and loving. He is the head, and has the same close, essential relationship to the Church, that the natural head has to the physical body. He is the very life of his people—is to them what the soul is to the natural body. If Christ is so closely, variously, and tenderly related to his people, why should they be backward in approaching him in prayer, or doubtful in regard to his answering their daily, their hourly petitions ?

4th. Christ's promises and exhortations should greatly encourage his people to pray. Even had he neither promised nor exhorted in relation to prayer, his people knowing his benevolent character, and the tender and close relations that exist between him and them, might well be encouraged to pray to him, and with perfect confidence ; but when he earnestly exhorts them to ask, and faithfully, and frequently promises to give them what they need, in answer to prayer ; his people are guilty of a great sin when they do not pray, or when praying for those things which are promis-

ed, and which they absolutely need, they pray in unbelief, or with little or no hope of getting the blessings prayed for.

5th. The fact, that when Christ blesses his people in answer to prayer, he honors himself, and his Father, and greatly benefits the moral universe, at the head of which he is placed for the sake of the Church, should encourage to prayer, and give confidence to his people, when they pray aright. All the infinite riches of divine grace and heavenly glory has been put into the hands of Christ as Mediator, that he might show his own love and the love of the Father for all who were redeemed by his blood. And the full manifestation of the love of God in the gifts of his grace in Christ, was intended not merely for the special benefit of Christians, but for the good of all his moral and responsible creatures in heaven as well as upon earth. And being so, if Christ were unfaithful to his solemn and glorious trust he would greatly dishonor himself, and his Father, and do unspeakable injury to the whole moral universe.

6th. The experience of God's people in all past generations, should encourage Christians in our day, and at every future period of time, to pray to Christ, and with confidence. Many, many, have already trusted in him, and have never been put to shame. He has always made good his promises to those who could claim them; and the prayer of faith will never want its answer. No! no! brethren: we believe that Christ would sooner leave the throne of heaven or even cease to be, than refuse to answer the prayers of those who ask in faith.

III. Under the third head of discourse, we propose to show to whom the promise of the text is made: "Ask, and it shall be given you." The pronoun, 'you,' refers to a particular class of persons. The sermon on the mount was delivered in the hearing of a great multitude of persons, most of whom, no doubt, were in unbelief. But though delivered in the hearing of all, and for the benefit of all who stood before, or around Christ, it was more especially addressed to his disciples, as we may discover by attending to the first part of it, and to various statements throughout it. In the beginning of the chapter, which contains the first part of the discourse, it is said:

"He went up into a mountain; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying." In the eleventh verse, it is said: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you." In the thirteenth, "Ye are the salt of the earth." In the fourteenth, "Ye are the light of the world;" and in the verse preceding the text, it is said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." The pronoun, 'you,' in the text, refers undoubtedly to the disciples, and the promise must be considered as limited to those who, like them, are united to Christ, and followers of him. We know that it is the duty of all men to pray to God; that unbelievers should pray for the Spirit to enable them to believe; and they have great encouragement to do so in the facts, that God commands them to pray, and that he has at times answered the earnest prayers of very wicked men. But regular and abundant answers, such as the text promises—the bestowment of every needful blessing just when needed, and asked, cannot be expected and shall not be obtained by any man who is yet without God and without hope. Till a man is justified in Christ, he is not in a position in which he can ask any blessing from Christ, with the assurance of receiving what he asks. Nay a man must not only be in Christ, but to a great extent be conformed to him, before he can expect to have favour with God and prevail in prayer.

IV. Under the fourth head of discourse we require to point out the condition, on which the promise of the text will be fulfilled to those to whom it is made. It is stated in a single, but very emphatic word, "Ask." In speaking of prayer as a condition on which the promise of the text is to be fulfilled, we must guard you against the pernicious error of supposing that we can merit any blessing, the very smallest, by our prayers. Meriting the favour of God, by anything which we, who are sinners, can do, is a thing entirely out of the question, that should not for a moment be allowed to enter the mind. The instant it does so, it pollutes the mind, awakens the spirit of self-dependence, and consequently separates us from fellowship with Christ, who is all our salva-

tion and all our hope. We have no claim even to the smallest temporal blessing, but by Christ; and his blood and righteousness, which alone have procured for us the continuation of natural life and its various blessings, have also procured for us eternal life—all the blessings of grace, and all the still greater blessings of glory.

We can merit nothing by prayer, and yet, we must pray, as earnestly, and constantly as if our prayers could entitle us to the blessings which we ask. If God has seen it to be a wise and right thing to appoint a certain means to be used by us in obtaining the blessings of the covenant of grace, none need be surprised to find that he requires his people to use the means properly, with a care and earnestness suitable to the vast importance of the blessings which they seek by prayer. Be assured, dear brethren, that it is not any kind of asking that will obtain answers from God.

There are many wrong ways of prayer, whereas there is but one right way. We are now prepared to show you how Christians must pray if they would receive from God, when they ask, and all they desire. This part of the subject is so very important that we should like to be very particular in our treatment of it, but we have already said so much, and have yet so much to say, that we cannot dwell on it. We shall only name the different points which we would most willingly have particularly explained, making a remark on those that require special attention.

1st. If Christians would be successful in prayer, they must not pray for too many things at once. If their prayers are personal, and in secret, the better way is to ask only one thing at a time: the thing which at the moment they most need.

2d. They should engage in the very solemn and important duty very deliberately; they should meditate before they pray.

3d. They should pray devoutly, with all those devotional feelings in exercise that are characteristic of the godly man: such as, deep humility, holy awe, sorrow for past sins, and gratitude for past mercies; love to God, and holy joy in

Him, for his own infinite excellencies, and because he is our own God, and shall be our everlasting portion.

4th. They should pray in the name of Christ, by which we don't mean that they should use his name in their prayers, but that they should realise their need of him as mediator, their connection with him as their surety, and head, and feel in their hearts that an infinitely holy God could not hear their prayers, if they were not washed from their sins in his blood, and clothed with his righteousness.

5th. They should pray in the Spirit ; they should rejoice in the presence of such a glorious Agent—know his offices, and take the advantage of them.

6th. They should greatly value, and be most anxious to obtain the blessing for which they presume to pray to God, in the name of Christ, and by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. Many ask and don't obtain, because they pray like a certain person who has confessed "That he contented himself with telling God that he wanted His graces, and yet could bear well enough to be without them." If we would succeed in prayer, we must value the blessings we ask, and feel that we cannot be contented while without them.

7th. They should try to get very near to God while pleading with him. There is such a thing as Job calls, getting to his seat. When we reach it, we can command the ear of God, and may be quite sure of obtaining His blessing.

8th. They should be deeply affected in prayer. David was a most courageous man ; when a lion rose against him at one time, he took him by his beard, and smote him and slew him ; and when Goliath defied the armies of the living God, he went out against him, and destroyed him with a sling and a stone ; yet, he wept when he prayed. And the Saviour's prayers were strong cryings with tears.

9th. They must ask for the glory of God, and not to consume the mercies which they may receive upon their own lusts. And let us not forget that wisdom, righteousness, and usefulness may be thus consumed, as well as the perishing blessings which we need, for the comfort of the body.

10th. They must pray till they are answered. In taking hold of God, in the name of Christ, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit, they must hold fast, like Jacob, and refuse to let go till they have prevailed.

Before we attempt to make any application of the truths now delivered in your hearing, it may not be thought out of place to say, that two are better than one in prayer. The blessed Saviour has said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in heaven." In cases, where Christians that have perfect confidence in each other, and agree in the thing to be asked for, are apparently unsuccessful—fasting should be added to prayer.

My dear brethren, from the text as now explained, you may discover that we are not straitened in God, but in our own bowels. The reason why we have not, is not that God has little to give us, or because, though infinitely rich, he has no desire to be liberal. The true reason—the only reason, why we have not, is, that we ask not, or that when we ask, we ask amiss.

True it is, that till we cease to be governed by our own ignorance, prejudice and passions, and become submissive to the will of God, we will never get what we want from him. He gives not according to the will of foolish, fallen man, but according to his own great, wise, and gracious will. But can any one fancy for a moment, that because God gives as He thinks proper, man shall be kept in spiritual poverty,—in a position in which he cannot expect to be either very happy or very useful? The man that reasons thus has a very unworthy conception of the goodness of God, which must be completely removed before he will pray much, or even pray at all, with any sincerity and earnestness. Do we ever reason in such a way in regard to blessings which we expect to receive from men? For example, when we have a great wish to become wise, and find a well qualified teacher who can give us all the wisdom we wish to obtain, do we imagine that we can never make rapid progress in educa-

tion, unless the teacher submits to give us instruction according to a plan of our own, which he knows would be a ruinous plan? If we have confidence in an earthly teacher, we know that the very way to advance rapidly in knowledge is to submit implicitly to the teacher's will. When a child wishes to prosper under the care of a wise and holy father, he never supposes he can best obtain his object by trying to govern his father, but by submitting to his will, and trying to please him in all things. My dear brethren, we lose nothing but gain everything by losing all confidence in ourselves, and putting the most entire confidence in God, wishing to be, have, and do only what He would have us to be, possess, and do. In this humble, and dependent condition we would grow in grace more rapidly, and become far more happy, and greatly more useful than we ever can, in trying to follow the bent of our own proud and perverse will.

Brethren, without submission to the divine will, we need not attempt to pray, unless indeed it be for submission, for all such carnal and proud approaches to God imply the wish to rule Him, and are a virtual denial of His authority and excellencies. But if we have confidence in God, and are ready to bow to His authority, and ask His favour according to His own will, we cannot begin to pray too soon, nor can we pray too frequently or too earnestly. Humble, believing prayer is one of the very best ways of honouring God, while at the same time it is one of the readiest and most effectual ways of benefitting ourselves and others. By prayer we may greatly benefit not our own families and friends only, but the Church and the world, even all the generations of men to the end of time. It has been well said "that prayer makes every Christian, in a sense, omnipresent, and omnipotent, for it prevails with Him who is both."

We doubt not that many pray in these days, degenerate and worldly though they be; but we have no reason to think that many pray effectually—that the prayer of faith is a common thing with us. If this were the case, would Christians everywhere be so lean? would the Church be as divided and worldly as she is, or would the means of grace be so

powerless? Dear brethren, we feel assured that there is but little effectual prayer in these times. No one could expect to find such prayer in the world, and the Church has no time for it, even if she had the inclination. There is such haste to be rich now-a-days, and as a consequence of this, such a competition in business, such effort, busile, and confusion, that professors can get neither leisure nor quiet for earnest continued prayer. Many of them cannot always find time even for family worship, and when they are permitted to engage in it, they have to be short. Wrestling with God, or even waiting upon Him for any considerable time now, is out of the question, a thing that we cannot expect, and do not look for.

Is there much effectual prayer even amongst ministers? Alas, many, too many of them, are quite up to the improvements of the age. They fancy that much earnest prayer is not needed, and because unfashionable they really think that it is not desirable or becoming. It is not at all improbable that some ministers would feel quite ashamed if the portion of their people, whom they most respect, and on whom they are most dependent, supposed that they were often in their closet, or as frequently on their knees in their study, as at their desk. Other ministers, though very sincere, and disposed to be very faithful, have really no time for effectual prayer, because their people are seldom with God, have no delight in his presence, and could not spend the Sabbath without much weariness, if they could not hear two or three sermons during the day. To meet their case, ministers must be prepared to interest them during the dull hours of the Sabbath. They must not only have two, or perhaps three sermons, but these sermons must be eloquent as well as sound; and besides preparing two, if not three, eloquent sermons during the week, the minister must visit the sick, the poor, and the dying, and do a great deal more out-door, extra work. Now, where in the midst of all this work, and the preplexity of mind that it must occasion, can ministers have either the leisure or the heart for long continued and earnest prayer? Effectual, fervent prayer, though very rare, is exactly what we need. It is the very thing which is every where most urgently called for; if not speedily obtained, the

ministry and Church shall be ruined as well as the world. We, most distinctly and most earnestly, say that the prayer of faith is the thing most needed by the ministry.

Evangelical ministers in these days are sound enough; they know the truth as it is in Jesus, very well, far better than Luther did, or any of the Fathers of the Church, now in such repute. Most of these ministers are learned enough, and just because they are so, do they need to pray very much, much more than ministers not so well qualified. Be assured, my brethren, that the Lord will use no instrument in His service that is not put into His hand, and more especially no sharp and polished instrument, that is well prepared for His work, lest the glory due to Him should be given to the instrument. Brethren, God has bound praying and preaching together, and men have no right to separate them. Nay, God has put praying before preaching, and therefore, the man who is unwilling to give himself to prayer has no warrant from God to preach, and should he do so, he will do so in vain, nay, to the hurt of souls. Ministers that are so overwrought that they have no time for effectual prayer, should remonstrate with those who so severely tax their time and energies, and if they cannot effect a change for the better, in any other way, they should stand up for their own rights, and like the Apostles, refuse to be hindered in the discharge of their own most important duties. The Apostles would not take any special care for the bodily wants, even of the poor and destitute. They wisely determined to give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And till ministers in our day follow their example, and give the precedency to prayer, because the most important part of their work—the part without which their preaching would be most injurious, how can they expect the divine blessing to rest on their labors. Nay, my brethren, till ministers spend more time and energy at the throne of grace than they do at their desks, or in their pulpits, they will not greatly injure Satan's kingdom nor benefit the kingdom of Christ. Be assured my brethren, it is not by reasoning or eloquence that the wicked heart of fallen man is to be subdued and created anew. It is not by the feeble voice of

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man that Satan is to be expelled from any human heart where he loves to dwell, and of which he has the firmest hold. No, no; the power that made man can alone regenerate him, and He alone that drove Satan from heaven can expel him from the affections of any sinful heart. Ministers can do much without the Spirit of God. They can collect congregations and keep them together, make them clearly understand the difference between truth and error; they can make even the worst of their hearers, sober, industrious, and moral; implant in them a taste for the forms of religion; convince them of the necessity of the new birth, and bring them to the very verge of it; but the new nature they cannot give, the living union with Christ they cannot effect. These things can only be accomplished by supernatural agency, and such agency cannot be expected without prayer. Who ever heard of a prayerless minister being a successful preacher? Is it not a well known fact that ministers that were most successful in preaching devoted very much of their time to prayer, the best of their time, and often much of the night as well as the best periods of the day?

If the ministry needs effectual prayer, so does the church. If the church is not revived, the world cannot be converted, and if the world is not converted it must be destroyed. The conversion of the world instrumentally is the special work, not of the ministry, but of the church. Of course ministers must take a share of the work, and a large share too, but it is not exclusively or chiefly their work. The whole church is expected to do the work, and hence she is spoken of as the leaven that is to quicken the whole dead lump, the light which is to dispel the world's darkness. Can she do the glorious work assigned to her, and for which she is responsible, in her present condition? And how is she to be purified and enlivened, when the most faithful preaching of the word has no good influence upon her? Perhaps the Lord will awaken her and purify her by severe affliction. We really cannot tell how she is to be brought into the condition in which she shall be disposed to devote herself to earnest prayer, but certain we are that until she is much, very much with God, and learns to take hold of Him, and so wrestle with Him as to prevail, she will not fulfill the

end for which she was called to Christ, and is now maintained by His arm and supplied by His grace.

The church has much, very much need, to pray for herself in these sad and most trying times. She is now in great danger, and Christ is speaking very solemnly to her; she may not hear His voice, but He is addressing her most pointedly and earnestly in such words as these—"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

The world should command the prayers of the church. She is in a most critical state at this moment; she is on the eve of revolutions of the most extensive and destructive character, revolutions that will change completely the face of the whole earth. The church should know this, and be ready to pray that a remnant of the guilty may be saved, and that the work of destruction that may spread far and wide, however awful, may be short.

But the ministry should now be the special object of the prayers of the church. She should pray for the servants of God very particularly as well as earnestly and constantly. She should pray that they might be entirely devoted to their work, and most successful in prosecuting it. She should pray for them every day of the week as well as on Sabbath day. The time ministers most need the prayers of the church is not at the end, but at the beginning of the week, before they have made any preparation for the services of the sanctuary. The Church should pray that the Lord would guide them to suitable subjects of discourse, give them proper views on these subjects, and make them feel deeply the importance of the truths which they wish others to feel. When they have got suitable messages from God for their people, the church should pray that they might be kept from engaging in any work, even speaking or thinking

of any thing, that would in any way prevent the Lord from blessing their Sabbath ministrations. As the Sabbath approaches, the prayers of God's people for ministers should be increased; the earnest desire of the Church on the Sabbath morning should be that the ambassadors of Christ might come into her midst from the presence of God, filled with the Spirit, entirely freed from the fear of man, and the love of human applause—and reflecting from their appearance, manner, and words, so much of the character and love of Christ that the Master might be as visible in them as the servant.

When ministers have entered the pulpit, the church should not fancy that they have got into a place so very sacred, and where so much of the presence of God must be constantly realised, that they cannot be exposed to temptation. The very reverse of this is the sad truth. The pulpit, like the closet, is the place most haunted by the Wicked One, where he uses his greatest skill and power, and where he is often most successful in the prosecution of his most malicious work. The Sabbath is Satan's market day, and the church is his market place. If Christians would have much of God's presence, and a great out-pouring of the Spirit in connexion with a faithfully preached gospel, they must keep the world, sin, and Satan, out of God's house; and this can only be done by earnest believing prayer during the whole period of divine service. Whenever Christians cease to pray when in the house of God, they cease to hear in faith, or in an humble dependence on God, as present and gracious, and when they cease to receive in faith, they cannot receive even the riches of God's grace with relish; and when the gospel is not relished, Christ is rejected, God is dishonoured, and the Spirit is grieved.

The efficiency of the holy ministry is a thing of such vast importance and so dependant on the faithfulness of the church, that to relieve herself of most fearful responsibility and bring into operation the very best means of honouring Christ and extending his kingdom on earth, she should feel herself most powerfully constrained to hold many social meetings for prayer with a view to its increase.

Men of the most approved character for wisdom and goodness should be called to officiate at these meetings, and they should never be asked to do so without having time to prepare themselves for the very important duty in which the church would have them to engage. We would not certainly recommend such men to compose prayers for the meetings referred to, and so commit them to memory that they might hope to be able when required to repeat them accurately. Such prayers in too many cases are but lip prayers which could not suit either the men or object of which we speak. The preparation needed, and which we would press upon your attention as a thing which, if not indispensable, is most desirable, is, that the men who are to take the lead in these prayer meetings should, for a considerable time before they are called to officiate, seriously and prayerfully ponder over the object to be brought before the throne of grace, till their hearts become deeply affected by its importance, and they are made to feel that their whole soul is ready to go out in most earnest desires to obtain it.

The Lord bless His own word, and to His name in Christ be all honour, glory, and praise, for ever and ever, Amen.



